America's Promise for Free College May Not Address Skills Gap

By AMY BUTCHER | 2 hours ago


As we previously reported on this issue [http://nonprofitquarterly.org/2015/06/26/what-exactly-is-the-impact-of-free-higher-education/], the barriers to higher education are multiple and include cultural, social, and academic obstacles along with financial ones. As the presidential progress report highlights, nonprofits are also playing a role in addressing all of these barriers. For example, the City University of New York runs the Accelerated Study in Associates Program (ASAP), which is funded by city, state and charitable giving. ASAP tackles multiple barriers to graduation, as students are required to get a dedicated adviser and attend seminars on study skills. An MDRC study [http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/doubling_graduation_rates_5.pdf] found that ASAP “was highly cost-effective in terms of graduating students. While it cost more to run ASAP, the increase in the number of students receiving degrees outpaced the additional cost.”

Graduation rates are indeed a good metric for student success, but the progress report lacks information on how free college and higher graduation rates will ultimately match student skills to current job demands. As per the Bureau of Labor Statistics [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_education_summary.htm], total job openings from growth and replacement needs are 17 percent for bachelor's degrees and 4.5 percent for associate degrees, both of which lag behind the 34.9 percent for high school equivalent or diploma (or at percent when postsecondary non-degree awards are included).

So how will free community college fill the need for non-degree jobs? The progress report doesn't deal with this issue but rather frames the situation as a need for higher education in general: "Now, more than ever, Americans need more knowledge and skills to meet the demands of a growing global economy without having to take on decades of debt before they even embark on their careers." The focus on individual debt reduction is laudable; the unanswered question, though, is whether "more skills" are necessarily the "right skills." And if the country needs to fill jobs that don't require any kind of degree, the danger is that specific areas, such as the manufacturing [http://www.industryweek.com/skill-workers-sector], will continue to experience labor shortages. According to a 2014 U.S. News article [http://www.usnews.com/news/stem-solutions/articles/2014/10/30/lack-of-skilled-workers-threaten-economic-growth-in-stem-fields], "Even as the unemployment rate continues to fall, millions of Americans are still without a job, underemployed or stuck with a low-wage job without a career path partly because of this mismatch."
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Individual fulfillment through education is a wonderful goal, but graduation rates are just one metric in the labor-pool-plus-jobs equation. A more robust performance indicator would be whether graduates actually end up finding gratifying work while filling jobs that society needs. Overall though, community colleges are still one of the best crucibles for students—especially those from low-income backgrounds—to hone skills for the job markets that need them. —Amy Butcher
Female cowbirds pay attention to cowbird nestling survival, study finds

September 9, 2015 by Diana Yates in Biology / Plants & Animals

Researchers observed the results when female cowbirds, left, laid their eggs in the nests of prothonotary warblers, right. Credit: Chris Young (cowbird) and Michael Jeffords (warbler)

Brown-headed cowbirds have a reputation for being deadbeat parents: They lay their eggs in other birds' nests and then disappear, the story goes, leaving the care and feeding of their offspring to an unwitting foster family. A new study suggests, however, that cowbird moms pay close attention to how well their offspring do, returning to lay their eggs in the most successful host nests, and avoiding those that have failed.

The new findings are reported in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

"Cowbirds may be paying attention not only to their own reproductive success, but to other cowbirds' as well," said University of Illinois Ph.D. student Matthew Louder, who led the study with Illinois Natural History Survey avian ecologist Jeff Hoover and INHS biological surveys coordinator Wendy Schelsky. "No one's ever suggested before that cowbirds or even other brood parasites pay attention to their own reproductive success." Louder is now a postdoctoral researcher with East Carolina University in North Carolina and Hunter College in New York.

Cowbirds are native to North America and are one of only a few bird species that engage in brood parasitism, the practice of tricking other species into raising one's young, the researchers said. Other brood parasites include the cuckoo, which targets nests with eggs that look very similar to its own. Some host species recognize foreign species' eggs and roll them out of the nest.

A previous study from Hoover and Scott Robinson, of the Florida Museum of Natural History, found that some female cowbirds notice when a host bird has ejected their eggs, and will ransack the "offender's" nest. Hoover calls this behavior "mafia-like retaliation." Some cuckoos also do this.
Cowbirds surreptitiously lay their eggs in other species' nests, leaving the care and feeding of their offspring to the unwitting hosts. The three larger eggs are cowbird eggs, laid in a prothonotary warbler's nest. Credit: Jeff Hoover

"There were a lot of implications of that earlier work, and one of them was that cowbird females aren't abandoning their eggs in another species' nest; they're paying attention, to a certain point," Hoover said. "And so we wondered how long they continued to pay attention."

In the new study, the cowbirds targeted prothonotary warblers nesting in experimental nest boxes that the researchers had modified to exclude predators. The researchers manipulated events in the nests to clarify whether the cowbirds randomly selected hosts or if the previous performance of a nest - in terms of cowbird survival - became a factor in their nest selection. The researchers removed cowbird eggs from some of the warbler nests and left them in others. They tracked whether the cowbird nestlings - and the warblers - survived to fledging age.

"We try to discriminate between host success and cowbird success," Schelsky said. "The cowbirds might be selecting nests where young cowbirds succeed, but they might also prefer nests where the warblers are doing well, and not pay attention to cowbird survival."

The team found that the nests that successfully hosted cowbirds were much more likely to be parasitized again, while those that failed to fledge cowbirds were significantly less likely to be targeted by cowbird females the next time around.

"They're learning both from success and from failure," Hoover said.

"And warbler success isn't really relevant to the cowbirds," Schelsky said.

While they are unable to say whether the same females are targeting the same nests again and again, the researchers said it is likely that that is the case.

"Our results mean that somebody's paying attention, and it makes the most sense that the female that's laying the eggs would be paying attention to her own reproductive success," Louder said. "We think that other females are also paying attention."

More information: A generalized brood parasite modifies use of a host in response to reproductive success, Published 2 September 2015 DOI: 10.1098/rsph.2015.1615

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Obama unveils new push for national free community college

Submitted by Ashley A. Smith on September 9, 2015 - 6:00am

The White House is stepping up the effort to make tuition free at community colleges across the country.

President Obama will formally unveil a coalition of community college leaders, educators, politicians, foundations and businesses that will work to spread the existing, different free two-year college models and recruit others interested in pushing the free tuition message nationally during his visit today at Michigan's Macomb Community College.

The independent coalition [1], which will also be known as the College Promise Advisory Board, will be led by Jill Biden, former Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer and Martha Kanter, a professor of higher education at New York University and former under secretary of education. (A full list of the board's members is below.)

"The predominant focus is that in the 21st century, a high school diploma is not enough for success in the economy and society. People need an education beyond high school," Kanter said. "The board will lend its expertise to help communities understand that investing in people who want higher education is worth it."

By 2020, it's estimated 35 percent of job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree and another 30 percent will require at least some college or an associate degree, according to the White House's progress report on free community college [2].

The president and the White House have been working to push America's College Promise [3] -- the initiative to make two years of community college free -- since it was announced in February. That plan was based on the Tennessee Promise, a statewide last-dollar program that provides two years of free college. That state's inaugural class of Promise students [4] started classes this fall. Last-dollar programs cover the gap between a student's financial aid package and tuition.

So far, in just the past six months, five communities have created free two-year college programs, including statewide programs in Oregon [5] and Minnesota. Congressional Democrats [6] have also proposed free community college legislation backing Obama's plan.

"America's community colleges came about because local communities believed in the promise that the opportunity to achieve a degree or technical training would benefit both their youth and their communities," Geringer said in an email. "College Promise rekindles that same community spirit and affirms the ideal that education beyond high school matters. College Promise will be built upon local
initiatives and local support enabled through a natural aspiration."

The board will also raise awareness and stress the importance of community colleges in general with the Heads Up America campaign. That campaign will release public service announcements encouraging the idea of making two years of community college free.

LaGuardia Community College President Gail Mellow, who is also a member of the advisory board, said one of the largest issues they plan to tackle is looking at the ways to pay for free community college. The advisory board will be in place for a minimum of three years, she said.

"This is an issue that will not be solved in a year or 18 months. It is a radical idea to the United States and it's not a partisan issue. It's an American issue about how we're going to be as a country in this century. Who we're going to provide for and how we're going to do that is a large and long-term issue," she said.

President Obama is also expected to unveil the Department of Labor's awarding of $175 million in American Apprenticeship Grants to 46 public-private partnerships that have pledged to train and hire more than 34,000 new apprentices in high-tech and high-growth industries within the next five years.

The members of the College Promise Advisory Board are:

- Ellen Alberding, president and board member of the Joyce Foundation
- Matthew Boulay, program officer for veterans' programs with the Kisco Foundation
- Noah Brown, president of the Association of Community College Trustees
- Walter Burghus, president of the American Association of Community Colleges
- Christopher Cabaldon, mayor of West Sacramento
- Phil Clegg, executive director for the American Student Association of Community Colleges
- Alexandra Flores-Quilty, president of the United States Student Association
- Brian Gallagher, president of United Way Worldwide
- Lily Eskelsen Garcia, president of the National Education Association
- Richard George, president of Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation
- Mark Haas, Oregon state senator
- Anne Johnson, executive director of Generation Progress
- Martha Kanter, professor of higher education at New York University and former U.S. under secretary of education
- Chauncy Lennon, managing director of global philanthropy at JPMorgan Chase
- Harold Levy, executive director of Jack Kent Cooke Foundation
- Stanley Litow, president of IBM Foundation
- Andrew Liveris, chief executive officer of the Dow Chemical Company
- Joe May, chancellor of Dallas County Community College District
- Gail O. Mellow, president of LaGuardia Community College
- Jen Mishory, executive director of Young Invincibles
- William F. L. Moses, managing director of education for Kresge Foundation
- Eduardo Padron, president of Miami Dade College
- Wade Rendett, chief executive officer of the transportation fuels division of General Biofuels
- Lauren Segal, president of Scholarship America
- Randy Smith, president of Rural Community College Alliance
- Tom Snyder, president of Iowa Tech Community College
- LaVerne Evans Srinivasan, president of education programs at Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Karen Stout, president of Achieving the Dream
- Scott Svonkin, president of the Board of Trustees, Los Angeles Community College District
- William Swanson, chairman of Raytheon Company
- Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Community Colleges
DOW, HUNTER COLLEGE PROFESSOR WHO STUDIES RACE, ACCUSED OF RACISM FOR FAILING AFRICAN STUDENT

BY TOBY ROGERS SEPTEMBER 09, 2015

Whitney Dow; African student claims bias in failing grade

An ugly battle has erupted within the Hunter College media department between a race-focused White male adjunct-professor and a West African female college student after he failed her in a final class denying her graduation.

Adjunct professor, Whitney Dow, 51, forced the New York City funded college to yank media studies major Mayenne Jalloh's diploma from her hands the day she was supposed to participate in her classes’ graduation ceremony. Dow's justification for giving Jalloh, 30, an F for his class, Documentary Production 2, is that she supposedly missed five classes, one class over the maximum limit.

Jalloh, whose Hunter College transcripts indicate that, other than two C grades,
she has received six As, six B+, six B- and two B grades in every other class at Hunter, even getting on the Dean’s list twice. Jallah would have been put on the Dean’s list her final semester at Hunter as well, if not for Dow’s failing grade.

The Black Star News has learned that Jallah has been ill. Ms. Jallah claims it was due to the stress and abuse she was enduring at Mr. Dow’s class. Jallah did in fact check in to MedCare walk in clinic on 1624 W. 183rd St. Westchester Ave and was treated by Dr. Abram Haile. BSN has obtained a written by Dr. Haile confirming this. "Mayne Jallah is under my medical care" and was "evaluated at the office on the following dates 3/23/15; 4/21/15; 5/1/15; 5/14/15. Please excuse her absence."

Jallah told BSN that she did tell Dow that she was sick and could confirm she was at MedCare on the dates in question. Dow apparently remained silent and walked away.

For the fifth and decisive class, Jallah claims that she did show up on time for the one class in question, but was drummed out by Dow in a "rude and abusive" manner and left the class in tears.

BSN did speak with several students who participated in the Dow’s class with Jallah. Some refused to speak about what they saw transpire between Dow and Jallah. Other students said they were unaware of any rift between them. But others did detect something was wrong with Dow’s behavior.

"It was like a soap opera all semester," one Hunter student told BSN, "the guy obviously disliked her. When she would walk into class, his eyes would bulge with anger. He would watch her every step intently, then just stare at her with this angry expression on his face. When she would look up at him, he would wait a few seconds, just make sure she saw his face. Then he'd look away. It was pretty creepy stuff."

According to Jallah and her fellow students in class, the problems for Jallah began early in the semester, when the adjunct professor announced in his four-hour, one-brake class that if students had to use the bathroom, they would have to raise their hands in front of everyone and verbally ask him if they could leave for that reason. He also said when class began, he would lock the doors.

In one class Jallah raised her hand and said she had to go the bathroom. Her request inadvertently sparked the entire class to break out in laughter, not at Jallah but at Dow, and that, according to Jallah and her fellow students, is when Dow turned on her.

BSN did speak with Dow on Friday, August 28th about his unusual requests and his overall behavior in his class. He did not deny them. "I don't go to the bathroom in the middle of class. I go before. I don't get a drink or take a smoke break," Dow said.

Dow told BSN he "never" heard Jallah was sick, nor did it matter. "You miss five classes, you fail the class," Dow said.

BSN asked about the incident in the class when Dow marked Jallah absent, when she was not crying. "She is not a kid, she is an adult." Dow shot back defiantly.

After defending his decision to fail Jallah, Dow bluntly said it is he who is in fact the victim of racial abuse from Jallah. To prove his point, Dow claimed to be reading a section of an e-mail message that Jallah wrote him in an attempt to get him to change her grade.

"Whitney, you are a racist. You always were a racist and you lock down at me because I am from East Africa," Dow said, purporting to read what Jallah wrote to him.

BSN did check that e-mail message and nowhere does the quote Dow purportedly read from exist. In fact, Jallah is not even from "East Africa," but "West Africa."

Dow, who also is a documentary film maker, whose works are all about race, explained his latest "Whiteness Project," a web based social media program designed to demonstrate "how white people process race."
Dow’s twitter hashtag for the site is #Whitney (aka American of CaucasianAncestry)

Dow then went on to angrily describe Jalloh’s class behavior in ways that parallels the racially coded language he claims to rail about. “Every time I tried
to talk to her, she was incredibly aggressive, incredibly abusive. Attacking me,”
Dow said, adding that his communications with Jalloh felt “like a stick up.”

BSN did uncover that neither Dow nor any other professor at Hunter College had
ever complained about Jalloh’s alleged behavior in class.

When asked again about the fight Jalloh claimed he provoked, Dow said, “If you
want to say I’m a dick, I probably am a dick. A lot of people think I’m a dick.”

When asked about the fairness of failing a student based on leaving one class
during a fight he had allegedly sparked Dow said, “I’m a flawed individual…this
was the best I could do. She should absolutely appeal the grade. It should be her
duty to get me kicked out of Hunter.”

Dow added, “Look, I give a shit about what I do. I certainly give a shit about
Mavenie. She is from East Africa. She has had incredible journey.”

The alleged race spat between Dow and Jalloh also appears to have ensured
Hunter College media department chairman James Roman, who will spearhead
the appeals board Jalloh will have to face to have her grade changed.

It appears Roman has secretly sided with Dow even before the appeals process
officially had begun. In an e-mail message exchange between Roman and Dow,
that BSN has obtained, Roman may have violated Jalloh’s student rights to a fair
hearing that requires he remain impartial until both Dow and Jalloh make their
case before the board.

“Hi Whitney. Your response and explanation appear to be very sound based
upon the requirements articulated in the syllabus. All the best,” Roman wrote
Dow on August 26.

“It is astonishing. These two White men violate every rule in the handbook to
deny me the diploma I have earned. Even conspiring behind my back in violation
of the college rules to manufacture an outcome against me. Then they have the
darndacity to say I am racist towards them,” Jalloh said.

“At least back home in West Africa, after a beating or an attack by a gang of
youths, the beating eventually ends,” she added. “But this is much worse. It is
psychological torture and it is unending.”

BSN did attempt several times to speak with Roman, Hunter College president
Jennifer Raab and Hunter College legal flack Laura Herzog. All three refused,
BSN’s request for comment.
Are Medicare Pay-for-Performance Benefits Worth the Risk?


Medicare pay-for-performance (P4P) incentives are inadvertently averting money away from those financially ailing hospitals primarily serving minorities and the economically disadvantaged to instead inflate the revenues of those hospitals serving a more financially prosperous population of patients. Such is confirmed by recent research (http://org.saltslabs.com/a/307/images/Pay-for-Performance%20Incentives.pdf) from David U. Himmelstein, MD, FACP, Lecturer in Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor at the City University of New York School of Public Health at Hunter College and Steffie Woolhandler, MD, MPH, FACP, Lecturer in Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Professor in the CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College, and Adjunct Clinical Professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

"Medicare's P4P program, which does not adjust for patients' socioeconomic status, assumes that bonuses and penalties will prod substandard providers to improve or see their patients migrate to higher-quality options," state Himmelstein and Woolhandler. "However, when quality problems are due to a hospital's financial distress and patients cannot go elsewhere, penalizing low scorers may well punish patients and exacerbate quality disparities. Prescribing a starvation diet for safety-net hospitals, they are stripped for cash and are quality-challenged makes no sense unless the goal is to close them."

Ask Himmelstein and Woolhandler: "Are P4P's benefits worth the risk? The evidence is surprisingly slim. A few small, randomized, controlled trials in outpatient settings have shown improvement on various measures, but most have found no improvement, and none have demonstrated reductions in death or disability rates."

Hospital administrators "game" P4P arrangements by overcoding physicians to embellish diagnoses to beef up their medical outcomes, confirm Himmelstein and Woolhandler. As RevCycleIntelligence.com recently reported, (http://revcycleintelligence.com/news/hospitals-dodge-financial-penalty-with-medicare-aca-loophole) Himmelstein and Woolhandler additionally confirm hospitals are steadily reclassifying Medicare patient readmissions as "observation stays" or delivering care for recurring Medicare patients in the Emergency Room (ER) to thwart Medicare's financial penalties.

"Researchers who used external data to audit Medicare Advantage plans' 'safe prescribing' quality reports discovered that 65% of plans overstate their scores, pushing down the rankings of the 5% who told the truth," confirm the authors. "At a hospital where we worked, the administration responded to poor scores for risk-adjusted mortality rates by hiring coding consultants, even as it was laying off clinical staff. Within 6 months, risk-adjusted mortality rates improved to better than expected and Medicare reimbursement climbed $3 million. Soon after, administrators made patient attendance at coding-coaching sessions mandatory," they explain.

The recent sustainable growth rate (SGR) fix, (http://revcycleintelligence.com/news/sgr-repealrequires-new-focus-on-quality-measurement) they add, will associate 16 percent of Medicare physician fees to cost and quality performance metrics. P4P pressures will "intensify," they say, as confusion escalates with paperwork befuddlement involving clarity of costs and quality deficits.

Indeed, as Himmelstein confirmed to RevCycleIntelligence.com in a personal interview, (http://revcycleintelligence.com/news/will-inefficient-financial-healthcare-reform-kill-the-aca) paperwork issues are a substantial concern requiring active addressing within the healthcare space: one-third of the total healthcare dollar goes toward paperwork and bureaucracy, he explained. "We are wasting an enormous amount of money that ought to go to healthcare on paperwork ... [which is] an extraordinarily inefficient way of deploying resources," Himmelstein said.

In addition to the notion of possible paperwork chaos, maintaining the integrity of physicians' work is perhaps now in question, the authors add. "Tethering physicians' rewards to box checking and redundant documentation risks both substituting insurers' priorities for patients' goals and demoralizing physicians. Pay for performance can crowd out intrinsic motivation that keeps us doing good work even when no one is looking," the authors state. "A growing body of behavioral economics research indicates that when preexisting motivation is high, monetary incentives often undermine performance on complex cognitive tasks — particularly when incentives are contingent on specific task performance or associated with surveillance, deadlines, or threats," they add.

The concept of paying for quality is an attractive option, they confirm. However, the modification of policies "that have been proven nowhere" merely means millions are in severe danger of risk, they maintain.
CHICAGO — Should I go back to Switzerland?

I ask this question every time potential American employers narrow their eyes when I ask for four weeks of vacation time, the legal Swiss minimum. I ask this question every time a motorist cuts me off when I’m riding a bike around my Chicago suburb. And I ask this question every month, when I insure my toddler’s health at a rate four times the Swiss cost of doing so.

Repatriation isn’t easy.

Lindsey McLean, an American repatriate now living in Spokane, Wash., echoes my sentiment.

"Some days I want to have a pity party for myself. Other times I’m positive. Other days I’m angry. Looking forward one day and back the next day. It’s a real roller coaster of emotions. Going abroad is like this too. But the highs and lows are even more extreme as a repat," says Ms. McLean.
According to Dr. Nan M. Sussman, Professor of Psychology and Dean, College of Staten Island, City University of New York, the better you've adjusted overseas, the more difficult it is to repatriate.

More in repatriation
A Returning German Expat's Struggles: Relearning How Things Work at Home
How a Start-Up Came to the Rescue of Another Returning German Expat
Relegated to Being an Expat in My Home Country
Repatriation Advice: 10 Tips for Handling Reverse Culture Shock
Still Addicted to Being an Expat? Writer Rashmi Dalal Discusses Article On "The Bittersweet Life"
Welcome to my American living room, where my American husband's Swiss alphorn leans against the couch, a symbol of both our successful Swiss adjustment and our struggle to realapte to American life.

Many days I want to go back abroad. I am not alone. Even repatriates like American Shawn Adamo, who has been back in the U.S. for 20 years, feel the desire to return abroad.

"It's like dress styles. It goes away but always comes back," says Mr. Adamo. Now that his two children are older, Mr. Adamo, who lived in Gabon from 1991 to 1993, is looking for opportunities that can take him back abroad to what he calls "a great lifestyle."

Carol Merchasin, author of This is Mexico, felt the similar draw to live abroad later in life, after living in Greece for 3-1/2 years in her early 20s. Decades later, after repatriating to the U.S. for many years, she moved to Mexico.

"I missed something about the foreign experience. That sense of being alert and awake because you're an outsider. I never lost the desire to experience that again," says Ms. Merchasin.

Other repatriates can't wait 20 years to return to the expat life. For Australian Franca Serratore, who left Switzerland after a five-year residency in 2008, one year back in Australia was enough.

"The first eight months I was back in Australia I felt weird. Like foreigner in my own country. I was back in Switzerland a year later. I think you need at least a year or two to adjust to your own country. But the question is, do you have the patience?"

Dr. Sussman's research confirms that it takes at least a year to feel comfortable at home again. In addition, she adds that a successful repatriation also largely depends on the country the expat is returning to.

According to Dr. Sussman, expats returning to Hong Kong, for example, have few problems repatriating. Hong Kong society is welcoming of people with various cultural identities. It used to be a British colony, most people are of Chinese ethnicity, and many have gone overseas. The culture also welcomes a variety of work habits.

On the other hand, Dr. Sussman says, the U.S. is not very flexible about cultural identity. "You have to act 100% American or you're viewed suspiciously," she says.

To explain her point, she discusses how President Obama's childhood is viewed in America. "Obama lived in Indonesia as a child. But instead of Americans viewing this as a positive experience in shaping a child, he's seen as inauthentic."

Dr. Mark Goulston, Principal at China Foundations, which coaches expats and repats and focuses on cross-cultural integration between American expats and Chinese workers at Fortune 500 companies in
China, has also found American repatriates having difficulty."

All our clients' friends in Tucson asked her why she went to China and asked her if she ate dog. Her friends seemed so superficial and ignorant that it turned her off about them," says Dr. Goulston.

This kind of cultural inflexibility spills over into American workplaces—even the very ones that send employees abroad.

"One American I spoke with had worked in Tokyo for an American bank. But when the bank brought him back to New York, he quit within a year because they didn't take advantage of the knowledge he had gained abroad. Instead, they assigned him to a domestic unit. So he went back to Japan and worked for a different bank instead," says Dr. Sussman.

Olli, a Finnish expat now living in England, who asked that his last name not be used for privacy reasons, returned to Finland to care for an ill parent after living for a decade in Norway and then in Germany. He also found the job hunt as a repatriate disheartening.

"My experiences abroad were seen as a threat rather than an advantage," Olli says.

After his father passed away, Olli returned abroad, satisfied he had answered the question, "Can you go home again?" with a resounding, "No."

Others, like American Kathleen Cremonesi, author of Love in the Elephant Tent: How Running Away with the Circus Brought Me Home, had successful repatriations.

"They say once you leave you can't go home again, but I believe you can," says Ms. Cremonesi. Ms. Cremonesi spent 2-1/2 years in Italy before repatriating to Oregon.

Ms. Cremonesi credits her successful return with her recognition and understanding that things would be different.

"I knew my friends and family had changed while I had been away and I respected that they had had experiences without me too," says Ms. Cremonesi.

For repatriates who experience high levels of stress, Dr. Sussman advises them to eat well, get enough sleep, exercise, and not drink too much. She also recommends that repats maintain their ties to their former culture to avoid a complete sense of loss. This can mean reading a local paper, getting in touch with expat groups if you live in an urban area, and maintaining linguistic fluency.

Despite having done almost all of these things, however, I still find life as a repatriate challenging. Joel Young, an American repatriate living in Washington State, perhaps sums up the repatriation challenge best: "I feel like I'm doomed to a life of always missing somewhere. Always."

Like myself, Mr. Young yearns to go back abroad someday too.
Blondell Cummings: A remembrance and food for thought

ZITA ALLEN and CHARMAINE WARREN 19/10/2015, 4:13 p.m.

Blondell Cummings (1944-2015) Contributed

A short, stocky woman in a long, white dress stands alone on a dimly lit stage. Squatting, legs wide, she hunches over a cast iron skillet, which she has gripped with her right hand as she jiggles it back and forth, up and down, round and round, with rhythmic intensity and energetic animation. Dipping a finger into its imaginary contents and sticking it in her mouth, a look of satisfaction flashes across her warm, round, friendly face as she continues to jiggle the skillet.

The image is one of many memorable ones from African-American dancer-choreographer-teacher-icon Blondell Cummings’ brilliant 1981 dance “Chicken Soup.” It reflects her ability to capture the universality of personal movements and gestures, erasing blurred lines between genres such as post-modern and what some call Black dance. In fact, Cummings is one of those who prove that, at its heart, dance is a universal language that can speak to everyone. In 2006, “Chicken Soup” was designated an American masterpiece by the National Endowment for the Arts. Although it is Cummings’ most famous piece, it is but one of many in a distinguished body of work.

For some, the fact the first 10 years of her career were spent with the avant-garde Meredith Monk’s the House placed Cummings, squarely in the postmodern camp. Yet Carl Paris wrote that Cummings once told him “her African and African-American dance training was as equally important as that of her training with Martha Graham, Jose Limon and Meredith Monk and the House,” while underscoring the ease with which she slipped from one community to the other. This ability to defy cultural divides in a search for common ground in her 1971 work “Point of Reference” prompted New York Times critic Anna Kisselgoff, to identify the young Cummings as a choreographer with “particular promise.” Needless to say, Cummings’ creative life exceeded that “particular promise” and more.
Cummings was born in 1944 to Oralee Williams and Roscoe Cummings, who left a life of picking cotton in South Carolina when she was young for the promise of New York and jobs as a nurse’s aide and cab driver. (Her work “3B49” was a tribute to her father, who was killed by a passenger in 1985.) She was the oldest of their three daughters. Family was very important to her. “We were really close,” said her youngest sister, Gaynell. Hilda is the middle sister. “Blondell was an awesome older sister, and she had a lot on her shoulders as the oldest. She was the first to go to college, and she made sure that we did too. Everything fell on her.”

Cummings earned a B.A. from New York University and a M.A. from Lehman College. In addition to being an original member of Monk’s company, Cummings performed with others, including the Rod Rodgers Dance Company and Ismael Houston-Jones, and created her own Blondell Cummings and Performers, as well as a cross-cultural arts collaborative, Cycle Arts Foundation, that Dance Magazine’s Wendy Perron described as being “devoted to bringing artists and audiences together to focus on the poetics of the human condition.” Her work has been performed on many stages as her reputation as an innovative choreographer crossing boundaries and merging dance with other art forms has taken her around the world. She has also taught at numerous institutions, including New York University, Cornell University and the City University of New York. Her wisdom and insights have been a highly valued addition to dance panels, including the Selection Committee of the prestigious New York Dance and Performance Awards (the Bessies), which, in a Facebook post, joined the many voices mourning “the loss of the indomitable” Cummings.
SoHo Is SoOver, New Yorkers Are Moving to WiNo and Rambo

New neighborhoods are springing up in real-estate lingo, and it isn’t just in New York City

By CORINNE RAMEY

Updated Sept. 10, 2015 9:51 p.m. ET

NEW YORK—Standing on Houston Street recently, tourist Susanne Ydergaard pointed toward what she thought was SoHo.

“It’s by the Hudson, right?” she said, a digital camera hanging from her wrist.

Nearby NoHo was equally foreign, as were FiDi, SoHa and Welsea, said Ms. Ydergaard, 60 years old.

“They’re easy to say,” but her home, she said, doesn’t feel the need to constantly rename itself. “In Denmark, we only do this with new areas,” she added.

For years, some of the trendiest New York neighborhoods have earned nicknames that caught on with locals, such as SoHo, or South of Houston Street, Tribeca (the triangle below Canal Street) or more recently, Dumbo for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass. Out-of-towners caught on eventually if they visited enough times.

But now, the latest shorthand is confusing New Yorkers and tourists alike, a mishmash brought about by wishful thinking among neighborhood boosters, real-estate agents and brokers.

“These things are spreading like kudzu,” said Andrea Saturno-Sanjana, a real-estate agent with Citi Habitats.

Real estate drives much of the name game. The latest new acronym: PLG, which stands for Prospect Lefferts Gardens.
“It rolls off the tongue,” said Sarah Burke, regional Brooklyn director at real-estate firm Douglas Elliman. “Even agents, when they call, they say, ‘Do you have anything from PLG?’”

PLG joins other proposed names for New York neighborhoods including “Hellsea” (Hell’s Kitchen for people who wish they lived in the Chelsea neighborhood), “Welsea” (West Chelsea) and “Rambo” (Right Around the Manhattan Bridge Overpass).

Other neighborhood nicknames seem to be intended as rebranding efforts for existing areas, including “WiNo” or Williamsburg North.

And it’s not just New York City. “The cute abbreviation names were a New York fad, but people got into it, simply because SoHo bloomed so large in people’s consciousness,” said Philip Kasinitz, a sociology professor at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center. The trend is more prevalent in urban areas, where residents, real-estate agents and developers redraw areas with smaller boundaries, therefore needing new names.

In Chicago, the moniker NoCa, for North of Chicago Avenue, has been derided by the Chicago Tribune as “way too New York” and “like the brand name of a diet soda.” Washington, D.C., has NoMa, or North of Massachusetts Avenue, while in West Palm Beach, Fla., an area south of Southern Boulevard has been dubbed SoSo.

According to data from StreetEasy.com, some newer names in New York have clearly made it. For example, the acronym FiDi, for the Financial District, was used in listings 167 times, and Dumbo was used 1,152 times last year.

SoBro, for the South Bronx, hasn’t caught on to the same degree, nor have SpaHa (Spanish Harlem), Welsea or WiNo.
BoCoCa, which stands for the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Boerum Hill, Cobble Hill and Carroll Gardens, showed up only 15 times last year, but it appears to be slowly staking a claim. The neighborhood currently boasts a business called Bococa Dental and a handful of BoCoCa parent groups.

As for PLG, Prospect Lefferts Gardens was created in the '60s, but has only within the last decade seen new development and wealthier residents. The name comes from nearby locations Prospect Park, Lefferts Manor and Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Longtime residents weren’t so sure, though, that Prospect Lefferts Gardens even exists, much less PLG.

“I just consider it Flatbush, and you’re right next to Crown Heights,” said lifetime resident Papaya Edwards, 41, who lives, technically, in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, and does custodial work.

Down the street, Jaub Brooks, 30, was incredulous that he, too, could be standing in PLG.

“I guess that’s an alias for Crown Heights,” said Mr. Brooks, a photographer.

As for the acronym, he said, “it sounds a little fancier than it actually is, you know what I mean?”

The city’s planning department produces a neighborhood map, with the disclaimer that
the map is neither exhaustive nor official. The neighborhood names float within community districts, allowing the department to remain agnostic on where one neighborhood starts and another ends.

“There are no boundaries associated with the neighborhoods,” said planning department spokeswoman Rachaele Raynoff. “Neighborhood names are as subjective and changeable as New York’s diverse population.”

Perhaps the harshest critic of these monikers has been U.S. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, who, as a city councilman in 2011, introduced what he called the Neighborhood Integrity Act.

“It’s a Wild West that currently exists right now,” said Mr. Jeffries, who professes a particular disdain for ProCro, the gentrifying border of Crown Heights and Prospect Heights. “It seems reasonable to establish some process through which community residents are actually involved in establishing neighborhood identities in law.”

That doesn’t stop some from looking for more names. Witness the continuing development of Manhattan’s West Side—call it Hell’s Kitchen, Clinton, Midtown West or just MiMA, for Midtown Manhattan, as one building does.

Similar abbreviations have found favor in San Francisco, where the area south of Market Street is called SoMa, the now-hot neighborhood North of the Panhandle has been dubbed NoPa, and Tendernob is used to describe an area between Nob Hill and the Tenderloin neighborhood.
Elsewhere in the Bay Area, NOBE, which is pronounced with two syllables, stands for an area of North Oakland, Berkeley and Emeryville that a neighborhood website says is “coveted by professionals, hipsters and families alike.”

They may be silly-sounding, but nicknames are an indicator of consumer behavior. Neighborhoods, not buildings, are what sell real estate, said Susan Getz, a real-estate agent at Coldwell Banker in San Francisco.

“Neighborhoods that have names and nicknames have a solid sense of community, which is what we’re looking for when we look for a home to call our own,” she said.

One puzzle, said Ms. Saturno-Sanjana, the New York real-estate agent, is why some hot areas, like properties around New York City’s High Line, a popular park on a former railway, have yet to be named.

“Everyone wants to be there, come there, buy there,” Ms. Saturno-Sanjana said. “That is certainly a neighborhood that exists, but no one is calling it North of Far West Village.”

She added: “If a place is good enough, maybe it doesn’t need a name.”

Write to Corinne Ramey at Corinne.Ramey@wsj.com
Presidential Race in Taiwan Reflects Women’s Rise in Politics

By AUSTIN RAMZY  SEPT. 10, 2015

TAIPEI, Taiwan — The people of Taiwan appear poised to elect their first female president. Two of the three leading candidates in the January election, including the nominees of both major parties, are women.

Women have led other Asian nations, but they have largely followed in the footsteps of male relatives. Not in this case. Rather, analysts say, the race reflects the fact that Taiwan does a better job of putting women into political office than just about anywhere else in the world.

The island “amazed me when I first started looking at it,” said Joyce Gelb, a professor emeritus at the City University of New York who researches women in politics. “It’s second only to the Scandinavian countries, which are the bellwethers of women’s representation. I think it’s very impressive.”

Explanations for the rise of women within Taiwan’s political class abound, including the matriarchal traditions of some Taiwanese aboriginal tribes and the promotion of women’s education during the Japanese colonial period.

But the most influential factor, scholars say, is a series of quotas that have gradually been imposed to ensure that women are represented in
government. While the origin of the policies goes back decades, it was only after the advent of multiparty politics in the 1980s that women began to make significant strides.

The front-runner in the current campaign is Tsai Ing-wen, 59, of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party. She lost her first bid for the presidency in 2012 but has maintained a strong lead in polls this time. Her chief contender, from the long-powerful Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, is Hung Hsiu-chu, 67, the vice president of Taiwan’s legislature.

The contest contrasts sharply with the situation scarcely more than 100 miles away in mainland China, which considers the self-ruled Taiwan part of its territory. The mainland has had a dearth of female leaders despite a Communist Party ideology that emphasizes the importance of women to society. Only two of the country’s 25 Politburo members are women, and none have reached the top echelon of political power, the Politburo Standing Committee.

Elsewhere in the region, the president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, is the daughter of the man who held that office from 1962 to 1979. The former Philippine president Corazon C. Aquino was the wife of a senator, and her successor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is the daughter of a former president. Bangladesh’s president, Sheikh Hasina, is a daughter of the country’s first president, and its former prime minister Khaleda Zia was the wife of a former president.

But in Taiwan, neither Ms. Tsai nor Ms. Hung has a family connection to a prominent male politician.

Efforts to bring more women into the political system began when the 1951 Constitution set aside a small number of legislative seats for women in what was then an authoritarian state. By the time democratization began, the idea that women should have a certain level of participation was already well established.
Democratization also coincided with a growing feminist movement, and women played a crucial role in organizing against the authoritarian government in the 1970s and '80s.

The first and biggest opposition group, the Democratic Progressive Party, set its own minimums for gender representation in 1996, decreeing that a quarter of its nominees for elected office had to be women. Two years later, it expanded that quota to candidates for elected party positions.

"The D.P.P. is, after all, a party that started from social movements of advancing political and social rights and equality, so it's natural that gender rights were part of the platform," said Ketty W. Chen, senior deputy director of the party's department of international affairs.

The Kuomintang introduced similar quotas after it lost the 2000 presidential election.

In 2005, the Constitution was changed to set aside 15 percent of the seats in the legislature for women. Since then, the level of women's representation has climbed steadily, to 33.6 percent after the last election in 2012, from 21.3 percent in 2004, according to statistics compiled by Chang-Ling Huang, an associate professor of political science at National Taiwan University.

Ms. Huang says the reserved seats helped bring increasingly competitive female candidates into politics. "I'd argue that thanks to gender quotas or women's reserved seats, Taiwanese are now quite familiar with female faces in politics," she said.

Hsu Chiao-Hsin, a spokeswoman for Ms. Hung's campaign, said the strong presence of women in the coming election is part of a global trend.

"In countries around the world, there have been more and more women in politics recently, like Hillary Clinton and Angela Merkel," she said. "This
shows that in politics, gender is no longer a glass ceiling. Having two women as candidates for the two parties, the Kuomintang and D.P.P., bears this out."

Ms. Tsai and Ms. Hung are markedly different in style. Ms. Tsai, who served as minister of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council and as vice premier during the Chen Shui-bian administration, from 2000 to 2008, has degrees from Cornell University Law School and the London School of Economics. She has been described as shy for a politician, and when speaking in public, she sometimes comes across like a schoolteacher.

Ms. Hung has been called “little hot pepper” for her fiery speeches, and she rose through the ranks of the Kuomintang. She received a graduate degree from Northeast Missouri State University, first won a seat in the legislature in 1990 and has since served seven terms in the chamber.

Yet while a victory by either would be groundbreaking for Taiwan, that possibility is not an important issue in the campaign, in another sign of how familiar female candidates have become here.

“At the end of the day, the gender question is decidedly secondary,” said Nathan Batto, a political scientist at Academia Sinica, a state-financed research institution in Taipei. “The question in this election, as with every election in Taiwan, is fundamentally about Taiwan’s relationship with China. The fact that both major candidates are women doesn’t change the fact that the real thing that divides them is very different ideas about what Taiwan’s relationship with China should be.”

Ms. Tsai’s party leans toward independence for Taiwan, a position that has worried the Obama administration. After she visited the United States before the 2012 election, the administration said it was concerned that she and her party might upend relations with China.

Ms. Tsai’s supporters said the American criticism had undermined her
chances.

She returned to the United States in the spring, however, and pledged to maintain the status quo with Beijing. Since then, Washington has issued no complaints.

Ms. Hung, whose Kuomintang has cultivated close ties with China, has indicated that she would push for even closer ones.

But with Ms. Hung trailing in most polls, some analysts have begun to suggest that the Kuomintang may face a major defeat in legislative elections that will coincide with the presidential vote. That could bring another electoral first in Taiwan: D.P.P. control of both the presidency and the legislature.

A version of this article appears in print on September 11, 2015, on page A9 of the New York edition with the headline: Women Rising in Taiwan’s Politics Approach Next Stop: The Top.
Folk City: New York and the Folk Music Revival
Museum of the City of New York
June 17, 2015-January 10, 2016

By Roslyn Bernstein

In the summer of 1963, I rented the last room available from New York University's student housing bureau. I was late in my decision to enroll in an advanced chemistry course, a prerequisite for a pre-med program, and the director of housing explained that there was one unique space left. "It's the room under the bell tower," she said, pointing on the map to the Judson Church campanile tower, which stood on the south side of Washington Square. "After the elevator stops, you have to climb some steep stairs," she said, "but the view is extraordinary. There are windows in every direction."

I had never lived in New York City before and the thought of living in a tower perched above the feverish frenzy of Washington Square Park, with its ever changing mix of students, and tourists, beatniks and folk singers, left me breathless. Through the leafy trees to the north, I could see suntanned bodies dancing to the rhythmic beat of drums and, on Sunday afternoons, I could hear the folk singers with their guitars, gathered round the Washington Square Arch.

It was, according to Stephen Petrus, the curator of the current Folk City exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) and the co-author with Ronald D. Cohen of the companion book, New York and the American Folk Music Revival: Folk City, the peak of the folk music boom in New York City, a movement that traced its roots back several decades. During his research, Petrus interviewed folk icon Pete Seeger on four or five occasions, for almost an hour each time. Warm and generous, Seeger advised Petrus to go back at least to the 1940s. Seven months before he died in January 2014, he showed up at a June 2013 fundraiser for the exhibit held at the concert hall of the adjacent New York Academy of Medicine, where he led a rousing rendition of "Irene Goodnight."

At the entrance to the show, visitors walk through an orange/red ante-room designed by Pure + Applied, both the designer of the exhibit and the book. On the floor, Woody Guthrie's lyrics to "This Land Is Your Land" are painted in large white letters. The song was written as a rebuttal to Kate Smith's "God Bless America" which could be heard everywhere on the radio during the 1940s. Guthrie's song, recorded by Moe Asch, was released at the end of WWII.

The exhibit begins with the Great Depression, with the first section of the show focused on the decade, 1920-1940. It was time when many folk singers began to arrive in New York City. There was Aunt Molly Jackson, a coal mining activist from Kentucky, who came in the early 1930s. Josh White, who introduced the Blues, and arrived from South Carolina. There was Lead Belly, who was discovered by Alan Lomax in a Louisiana prison, and who arrived in New York in 1934. During the 1930s, when Lomax worked for the Library of Congress, he recorded 10,000 songs. Petrus called him, "An anthropologist doing field work."

At the end of the decade, folk music became more receptive to political activism. Chain Gang by Josh White and his Carolinians, produced by John Hammond for Columbia Records in 1940, was the first album explicitly about civil rights. The cover of a collection of "Negro Songs of Protest," displays the work of left-leaning artist, Hugo Gellert.

Throughout the show, visitors can hear the songs on listening stations. Less successful are podcast/audiotaped recollections which have to be accessed by calling a phone number and entering a code. "Unfortunately," Petrus said, "they are not being used as much as I hoped they would be."

Petrus was hired by the Museum of the City of New York on an Andrew Mellon Curatorial Fellowship in 2012, two years after he completed his CUNY Ph.D. dissertation on the political and cultural history of Greenwich Village in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, the Museum already had plans for a folk music show and a funder had provided seed money. The situation was perfect for Petrus, who drew upon...
Chapter Four of his thesis. He subsequently wrote the proposal and spearheaded the project from conception to completion. Ultimately, he borrowed from 25 lenders, mostly private collectors who were very generous, whittling down 800 objects on his list to a mere 225. "Folk music was part of their identity," Petrus said, describing the collectors as 60 to 80 years of age, white and middle class. "Consumers of folk music from 1958-1965 were largely college kids, left, liberal, kids who supported John F. Kennedy and civil rights," he said.

Over time, blessed by its community infrastructure, New York became a leader in the folk music scene. New York was increasingly the place for folk music concerts. In 1940, Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie met for the first time at the "Grapes of Wrath" concert, which was held one year after the novel was published. In 1941-3, the Almanac Singers (co-founded by Seeger and Lee Hays) started a singing union movement and their anti-war album, Songs for John Doe was released in 1941. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union and the Red Army mobilized for war, the album became obsolete and Eric Bernay, the producer, destroyed the remaining copies. Maybe 1,000 copies were sold.


As the exhibit reveals, the Red Scare of the early 1950s interrupted the folk boom and took a heavy toll on the burgeoning music scene. Red Channels, the entertainment industry blacklist publication, included the names of many performers including Pete Seeger. Seeger, whom Petrus described as a communist with a small c, refused to testify although he did not take the Fifth. He was convicted for contempt of court, a conviction that was finally overturned by Congress in 1962. As a consequence of the court's decision, he was not allowed to perform on television or radio during the McCarthy era. Josh White testified before the House on Un-American Activities Committee. Decca Records terminated the recording contract of The Weavers, all of whom were on the list, and the group's popularity plummeted, resulting in their being disbanded in 1952. They did reunite in subsequent years as McCarthyism faded.

Artifacts from the decade 1948-1958, supplement wall text in telling the New York story: there are checks, telegrams, scribbled notes and stapled magazines, often mimeographed. It was, Petrus said, "very much a do-it-yourself aesthetic."

By the time, the boom years, 1958-1965, arrived, folk music was mostly centered in big cities like New York, San Francisco and Chicago although it could also be found in college towns like Oberlin, Ohio. The Kingston Trio's version of "Tom Dooley," a folk song from North Carolina based on the murder of Laura Foster by Tom Dula sold more than three million copies as a single. Sales of the group's eponymously titled debut album, released in 1958, exceeded 1 million by 1961.

A wall map shows the density of folk music clubs in New York, clustered south of Washington Square Park: The Bitter End, The Village Gate, The Gaslight and Gerde's Folk City. The original sign for Gerde's now hangs in the show after languishing in a garage for 28 years. Most were basement houses, with the performers getting a share of the evening's take. A few performers, including Tom Paxton and Julie Collins, did earn their living from their music.

Prominent artifacts in this section are "Baby," Odetta's guitar from 1951, Judy Collins' guitar from 1970 and the signature objects in the exhibit, four original manuscripts of Bob Dylan songs, borrowed from a private collector: "Blowin' in the Wind," "Mister Tambourine Man," "Maggie's Farm," and "Masters of War."

Rare footage shows protestors who opposed Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris's banning of Sunday afternoon folk music in Washington Square Park in April 1961. The Right to Sing Committee, including the Reverend Howard Moody and Izzy Young, managed to prevail and Mayor Robert Wagner repealed the short-lived ban in the middle of May. The protest pitted high culture supporters like Morris, who was involved with Lincoln Center, and the New York University President vs. the Village Independent Democrats (VID), activist Jane Jacobs and folk singer supporters. Only two years earlier, Jacobs had led a group that defeated Robert Moses's plan to run a highway through the park.

Of course, what happened next was that the four lads from Liverpool arrived! Beatlemania swept across America and New York City. But, as Petrus said, folk music in some form or other survived. There was the Hootenanny Variety Show, which invited the Left who felt that the people's music was being commercialized. There was folk-rock in the 1970s and ethnic folk music in the 1980s. Today, there is the Jalopy Theater in Red Hook. When Petrus moderated a panel on "Dylan Goes Electric" in July with Elijah Wald, David Hajdu and Terri Thal, who was Dylan's first manager, some 240 people showed up.

Attendance at the exhibit has been strong although getting folks to travel to uptown Fifth Avenue museums like the Museum of the City of New York on 103rd Street, and El Museo del Barrio, between 104th and 105th Street, isn't easy. To date, The Africa Center at 110th Street is still under construction. "Folks take the Number 4 and 5 trains to 86th Street and they then ask, 'Am I in Upstate New York?'" Petrus said.

The Museum has exhibited several major shows over the past years on The Greatest Orch: The Master Plan of Manhattan, 1811-2011, and on Capital City: New York's Banks and the Creation of a Global Economy. But their goal now is to attract a larger audience with a permanent exhibit that will open in the fall of 2016. Housed in the three first-floor galleries, it will provide an overview of New York City history, with the first gallery focused on the Colonial period to 1898, the second, on the years 1898 to 2012 and the third, on the present and the future. "This is the only Museum that focuses on the history of the five boroughs," Petrus said, differentiating it from the New-York Historical Society (NYHS) which "focuses on the five boroughs in the context of American history."
The Happy Intellectual

By Maggie Scarf
| September 10, 2015 - 11:53am

“Why Not Say What Happened”

Morris Dickstein

Liveright Publishing, $27.95

In this beautifully wrought, rather romantic memoir, the renowned literary critic Morris Dickstein recounts the tale of a quintessential American journey. It is a story that begins in a loving, happy, but strictly monitored Orthodox Jewish household on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Mr. Dickstein, born in 1940, attended a Yeshiva school, where he studied religious texts in the mornings (in Yiddish) and received a secular education (in English) in the afternoons.

On the surface, recounts the author, he could not have been a happier child. “I had the swagger of the precocious kid, always merry and bright, who spoke early and did clever things. Yet I felt somehow on trial, rarely free of my parents’ watchful eyes.” His mother’s anxious, exaggerated worries about his health were to become a leitmotif throughout much of his adult life.

Mr. Dickstein, now distinguished professor emeritus of English and theater at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, eventually left the warm embrace of Orthodox Jewish life, but as this memoir makes clear it was not without ambivalence and conflict. Even while attending Columbia University he was enrolled as a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary; it was as if he were preparing for two different lives. At last, having become wholly enchanted by his literary studies — especially English and American literature — he dropped out of the seminary just shy of graduation.

Thus began Mr. Dickstein’s remarkable 40-plus years as an essayist, author, professor, public intellectual, and cultural historian.

There is a generous, modest, self-effacing spirit that pervades these pages, as well as a good deal of wit and the occasional gossipy tidbit (e.g., Susan Sontag’s self-serving revision of her past). Sexually naive when he arrived in New Haven as a graduate student, he falls deeply in love with the slim and elegant L. But he cannot imagine himself in the guise of a swashbuckling lover. As he remarks, he did not personally believe himself the answer to Freud’s famous question: “What does a woman want?” However, the love affair does proceed apace, and there is a very funny riff when young Morris is anticipating a tryst with L. in a friend’s empty apartment. As he looks forward to this magical evening, the author finds himself in a state of constant arousal, and he worries about the fact that a male in a state of tumescence for more than four hours may constitute a medical emergency!

Mr. Dickstein is fortunate to have entered his chosen field in the heyday of some of the great literature teachers of the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as Lionel Trilling and Jacob Taubes (at Columbia), F.R. Leavis (at Cambridge University), and Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and Rene Wellek (at Yale). As the critic Molly Haskell has written, this account of a passionate young scholar's passage through the sober '50s and the tumultuous '60s is "an
As a small example, here is the memoirist recalling what it felt like to teach a particular poem when he himself was in his late 20s: "[R]eadi ng literature simply for pleasure and expounding it for students are radically different experiences. Having spent years with these poets, still I wondered whether I could fully express what gave them such significance for me. Wordsworth's Immortality ode, evoking his wild Edeni childhood and receding past, poignant in his fear of declining powers, had always moved me deeply, often to tears. I had read it aloud to L. when I was courting her, as it offered coded insight into who I really was, my emotional landscape."

Candid and beautifully written, "Why Not Say What Happened" invites the reader into that landscape, and it is an invitation well worth accepting.

*Maggie Scarf's books include "Unfinished Business: Pressure Points in the Lives of Women." A fellow at Yale's Jonathan Edwards College, she lives in Sag Harbor.*

*Morris Dickstein lives part time in Sag Harbor.*
The all-new September 2015 edition of CUNY TV's ARTS IN THE CITY, hosted by Pat Collins from Manhattan's The High Line, begins Friday, September 11 (2015) at 10am, 3pm and 8:30pm on CUNY TV*. (The show is repeated Sunday 9/13 at noon and returns Friday 9/25 at 10am, 3pm and 8:30pm and on Sunday 9/27 at noon.) On and after Sept. 11, the program may be viewed anytime on www.cuny.tv.

Donna Hanover tours the New York Botanical Garden's unusual exhibition, FRIDA KAHLO: ART, GARDEN, LIFE, honoring the Mexican artist (1907-1954) by focusing on her intense interest in the botanical world and presenting the first solo display of her work in New York City in more than 10 years.

CAROLL SPINNEY, the actor and puppeteer currently celebrating his 46th year on SESAME STREET as Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch, talks with Pat Collins about the highlights of his life and career, and the documentary I Am Big Bird: The Caroll Spinney Story.

SOMETHING ROTTEN! is Broadway's newest hit musical, based on the premise that two playwright brothers in William Shakespeare's time learn that the "next big thing" in the theatre business will be the musical. Tinabeth Pina interviews the production's Shakespeare, Christian
Borle, and one of its brothers, Brian d'Arcy James, at Sardi's.

Glamorous author Jackie Collins meets with Minnie Roh to talk about her newest book (her 32nd), THE SANTANGELOS. With sales north of 500 million books, Collins reveals she still writes every word in longhand!

Harlem RBI is an organization that believes in the power of baseball to change lives. Carol Anne Riddell visits a once-abandoned East Harlem lot that's now a playing field with green grass, its own irrigation system, a real dugout, and coaches who teach kids about life as much as baseball.

And an all-new feature, Hidden Gems of NY, showcases the Mount Vernon Hotel Museum in midtown, one of the oldest buildings in New York City.

*CUNY TV is broadcast over-the-air in the tri-state area on Ch. 25.3, and cablecast in THE FIVE boroughs of New York City on Ch. 75 (Time Warner and Optimum), Ch. 77 (RCN) and Ch. 30 (Verizon FiOS).
The Executions That Still Shock
Two new plays revisit Roy Cohn and the Rosenbergs, whose stories continue to haunt the Jewish psyche.

09/10/2015
Ted Merwin
Special To The Jewish Week

Scene from Joan Beber’s “In Bed With Roy Cohn,” which seeks to “find some humanity in him.” Russ Rowland

Whether it was the crime of the century or a government frame-up of an innocent Jewish couple — or, as is more likely, something in the middle — the execution for treason of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg continues to send shockwaves through American culture. Among the most troubling and fascinating aspects of the case was the involvement of Roy Cohn, the (secretly) gay, corrupt Jewish attorney who prosecuted the Jewish couple. Two plays that opened last week in New York, Joan Beber’s “In Bed With Roy Cohn,” which imagines Cohn’s last days, and Karen Ludwig’s one-woman show, “Where Was I?” in which she recalls playing Ethel Rosenberg in the 1992 TV film, “Citizen Cohn,” testify to the unslackened grip of the Rosenberg case on our collective imagination.

Cohn grew up in an observant Jewish family in the Bronx; his father, Albert Cohn, was active in Democratic Party politics. After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1947 at the age of 20, and being admitted to the bar a year later, Cohn was immediately hired by Irving Saypol, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan, and began prosecuting Communists in counterespionage cases.

The 1951 trial of the Rosenbergs, who were accused of passing atomic secrets to the Soviets, thrust Cohn into the national spotlight; his direct examination of Ethel’s
brother, David Greenglass, was a major factor in the couple's conviction and execution. (Half a century later, Greenglass admitted to New York Times writer Sam Roberts that he had lied on the stand in order to divert attention from himself and his wife, Ruth, who had also been part of the spy ring. And in the grand jury transcript of his testimony, released just two months ago, Greenglass never mentioned that his sister was involved in any way, which has led legal experts to conclude that Ethel was innocent.)

After the Rosenberg case, Cohn became Sen. Joseph McCarthy’s right-hand man in conducting his crusade against Communists, many of whom were also Jewish. He went on to have many high-profile clients, from mafia boss John Gotti to nightclub owner Ian Schrager to the New York Yankees. One such client, now-presidential candidate Donald Trump, is even said to have learned his abrasive style of public discourse from Cohn. But Cohn’s career ended in disgrace. He had just been disbarred when he died of AIDS in 1986.

Cohn was most famously portrayed in Tony Kushner’s “Angels in America,” a 1990s Pulitzer Prize-winning two-part play, filmed in 2003 by HBO, in which the power-mad attorney appears fiendishly realistic. By contrast, Beber’s play, which is directed by Katrin Hilbe, is a more surrealistic take on Cohn (Christopher Daftsis); in it, the dying lawyer, surrounded by blinking vital signs on the walls of his bedroom, hallucinates that he is visited by figures from his past like Ronald Reagan (Nelson Avidon), Barbara Walters (Lee Roy Rogers) and Julius Rosenberg (Ian Gould). Cohn’s overbearing mother, Dora (Marilyn Sokol, “Old Jews Telling Jokes”) is, the play suggests, most responsible for Cohn’s deep-seated psychological conflicts, because of her disapproval of his homosexual lifestyle.

Beber, 81, is the author of a previous play about the Rosenbergs, “Ethel Sings,” which ran in New York in 2013. She grew up in Omaha, Neb., the daughter of an attorney who was a distant relative of Ethel Rosenberg, and who not only visited the Rosenbergs in prison but also fruitlessly tried to get President Dwight Eisenhower to intervene in the case. In an interview, Beber told The Jewish Week that while she was only a teenager when the Rosenbergs were executed, she developed a lifelong fascination with the case, and particularly with Cohn.

While Cohn was, the playwright opined, a “hateful person,” he suffered from the “agony of having to hide his homosexuality,” which he identified with utter powerlessness. “I wanted to find some humanity in him,” she explained, in contrast to what she perceives as Kushner’s portrayal, in which he is, she believes, “not explored in a complex way — he’s just shouting, loud and impossible.”
Boatloads of Sushi, Plus 60-Inch Screen for Every Game

Promenade Bar and Grill has 52 60-inch TVs, plus charging stations, a sushi bar and 

By PIA CATTON
Sept. 10, 2015 7:16 p.m. ET

Sports bars typically follow a formula: TVs, Buffalo wings and happy hour specials. But Promenade Bar and Grill adds to the equation, then multiplies with a wow factor.

The key addition here is a sushi bar, which is rare enough in a sports setting, but this one is also kosher.

General manager Eddie Fahmy added the sushi bar in July after talking with a customer, a student of nearby Baruch College who keeps kosher and whose religious dietary restrictions prevented him from ordering food.

“He couldn’t eat anything out of the kitchen,” said Mr. Fahmy. “He came up with the idea to do a kosher section.”

The sushi bar serves standard rolls ($3.50 to $7.50) on disposable plates to prevent kosher dishes from mixing with non-kosher. Sushi boats ($34 for two, $66 for four) can also sail over, loaded with creative arrangements.

Kosher wine, and wine glasses, are also available, but Promenade is unquestionably a sports bar. The main happy hour, when all pints of draft beers are $4, runs from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. every day except Sunday when happy hour goes from 8 p.m. until closing.

Cocktails range from the classic Moscow Mule ($10 and kosher) to the house special Promenade Cooler, made with cucumber vodka, St. Germaine and lemonade ($12).
Sports-themed drinks also show up. The Honey Deuce ($12), the U.S. Open’s signature vodka drink, pays homage to the annual tournament. The Super “Fish Bowl” is a blue drink in a bowl meant for sharing ($35). For Triple Crown season, mint juleps are added as a special.

Promenade also added a major convenience for fans who watch sports all day while also using mobile devices for fantasy leagues and social media: On the walls are 15 power-charging stations with cords for most mobile devices. For anyone out of reach, the wait staff can bring a portable version to the table.

The multiplier effect, though, is in the actual sports viewing. Lining the walls are 52 60-inch TVs, which can be accompanied by multichannel sound boxes on tables that allow patrons to switch between the audio for different screens.
This past Tuesday, diners flipped between the Williams sisters at the U.S. Open, a soccer game pitting the U.S. men's team against Brazil and two baseball games.

Between the pop music and outbursts from fans cheering their sport, the room gets loud. Trivia night, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, can make it even more noisy.

But it's loud because the vibe is inclusive. Here, Argentinean soccer fans will find the Choripán, a chorizo sandwich ($13), while NFL fans can gnaw on wings ($11 for eight) and the health conscious can dive into a vegan veggie burger on a gluten-free bun ($12).

"We want them to feel like they're at home," said Mr. Fahmy.

Promenade Bar and Grill, 344 Third Ave. between East 25th and East 26th streets; open Monday to Friday from 4:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. until 2:00 a.m.; 646-918-7220; DOH rating: A.
Autopsy Cites ‘Intentionally Removed’ Plug in Ruling Kayaker’s Death a Homicide

By LISA W. FODERARO  SEPT. 10, 2015

The medical examiner’s conclusion is clear: Vincent Viafore, who the police say was killed by his fiancée during a kayaking trip on the Hudson River this past spring, was a victim of homicide caused by a “kayak drain plug intentionally removed by other.”

But the lawyer for the fiancée, Angelika Graswald, said the medical examiner’s office had overstepped its bounds with that determination. He said it was based on police speculation, not an examination of Mr. Viafore’s body.

“Clearly, the Orange County medical examiner failed to conduct any meaningful investigation of her own and relied on false information provided by the New York State Police,” the lawyer, Richard A. Portale, said on Thursday, referring to Jennifer L. Roman, who performed the autopsy for the medical examiner’s office in Orange County, N.Y.

“She ruled this a homicide without a scintilla of medical evidence,” Mr. Portale added.

He argued that the reference to the kayak plug in the autopsy report
could prejudice a jury.

Since May, when Mr. Viafore’s body was pulled from the Hudson, prosecutors have declined to identify a cause of death or release the autopsy.

A copy of the report was obtained by The New York Times. It was unsurprising in some of its conclusions. It lists the cause of death as drowning (Mr. Viafore, 46, who was not wearing a life jacket, capsized in 46-degree water, cold enough to quickly cause hypothermia). The toxicology results attached gave his blood alcohol concentration as 0.066 percent, close to the legal limit of 0.08 and consistent with Ms. Graswald’s account that the couple, who shared an apartment in Poughkeepsie, paddled to Bannerman Island on April 19, where Mr. Viafore had a few beers.

The autopsy offers a grim, methodical accounting of Mr. Viafore’s body, which was recovered from the middle of the river on May 23. His face and abdomen were bloated, the report says, and marked by a mottled red and green discoloration.

Besides evidence of drowning, the only injuries noted in the report are a two-inch abrasion on the left torso and bruises on the lower chest and arm, also on the left side. The police have made no reference to a possible struggle between Mr. Viafore and Ms. Graswald, 35, while they were in their kayaks, though they have said Ms. Graswald moved his paddle out of his reach after he went in the water.

Some legal experts agreed with Mr. Portale’s contention that the medical examiner’s conclusions had gone too far. Jeanine Pirro, a former district attorney in Westchester County who now hosts “Justice With Judge Jeanine” on Fox News Channel, said medical examiners typically gave the manner of death, whether accident, suicide, homicide or undetermined, without elaborating.

“That is a very unusual way of describing manner of death,” Ms. Pirro
said in a phone interview. "It's rare that you get something next to the manner of death that is so outside the analysis of the body."

"Let's assume that the drain plug was removed," she added. "It doesn't mean it's a homicide. It could mean that it was removed by accident. What does that have to do with the drowning? If that's what the medical examiner thinks, she's going to have to back that up on the stand."

The medical examiner's office referred questions about the report to the Orange County executive's office.

The county executive's office defended the medical examiner's actions. Justin Rodriguez, a spokesman for the county executive, Steven M. Neuhaus, said a medical examiner could use facts outside of the autopsy, citing a state law that addresses determinations about cause and manner of death.

"Obviously this statute envisions that the autopsy is only one aspect of the medical examiner's examination into the cause of death," he said. "If medical examiners were limited to basing their conclusions solely on a physical examination of the body, there would be no coroner inquests. The coroners and medical examiners have been doing this for over 100 years."

The case has captivated residents of the Hudson Valley and beyond, for both its puzzling circumstances and the defendant's behavior. For more than a week after Mr. Viafore's drowning, the police described it as an accident. Ms. Graswald, meanwhile, was posting numerous photographs and videos to Facebook that showed her smiling broadly, doing cartwheels and kayaking.

After Ms. Graswald was charged on April 30, the police said she had implicated herself in the killing. At a bail hearing later, they quoted her as having said, among other things, that it "felt good knowing he was going to die."

Mr. Portale, her lawyer, said his client's statements to the police had
been coerced.

Complicating matters is the assertion by Mr. Portale that the kayak’s drain plug had been missing for some time. Kayaking experts have said that a missing plug would not necessarily cause a boat to sink because the hole it closes, at the top of the vessel, is so small. (Mr. Viafore’s kayak did not sink to the bottom of the river, and was later found near shore.)

Such plugs, kayaking instructors say, are designed to make it easy to rid the kayak of excess water by flipping it over on dry land. In very choppy conditions, water can splash directly into the cockpit, causing the kayak to ride low in the water and making it unstable.

Lawrence Kobilinsky, a forensics expert and chairman of the department of sciences at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan, also found the reference to the kayak plug troubling, particularly the description that it was “intentionally removed by other.”

Calling the reference a “red herring,” Dr. Kobilinsky said that medical examiners can and do consider police reports and other information besides the physical examination in arriving at a manner of death. However, he said, the leap from ruling a death a homicide to suggesting it was murder is not one a medical examiner should make.

“That’s not something the medical examiner should be writing down,” he said of the reference to the plug’s intentional removal. “It already presumes it’s a murder. Homicide can be justified or not justified, or it can be an accident. It simply means that one person causes the death of another.”

“The way it was written,” he added, “sounds like the medical examiner was saying it’s clearly a murder based on pulling the plug. But that’s a big hop, skip and a jump, and in a courtroom, all of this stuff will get dissected to the finest detail.”
Correction: September 10, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the date on which the police say Angelika Graswald killed her fiancée, Vincent Viastore, during a kayaking trip. It was April 19, not April 10.

This version of this article appears in print on September 11, 2015, on page A21 of the New York on with the headline: 'Intentionally Removed' Plug Cited in Ruling Kayaker Death a Homicide.