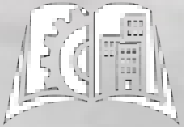


COVID AND THE CITY



CUNY SCHOOL
OF LABOR AND
URBAN STUDIES
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

JANUARY 2021

Publications by the
Faculty of the CUNY
School of Labor and
Urban Studies

On COVID-19, civil
rights, and the cracks
in our systems laid
bare by the year 2020





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COVID AND THE CITY
JANUARY 2021

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LETTER FROM THE ASSOCIATE DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The year 2020 ushered in the most horrific pandemic in the last 100 years. In the early days of 2021, we are left mourning 400,000+ deaths with numbers climbing daily. With casualties largely being suffered by our most vulnerable workers and populations, we also continue to witness the ongoing systematic murder of our black brothers and sisters on the violent streets of our cities. Martin Luther King, Jr. provided us with an important context for these riots and looting when he wrote:

Urban riots must now be recognized as durable social phenomena. They may be deplored, but they are there and should be understood. Urban riots are a special form of violence. They are not insurrections. The rioters are not seeking to seize territory or to attain control of institutions. They are mainly intended to shock the white community. They are a distorted form of social protest. The looting which is their principal feature serves many functions. It enables the most enraged and deprived Negro to take hold of consumer goods with the ease the white man does by using his purse. Often the Negro does not even want what he takes; he wants the experience of taking. But most of all, alienated from society and knowing that this society cherishes property above people, he is shocking it by abusing property rights.

As CUNY's newest campus, our faculty was challenged to fulfill our mission to "expand higher education opportunities for workers; prepare students who aspire to careers in public service and movements for social justice; promote civic engagement; provide leadership development for union and community activists; and help workers achieve greater economic security" in a troubling environment. To create a secure, effective, and supportive learning situation for adult students, many of whom employed on the frontline in hospitals and public transportation and who served as city workers, SLU assured its students that their education would continue through the safety of distance learning. Not only did the faculty rise and succeed in a most professionally and personally challenging situation, they also embraced their roles as social justice researchers, practitioners, and activists by confronting all the complexities of the COVID-19 Crisis and providing important expertise and insights to resolving related issues. This volume is a testament to those faculty whose voices have helped us grapple with this life-changing crisis.

The writings reflected in this volume echo the sentiments expressed by Amanda Gordon during the reciting of her poem on January 20, 2021, "We are striving to forge our union with purpose, to compose a country, committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of man"

So, we invite you to read, think, and share the writings in this volume and urge you to reflect on the part they play in our ongoing dialect and pursuit of social justice.

Dr. Gladys Palma de Schrynemakers



② The messenger - Truth

WATER
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LABOR IN THE TIME OF COVID



MARCH 17, 2020

IF THIS IS WAR, HERE'S WHAT TO DO: CORONAVIRUS AND NATIONAL PURPOSE

MARC KAGAN - PH.D. CANDIDATE AT THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER HISTORY DEPARTMENT
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Confronting the coronavirus virus is “like a war,” former Vice President Joe Biden declared on Sunday, echoing previous statements by Sen. Bernie Sanders, Mayor de Blasio, and others. With the CDC projecting a COVID-19 death toll that could surpass that of some U.S. wars, now is a time to learn from the homefront experience of past conflicts.

Wartime leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt moved boldly to fully mobilize society for battle. The federal government reorganized the production and distribution of goods and developed vast new infrastructure, commandeering private resources when necessary. A few bemoaned government expansion, but the notion that Washington had a responsibility to step in and handle tasks previously done poorly or not at all largely prevailed.

Today, we find ourselves unable even to perform an adequate number of coronavirus tests or provide enough masks and other safety gear. Lurking behind is a shortage of ventilators and ICU beds. Once again, we need the government to take decisive action.

Lincoln's administration built new rail lines at a frantic pace. During World War I, Washington took over the telephone and telegraph networks and all the railroads, which it ran as one system to ensure efficiency. To speed up the war effort during World War II, the federal government built synthetic rubber plants, doubled steel and aluminum production, laid pipeline, and constructed hydroelectric dams. At Washington's insistence, factories were converted to wartime production and resources were pooled across corporate boundaries. The largest aircraft factory in the world was built by Ford, with government money, to produce bombers designed by Boeing.

A determined and decisive government could ensure similar wonders today, orchestrating the use of private and public facilities to produce needed medical supplies, engage in the crash construction of additional

hospital beds, provide services to quarantined people, make sure food, gasoline, and other vital supplies continue to be available, and develop new drugs and vaccines. We face both actual shortages of medical personnel and the coordination necessary to mobilize them efficiently.

Government summoned labor in past wars as soldiers, but also to support the war effort. In the Civil War, the government built a vast nursing corps from scratch. In the more complicated economy of the 1940s, the government determined production priorities, established a partially “planned” economy to ensure that production, and mediated conflicts between capital and labor. To draw women into the workforce, it ran daycare centers. To attract African Americans, it outlawed racial discrimination in war production.

Effective war efforts demand national solidarity, founded on notions of equality and protection of the most vulnerable. During World War II, our government sanctioned and even encouraged the growth of unions and imposed tax rates on the ultra-rich of up to 90%, moves toward what was called “equality of sacrifice.” We should follow suit, making sure that the most needy are protected with income support and free medical coverage, while the wealthiest pay their fair share.

Sanders has called for coronavirus medicines to be sold at cost, mirroring the efforts of Roosevelt to ensure equitable distribution of goods in short supply and prevent price-gouging. World War II price controls, enforced by an army of consumers who reported violations to federal authorities, proved largely effective. Washington — or if need be the states — should now act similarly, establishing price caps for such vital goods as disinfectants, wipes, thermometers, and — yes — toilet paper, which are being sold online at outrageous prices.

When wartime administrations vastly expanded their roles, the United States did not become an autocracy. During the Civil War, the country carried out a hotly contested national election, even with fighting going on in some

of the states which cast ballots. We picked a President during World War II, too. After 9/11, New Yorkers voted in a primary and then elected a new mayor.

The experiences of past wars, of course, were not without blemishes which we should learn from. During World War II, the government embraced crude racism in its internment of thousands of Japanese-American citizens. Crises always attract the greedy. The term “shoddy” was invented during the Civil War to describe manufacturers who ripped off the government. World War II manufacturers took advantage of “cost-plus” contracts to pad expenses and fund non-vital investments.

But largely, the American experience with wartime governmental activism was positive. Equality expanded and so did economic growth. And, of course, both the Civil War and World War II were ultimately won against mighty enemies.

One striking difference from today was that yesterday's officials were often highly competent, whereas today many top federal officials are clearly over their heads. Lincoln's “team of rivals” and Roosevelt's New Dealers knew that vigorous and inventive government could substantially improve the lives of the American people. That is an idea that has been naysayed by Republicans and neoliberal Democrats, who for over 40 years have worked to undermine the resources and legitimacy of government. Every day we are paying the price for that attitude in the ineptitude of current “wartime” Washington. What we can learn from the past is that it does not have to be that way: War, calamitous as it is, might also lead us toward a more effective and humane society. But only if we make the effort.

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MARCH 27, 2020

IT DIDN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS

STEPHANIE LUCE - PROFESSOR OF LABOR STUDIES, CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES



We have been forced to choose between two terrible options: Lock ourselves down to prevent the spread of the virus, resulting in massive job loss—while many vulnerable workers are still forced to work in unsafe conditions; or maintain some business as usual, stemming the economic impact but putting tens of millions of people at risk. It didn't have to be like this.

We could not have prevented the virus itself, nor the resulting loss of life altogether. But imagine if:

- Instead of cutting public health budgets and access to health care for decades, we had expanded it by enacting a single-payer health care system—an improved Medicare for All.
- We had community health centers that did low-cost preventive care, giving people the education and resources to stay healthy to begin with and making a much smaller share of the population at risk for dangerous disease.
- We had paid sick days for all workers so they didn't have to come to work when they had symptoms.
- We had strong unions, high minimum wages, and good benefits, so very few people were poor. Workers would not feel so desperate to work even when sick or in danger, and they could afford basic necessities to keep them healthier year-round.
- We had a public health philosophy of “an injury to one is an injury to all.” Governments would be ready to step in with testing programs, resources for people in quarantine, and fair access for all to treatment and vaccines.
- We taxed the rich and corporations and used that money for the public good and building a strong economy. Our economy would be better equipped to sustain shocks.
- We valued science and scientists, and invested in their research on issues for the public good.
- We valued international connections and relationships, encouraging cooperation and collaboration on research, education, and treatment across borders, rather than demonizing or punishing entire nations.

Read More in LABOR NOTES

https://labornotes.org/2020/03/it-didnt-have-be?fbclid=IwAR1OiT1D4mEem9fYnkKJ42-AI1nZUVnaqlo9zsC34APhLX01s2wuLPZHx_0

WILL COVID-19 BE OUR TRIANGLE FIRE?

DAVID UNGER
COORDINATOR OF LABOR RELATIONS
CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS AT SLU

The world is in the grips of a horrible pandemic that will touch us all. But as has almost always been the case, the burden of COVID-19 will disproportionately fall on marginalized and working people. In New York, now the epicenter of the U.S. crisis, we watch as the crisis pushes the stories of previously invisible workers—the grocery store clerks and delivery persons, transit workers and hospital orderlies—squarely into the public conversation.

Hearing stories of workers' deaths and illnesses, it is easy to fall into despair. But if history teaches us anything, it is that this crisis also presents an opportunity.

One hundred nine years ago, on March 25, 1911, 146 workers—mostly young immigrant women—were killed when a fire broke out on the ninth floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York. Many of the workers were burned alive, blocked from safety by exit doors locked by the owners to prevent theft of fabric; others chose to leap to their deaths rather than burn.

From the ashes of their horrific, preventable deaths, movements rose to challenge the structures of power that made working people invisible and expendable.

Will COVID-19 be a similar “trigger event” that changes how we, as a country, treat working people? Could lasting, positive change rise from the ashes of this pandemic? If history is our guide, we are in for a hell of a fight.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Already, weeks into the pandemic, there is a newfound recognition of who is “essential” in our society and economy. Unfortunately, these newly recognized essential workers are bearing the brunt of working in this crisis.

In New York City, Stephen Jozef, an electrician working on a Google office building, became the first construction worker to die, before workers demanded a stop to construction of high-rises and luxury apartments. The following day, Kious Kelly, a nurse at Mt. Sinai hospital where workers had worn garbage bags as personal protective equipment (PPE), became the first New York nurse to die from the disease.

As of this week, eight members of Transport Workers Union Local 100 have died. More than

330 Transit Authority workers have tested positive, with 2,700 ordered to quarantine at home. This was after management had refused for weeks to give workers masks.

For the newly “essential” food service and grocery industries, the lack of protections is a crisis for both workers and the public. Prior to COVID-19, only 25 percent of food service workers received paid sick days. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2014 that fully 20 percent of food service workers had come to work at least once in the previous year ‘while sick with vomiting or diarrhea,’” the New York Times wrote in an editorial (“The Companies Putting Profits Ahead of Public Health”).

FROM THE ASHES OF THE FIRE

The tragic deaths of frontline workers from COVID-19 need not be in vain. The Triangle Fire became a turning point in the history of working people and the U.S. labor movement.

Coming out of the fire, working people won some of the country's first laws mandating fire safety practices and improved building codes, regulating working conditions, improving sanitary facilities, encouraging collective bargaining, and limiting the hours of work for women and children. The seeds of everything from minimum wages to workers compensation to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration came out of the post-Triangle push for reforms.

Frances Perkins, who witnessed the fire and later became Secretary of Labor under FDR, famously described the Triangle fire as “the day the New Deal was born.”

The story of Triangle is one of worker power and union struggles, of organizing and movements that made a tragedy a catalyst, not just a headline.

Two years before the fire, 20,000 immigrant women shirtwaist workers—including those from the Triangle factory—struck to demand safer workplaces and union recognition with the International Ladies Garment Workers (ILGWU). Thousands of workers won recognition and crucial safety protections—but not the Triangle workers. As former Labor Secretary Hilda Solis said on the 100th anniversary of the fire, “If these workers had a voice—a union—and the ability to speak up about conditions, these events probably could

.....

“There is a chance that the COVID-19 crisis will be a ‘trigger event’ -- that the horror of working poor people and immigrants risking their lives...to keep us fed and cared for will be viewed with the same horror as were those 146 workers’ deaths for the Triangle owner’s profits.”

have been prevented.... They had tried to organize and faced virulent opposition.”

In the days after the fire, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers lined the streets of New York for a funeral march organized by the ILGWU. The revitalized labor movement in New York and nationwide led the calls for accountability and reform and kept relentless pressure on the city and state for years.

The credit for the major reforms often centers on individuals like Perkins, Senator Robert Wagner, and FDR. But without the organizing and strikes of hundreds of thousands of workers, the “virulent opposition” likely would have succeeded in blocking meaningful reform. The post-fire period saw a massive increase in the numbers of workers joining and forming unions and taking major public, disruptive actions. It took a movement to turn tragedy into lasting change.

LESSONS FOR COVID-19

Will this crisis trigger a new wave of building power and transform the public conception of basic protections and rights? We are already seeing the seeds of change. Much like textile workers before them, workers are organizing in industry after industry for mutual aid and

action. Pittsburgh sanitation workers pulled a wildcat strike for PPE and additional pay. Amazon, Whole Foods, and Instacart workers struck for paid leave, safer conditions, and health care for part-time employees. Chipotle workers walked out demanding sick leave and better sanitation. General Electric workers are protesting to demand their factories be used to build ventilators.

As a recent Whole Foods strike leader shared hopefully, “There’s been an incredible little strike wave this week, and I would like to see all these disparate movements come together, because there’s a lot of overlap in what we’re asking for.”

There is a chance that the COVID-19 crisis will be a “trigger event”—that the horror of working poor people and immigrants risking their lives—and dying—to keep us fed and cared for will be viewed with the same horror as were those 146 workers’ deaths for the Triangle owner’s profits. That being forced to work while sick will become as shocking as women and children working around the clock behind locked doors in factories. That working

without health care and protective equipment will lead to the creation of new forms of oversight by government and community. That previously invisible immigrant workers will continue to be treated as essential.

But as always, the other side—the bosses, the owners of capital—will be fighting to make things worse for working people.

The White House is already using coronavirus response to push through viciously anti-union rules, impose tougher border control, and roll back food safety inspections and environmental regulations. Bosses are pushing to rip up contracts, cut wages and pension obligations, and walk back regulations and oversight in industries far and wide.

But, like working people a hundred years ago, the power of our movements gives us a fighting chance to turn this tragedy, too, into lasting change. It’s an opening we have to take.

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BARGAINING FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN THE CORONAVIRUS ERA

MARIANNE GARNEAU - ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF LABOR STUDIES, CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

Recently, Arizona teachers waged a sick-out, an “overwhelming” mass action in the name of “health and safety,” given that their school district was set to reopen despite the state not meeting the benchmarks it had itself set for safe in-person instruction. The action forced the administration of the 7-school district to reverse course on its plan for reopening. Similarly, the Chicago Unified School District announced earlier this month that classrooms would be closed and learning would be online-only hours after the Chicago Teachers Union threatened a strike vote.

At this point, 13 of the 15 largest school districts in the US have decided to only hold classes online, in spite of tremendous pressure from government and business to open schools for in-person learning in the hope of reanimating the economy. The impetus to close, which is clearly the only safe option, has come almost entirely from unions.

In general, those who have been most effectively advocating for public health during the coronavirus pandemic have been unions and workers. That includes health care workers who have demanded PPE and adequate staffing to continue caring for the onslaught of coronavirus and other patients around the clock, and for that matter grocery workers and transit workers who have demanded safer conditions.

BARGAINING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

In recent years, some corners of the labor movement, including the Chicago Teachers Union, have touted a strategy called “bargaining for the common good.” The idea is to address issues of concern to the broader community at the bargaining table, beyond the normal scope of contract issues. The example with CTU was addressing homelessness, which affects 17,000 students in their district; the union proposed an affordable housing plan and the city ultimately agreed, much more modestly, to appoint support staff for homeless students in schools.

The theory is, this approach not only does good, but crucially brings with it public support – members of the community are more likely to back the workers and their potential strike if they have a material interest in seeing the contract settled in the union’s favor. In some ways, bargaining for the common good is a cunning pushback against employer attempts to paint unions as selfishly looking out for their

members’ interests — all that propaganda about “lazy” and “incompetent” teachers protected by unions at kids’ expense.

Nice as this sounds, this line of thinking leapfrogs over an important reality, which is that workers’ interests and the public interest are already aligned, at least far more often than people realize. When workers — especially teachers or nurses — bargain over even their own working conditions (class sizes, resources, staff-to-patient ratios), that is a matter of the common good, or at least the good of the working class, which is the vast majority of society. The basic bargaining issues that come across the table are quite often ones that make communities healthier and stronger, that draw resources to important public institutions like health care, transportation, schooling, and libraries. This is not just a matter of staffing levels, but other issues of quality of service, and thus quality of life.

Even beyond that, any worker compensation is compensation of working people in the community, and when a union is able to raise the wages for their members, that often raises the floor, including for unskilled and non-union workers. For as much as unions are painted as chauvinistically getting a better deal for their members, or even gatekeeping around “good jobs,” the majority of union activity is a fight against the boss in recognition that raises and working conditions don’t come out of other workers’ wages and working conditions, they come out of owners’ profits and prerogatives (or bloated administrations, or public spending on corporate interests). The gains unions make — including with respect to things like safety and health — are gains for workers who are themselves members of the public. If bosses and public administrations have the ability sometimes to pass that buck by making cuts elsewhere, that’s an argument to broaden the institutions of working class power that have been effective in advancing our interests against capitalists’. Historically, that has meant unions.

WORKING-CLASS INTEREST IS GENERAL INTEREST

Anti-worker propaganda from both liberals and conservatives has succeeded in framing every union fight as chauvinistic, narrow self-interest, even if the workers involved are deemed “worthy.” Our response to that cannot just be to implicitly concede the point and reach out to “the public” to tack on issues of interest to them. Instead, we have to reclaim

the working class’s interest as the general interest. Bargaining for the common good somewhat implicitly agrees that workers are a special interest group that can contingently be bundled with others’ interests. (Granted that teachers’ unions, and no less the CTU, have long opposed this rhetoric.) This also comes from a left viewpoint that sees unions as narrow, economic institutions that have to step outside of workplace fights and ally with other institutions in order to gerrymander a broader social relevance. But as we can see from these pandemic-era fights in health care and education, that simply isn’t true. The ones keeping patients and children and other members of the community safe right now are the workers forcing public policy through their struggles on the job.

A ton of emphasis has been placed in recent years on garnering public support for union battles — the thought is that without that broader support, unions cannot win against employers. While public support has a huge effect on worker morale, it’s not entirely clear how much effect it actually has on employers, including public ones. (For that matter, just look at how many Democrat or social democrat-mandated governments have spent their time in office bringing unions to heel or slashing services, turning against the very platforms that put them there.)

In fact, contrary to the widespread belief about the importance of public support and the narrowness of unions, the battles that have been won swiftly and decisively during this period of coronavirus have been won by workers withdrawing their labor or threatening to do so. Against a draconian push at nearly all levels of government and business to minimize the pandemic, short-change public health and re-open the economy at any cost, workers and their unions have been some of the only groups successfully pushing back in defense of the public’s health and safety. They have done so by leveraging the real power they have, their labor — not by marshaling public support. After all, this is a time when public interest is being steamrolled. While employers and government have been willing to expose the working class to COVID-19, organized labor has been the bulwark effectively bargaining for the public’s health and the common good.

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<https://organizing.work/2020/08/bargaining-for-the-common-good-in-the-coronavirus-era/>*

NEW YORK SOCIALISTS IN THE LEGISLATURE—AND OUT

JOSHUA B. FREEMAN - DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT CUNY GRADUATE CENTER;
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In the June 23rd New York State Democratic primary, five candidates backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) won nomination for seats in the state legislature. If they win their general election contests in November—which is likely, since all are running in heavily Democratic districts—they will constitute the largest socialist delegation in Albany in one hundred years.

Yet things did not go well a century ago for the five members of the Socialist Party elected to the State Assembly in 1919. On April 1st, 1920, they were expelled from the chamber by an overwhelming vote for alleged disloyalty to the United States. And while all five won the subsequent special elections to fill the vacant posts, three were quickly expelled again, leading their two colleagues to resign in protest.

Given the gulf of time between these socialist electoral peaks, it's not surprising that there are many differences between the two groups of candidates, their programs, and their challenges. But there are striking parallels, too, and important reminders for the left, especially as the country teeters on the edge of a frightening period of political violence and repression. Donald Trump's rejection of basic democratic and legal norms is hardly as novel in US history as it is often portrayed: Even in liberal New York, there have been repeated efforts to alter or ignore the rules of democracy when voters elect candidates who seek fundamental changes to the capitalist system. The story of the socialist legislators expelled during the first Red Scare shows how little it took for defenders of the status quo in both

parties to embrace anti-democratic measures when that status quo was challenged.

The Socialist Party of America (SP), formed in 1901, was the first national anti-capitalist organization capable of running effective electoral efforts at every level of government. By 1912 it had become a significant, if decidedly minority, political force. That year, party leader Eugene Victor Debs won 6% of the presidential vote, a mark still unmatched by a socialist in a general election. Twelve hundred socialists held local or state office, including 79 mayors. Four years later, SP candidate Allan Benson, a writer and newspaper editor, failed to match Debs's percentage of the vote, but the party elected 29 legislators across the country as well as mayors in Milwaukee and Minneapolis.

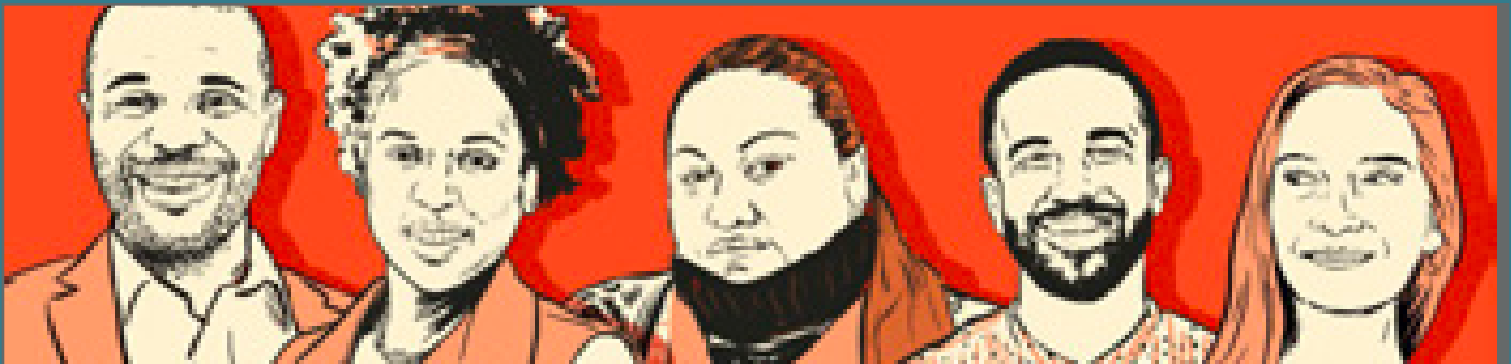
In New York, the first socialist electoral success came in 1911 in Schenectady—an industrial center with giant General Electric and American Locomotive factories—when the city elected Herbert M. Merrill, a GE worker and union leader, as the state's first socialist legislator. The next year, George Lunn, a well-known Presbyterian minister, was elected mayor on the Socialist line. The SP drew much of its support from skilled workers, many from “old immigrant” backgrounds: German, British, or, as in the case of Debs, French. But in New York City, a party stronghold, poorer and less skilled workers, many of them “new immigrants,” especially Jews, provided its main base. In 1915, Abraham I. Shiplacoff, the Ukrainian-born secretary of the United Hebrew Trades—a federation of Jewish unions with a peak membership of 250,000 in 1914—won election to the state Assembly from Central Brooklyn. In 1917, socialists won ten Assembly

seats in working-class districts in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan.

It was not long before the Democrats and the Republicans sought to roll back the socialists' electoral successes. To do so, they turned to a tactic widely used in the 19th century to defeat radicals: fusion. In 1918, in all of the socialist-represented districts, Democrats and Republicans nominated the same candidate, combining forces to defeat eight of the incumbents. But one year later—Assembly members were elected every year until a 1937 constitutional revision—the socialists clawed their way back to win five seats. Samuel DeWitt, a poet and gifted speaker born on the Lower East Side, represented the South Bronx. The Bronx district that included Crotona and Arthur Avenue was represented by Samuel Orr, a lawyer, born in Russian-occupied Poland. Charles Solomon, who would later become a judge while remaining a socialist, represented Central Brooklyn. Representing lower Harlem and part of Morningside Heights was the Swiss-born August Claessens, who taught himself Yiddish so he could take part in Jewish socialist activities. Finally, representing the Lower East Side was Louis Waldman, a Ukrainian-born engineer and law student.

The socialists' victory proved short-lived, however. By the time the State Assembly convened on January 7th, 1920, the United States was in the throes of the first Red Scare...

Read More in JEWISH CURRENTS
<https://jewishcurrents.org/when-new-york-socialists-were-kicked-out/>





OCTOBER 15, 2020

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES: GENDER AND THE GIG ECONOMY

RUTH MILKMAN - DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY, CUNY GRADUATE CENTER;
CHAIR OF LABOR STUDIES, CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

Luke Elliott-Negri, Kathleen Griesbach, Adam Reich and I began studying platform-based food delivery in 2018. Like many labor scholars, we were fascinated by the exploding gig economy and its impact on workers. In late 2018 and early 2019 we conducted Facebook surveys with 955 platform-based food delivery workers, followed by in-depth interviews with 55 of them.

Our data were collected well before the COVID-19 pandemic sparked an explosion of demand for all sorts of home delivery, even as it widened pre-existing gender and class inequalities. Those developments only add to the significance of our findings.

We did not start the project with a gender focus, but we quickly learned that working-class women dominate this sector of the gig economy. About three-fourths of our survey respondents (and a similar proportion of interviewees) were female, and mostly white. This should not have been a surprise, but for us it was, maybe because we live in New York City, which has a far longer tradition of food delivery – mostly performed by immigrant men – than the rest of the U.S.

It is tempting to imagine that gig work, where the boss is not a human but an algorithm, is uncontaminated by the gender inequities that structure traditional occupations. But the gig economy is embedded in the larger society. Like the rest of the labor market, platform-based work is gender-segregated: most drivers for Uber and Lyft are men, for example, while food delivery is a female-dominated sector in most of the U.S. Both within and across such gig-economy occupations, men earn more, on average, than women, just like in the rest of the labor market.

The omnirelevance of gender is an old story. More surprising was the way in which our interviewees interpreted their work experiences and made them meaningful. In this high-tech, ultra-modern sector of the labor market, traditional gender arrangements are hegemonic – although at the same time our interviewees displayed strong class resentments toward

both the company and their most privileged customers. We were struck by the salience of normative femininity among “shoppers” working for Instacart, Uber Eats Doordash, and similar platforms, as our recent article in Critical Sociology details.

WHY WOMEN ARE DRAWN TO THE GIG ECONOMY

The women in this sector, most of them mothers and other caregivers, are attracted to it for three key reasons: (a) scheduling flexibility, which allows them to balance their paid delivery work with their unpaid caregiving commitments; (b) the opportunity to use their previously unpaid food provisioning skills to generate cash income, in a neoliberal twist on “wages for housework”; and (c) the emotional meaning derived from delivering food to elderly and disabled customers who cannot easily shop for themselves. All three of these features of food delivery gig work reflect and reinforce the traditional gender division of labor and normative femininity.

As we showed in an earlier publication, the food delivery platform companies’ much-vaunted promise of scheduling flexibility often has strings attached. But the women we interviewed highlighted control over their time as a compelling draw – especially relative to the increasingly unpredictable scheduling in traditional low-wage retail and service jobs. As one woman who had previously worked at Whole Foods recalled, “I saw a lot of Instacart shoppers in the store and I just got to thinking, ‘Why am I working on someone else’s schedule?’” Others waxed with enthusiasm about how they could schedule their food delivery gigs to dovetail with children’s activities and illnesses, taking family members to medical appointments, and the like.

Another fascinating theme in the interviews was the pleasure and pride involved in the craft of food provisioning. “What girl doesn’t like to shop?” one woman asked rhetorically. Others spoke about how much they enjoyed food shopping, especially when spending someone else’s money. Some women criticized male

shoppers for lacking the requisite skills, for example in selecting high-quality produce. Pride in shopping skill was a specifically female phenomenon among platform-based food delivery workers, even more so than scheduling around caregiving obligations, which a few “stay-at-home” fathers we interviewed also highlighted.

THE CLASS-GENDER NEXUS

Just as the notorious weakness of the U.S. social safety net makes this job appealing to women with caregiving commitments, that same weakness leads people with disabilities and the elderly to rely on the market to meet their basic needs. That, in turn, endows food delivery with a caregiving dimension that makes the work meaningful to many of those who do it. “It gives me a good feeling to be able to help somebody,” one told us. “It’s a good service, even though the company is crap.”

That perspective was echoed repeatedly in our interviews. “I hate this company,” one woman exclaimed. “They’re the enemy! It’s us against them, and it’s war.” Another compared one of the firms to “the Antichrist.” They were especially enraged by the arbitrary changes – “pivots” in industry lingo – that the platforms periodically made in job payment rates and in the way customer tips were handled. The pivots also led to declining earnings. “They just keep cutting here, and cutting there, until pretty soon there’s not going to be anything left but tips,” one woman complained. Most interviewees, in short, were well aware of their class position.

These women exemplify what Marxist-feminist Temma Kaplan, in a classic article, famously called “female consciousness.” She noted that those with female consciousness “accept the gender system of their society,” and specifically the traditional gender division of labor. For Kaplan, class consciousness coexists with female consciousness among working-class women, and our case study confirms that. Interviewees resented their treatment

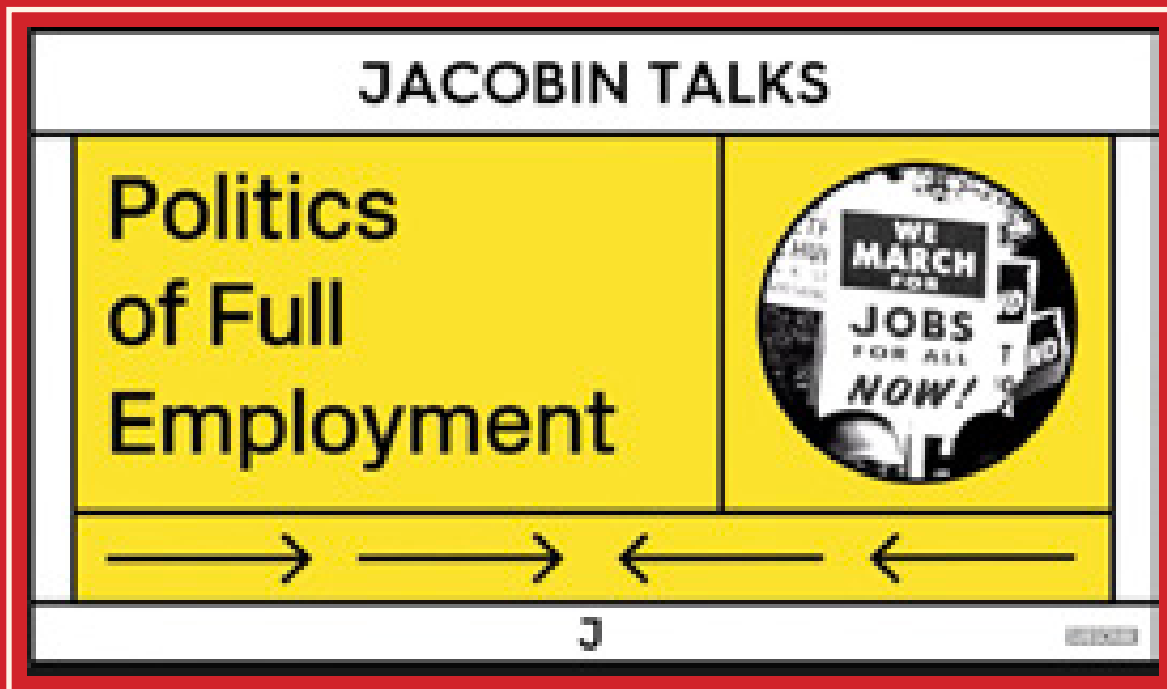
by their most affluent customers (typically the worst tippers), in sharp contrast to those clients who valued their services because of age or disability. These workers were also enraged by the constantly shifting policies of the food delivery companies, and by their meager and unpredictable pay. But in contrast to their critical awareness of class domination, concern about gender inequality was conspicuous mainly by its absence. Instead, they explicitly embraced the traditional gender division of labor and normative femininity.

The class-gender nexus has received limited attention in the burgeoning literature on intersectionality. Our article helps to fill that gap.

Originally Published in WORK IN PROGRESS
<http://www.wipsociology.org/author/ruth-milkman/>

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SEPTEMBER 18, 2020



[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=PAPOFIWRYPY&LIST=PLXLNHP2F0KUKLSP2CQ38B9XYMXZINHZN&INDEX=35](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAPOFIWRYPY&list=PLXLNHP2F0KUKLSP2CQ38B9XYMXZINHZN&index=35)

THE POLITICS OF FULL EMPLOYMENT

Hosted by Bhaskar Sunkara of Jacobin Talks

Guest: Stephanie Luce, Professor of Labor Studies,
CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies



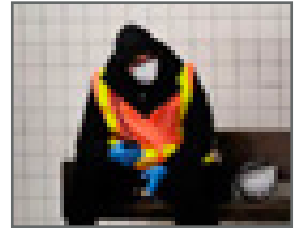
by Stephanie Luce | March 26, 2020
READ MORE AT <https://portside.org/2020-03-26/vietnam-covid-19-and-public-health>

Vietnam, Public Health and COVID-19

“The slogan ‘prevention is better than curative’ is always repeated but in reality, only a maximum 30% of investment goes to prevention. Hopefully, more and better evidence coming from the Covid19 epidemic would change this proportion a bit toward more prevention.”

Essential Workers are Dying from COVID-19

“The coronavirus is terrible for all, but more terrible for America’s underclass, now redefined not just as the poor and marginalized, but those who are deemed ‘essential’—not to heal the sick but mostly to enable the rest of us to successfully shelter in place.”



by Marc Kagan | April 02, 2020
READ MORE AT <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/04/essential-workers-deaths-underclass.html>



by Sean Sweeney | August 31, 2020
READ MORE AT <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/08/nationalize-fossil-fuels-green-new-deal-big-oil>

There May Be No Choice but to Nationalize Oil and Gas — and Renewables, Too

“At the end the day, the financial viability of oil and gas is less important than the energy these concerns generate, which reflects just how dependent the entire economy is on fossil fuels. In other words, there may be no choice but to nationalize the sector.”

Coalition and Confrontation: A Response to Jared Abbott

“Any attempt to position confrontation and coalition as distinct strategies rather than as themselves tools that combine in different circumstances to form appropriate strategies is ungrounded in the messy reality of even the left-most political players.”



by Luke Elliott-Negri | September 28, 2020
READ MORE AT <https://organizingupgrade.com/coalition-and-confrontation-a-response-to-jared-abbott/>



THE CITY IN THE TIME OF COVID



APRIL 1, 2020

THE CASE FOR A RENT MORATORIUM

GIANPAOLO BAIOCCHI - PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR
OF THE URBAN DEMOCRACY LAB AT N.Y.U.

H. JACOB CARLSON - SUBSTITUTE ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

Last week, the U.S. Senate approved a \$2.2 trillion coronavirus stimulus package. It includes many important elements, such as expanded unemployment benefits, and emergency aid for small businesses and hospitals hit hard by the crisis. This is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

We need Congress to enact an immediate, 90-day national rent moratorium — a temporary suspension of rent payments that will keep families in their homes before other dominoes start to fall.

This would be a bailout for people — for the countless families already facing difficulties making their next rent payment and who soon will face the real prospect of eviction. If we do not act now, people will lose their access to housing. The social impact of evictions on individuals, families and communities will be brutal.

Two weeks ago, unemployment claims skyrocketed to record-breaking levels. More than three million people filed for unemployment in response to the pandemic, nearly five times the highest number recorded during the Great Recession. Millions more will lose their jobs in the coming weeks and months. For those who were already using a large portion of their income for rent and have small savings reserves to cushion the blow, unemployment will be disastrous.

Today, a staggering 47 percent of renters spend more than a third of their income on rent, while one-quarter of renters give more than half of their income to their landlord. According to our estimates from the Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking, 57 percent of renters could not afford an unexpected expense of \$400 with the money they have on hand. For these households, any loss in income is a threat to housing stability.

To use a well-worn phrase, the rent was already “too damn high” to begin with, and the coronavirus pandemic has only intensified the pressures on very fragile household budgets...

Read More at THE NEW YORK TIMES

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/opinion/coronavirus-rent-freeze.html>

JUNE 4, 2020

PROTESTS LAY BARE STRUCTURAL RACISM IN MASS-TRANSIT POLICING

KAFUI ATTOH - ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF URBAN STUDIES,
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As New Yorkers juggle hand sanitizer and dodge errant tear gas canisters, they may find it hard to recall that, only six months ago, Gov. Cuomo and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority were clashing with activists and legislators on the issue of fare evasion.

How innocent we were! At the heart of the clash was Cuomo's plan to hire 500 new MTA officers as a way to deter "theft of service."

Theft of service? Looking back on that pre-COVID-19 moment illuminates much about our present situation.

For activists, of course, the problems with Cuomo's plan were immediately obvious. The plan stoked ongoing concerns around racial profiling, and seemed to imply that the MTA's mounting problems were really the fault of the city's poor.

Another key problem was simply math. As Streetsblog noted, the MTA's proposal to spend "\$249 million on new cops to save \$200 million on fare evasion" belied anything approaching sound economic sense. In a letter to Cuomo, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said more or less the same thing: Rather than a hiring spree, "desperately needed resources would be better invested in subway, bus, maintenance and service improvements."

In the last six months, a great deal has changed. Gone are the Halcyon days in which fare evasion or "theft of service" elicit spirited debate.

Today, the issues facing the MTA and New York City Transit appear more existential. After Cuomo's March 20 "New York on PAUSE" declaration, daily transit ridership fell by 90 percent. By mid-April ridership on the subway had reached a historic low of 365,000 daily trips — down from 5.56 million trips a year before. Losses in fare revenue have been extensive.

The MTA's financial situation remains shaky despite the fact that the agency has received federal and state aid and new powers to borrow from its capital budget — and especially given the possibility of another outbreak. Beyond the hit to transit budgets, the human costs also have mounted. As of this week, more than 60 transit workers in the city — most of them bus drivers

— have succumbed to COVID-19. Transit in the city is facing a new reality — one that has made a mockery of the old bugaboo of "fare evasion."

Yet in Albany, our leaders carry on as if nothing has changed. In mid-April, Gothamist reported that, despite \$8 billion in COVID related losses, the MTA still plans to plow ahead with its decision to hire 350 new MTA police officers. Having already hired 150 since January, the MTA will expand the force's ranks by 150 in July and by another 200 in December. MTA spokeswoman Meredith Daniels defended the decision by saying that it simply reflects the MTA's top priority: "to provide a safe and secure transportation system."

The takeaway is clear: Despite the radical nature of the change that has befallen the world, and New York City in particular, the MTA remains bewilderingly consistent in its eagerness to expand the policing of mass transit.

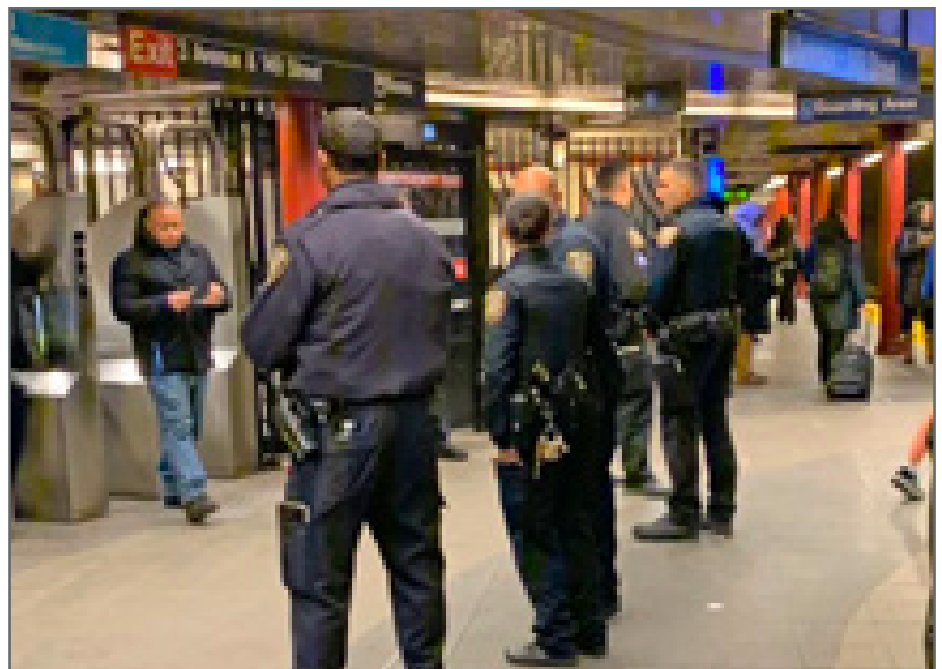
Even though Albany may not have changed, New York has. In the teeth of the MTA's obduracy,

a growing share of the public simply won't stand for it anymore.

These past weeks, amid a wave of global demonstrations in response to the killing of George Floyd, protesters are questioning how we fund the police versus how we fund everything else — from public education and healthcare to public transportation. They illustrate the point simply by juxtaposing images: The first image is usually of a nurse or bus driver wearing a garbage bag fashioned into PPE. The second image is of a police officer armed to the gills with both the new military-grade gadgets and an armored vehicle purchased for \$250,000 through a Justice Department grant...

Read More at *STREETSBLOG NYC*

<https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2020/06/04/op-ed-protests-lay-bare-structural-racism-in-mass-transit-policing/?fbclid=IwAR1Mlw1Mj4jQWif-TXVfyKHgoaKDukPYR6mJUi5eSvYF1TvnB63LH5JK8M>



JULY 16, 2020

ALL UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS DESERVE CITIZENSHIP, NOT JUST “ESSENTIAL WORKERS”

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The Covid-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to the large number of undocumented immigrants who work in “essential jobs,” ranging from agriculture to hospital workers. Many of them labor in workplaces like meatpacking where the virus is notoriously rampant, and few to no protections exist. Close to 11 million immigrants currently live in the United States without legal status. About eight million of these affected undocumented individuals (and at least hundreds of thousands more with DACA, TPS, or low-wage guestworker visas) are in the U.S. labor force.

As scholars of immigration and labor, we have examined the poverty wages and dangerous working conditions faced by immigrant workers even before the threat of Covid-19. Many of these workers are now held up as essential heroes who are feeding and caring for America. Meanwhile, they face a ramped up system of detention, deportation and surveillance under the Trump administration.

Many (well-meaning) observers at outlets such as the New York Times and The New Republic have called on the federal government to finally reward the essential work of undocumented immigrants with a path to citizenship. It became a compelling rally cry at the beginning of the pandemic in the United States, when hospitals were overwhelmed, getting food became a herculean task and families became hyper aware of the exhausting nature of domestic labor. Today, as states across the country reopen stores,

restaurants and hair salons, all while facing a surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths, even more undocumented workers are being exposed to the risk of infection.

Undocumented workers laboring in essential industries should absolutely be provided a pathway to citizenship, which would undoubtedly bring them much needed relief. But we believe all undocumented people, regardless of where they work—or whether they work at all—should be eligible for the same path to citizenship. This call has been long debated, but it is the only way forward to a more equitable immigration policy.

The typical argument for citizenship is based on the utility of immigrants to Americans. If you are forced to expose your body to dangerous chemicals and brutal working conditions—and now Covid-19—to harvest food to feed Americans, the argument goes, you are an essential worker and should be spared deportation, and perhaps even get citizenship. But what if you are laboring at home to care for family members? What if you are disabled and unable to find work that pays? What if you are building a more just America by helping organize the Black Lives Matter uprisings? What if you are elderly? A child?

Valuing immigrants for their utility to businesses and consumers has always been a mistake, and remains so during the pandemic. Linking citizenship to a narrow definition of productivity—wage work in exploited but essential jobs—expects one group of people to earn the right to exist by serving another. Tying political inclusion to labor production for some groups is uncomfortably close to the shameful





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“We must stop thinking about citizenship for immigrants in terms of who deserves it. Individuals should be granted citizenship simply because they are human and they are here.”

American history of African American slavery (and the valuation of black bodies for their labor) and the expulsion of Native Americans from their lands (because of their ostensible lack of productivity). We should learn from the Black Lives Matter protests that people’s worth should not be based on their economic utility, or how they live their lives.

The Covid-19 crisis is a good time to put an end to these deeply unjust patterns—not replicate them.

Basing citizenship on essential (or any) work status values some people over others. It also solidifies the notion that the government’s ability to deport you, rip you from your family and community, and make you wait in abusive and dangerous detention centers without due process is based on your utility to the rest of us, and not your right to a dignified life.

A pathway to citizenship within a deeply unequal and exploitative system leaves the system itself intact. All workers should enjoy a dignified and safe workplace, and a living wage, regardless of immigration status. They should also have access to a robust healthcare system and quality childcare and education for their children. Yet, these are fundamental rights that both immigrant and non-immigrant workers lack in America today. We call for citizenship for all immigrants and safe working conditions for all workers.

We must stop thinking about citizenship for immigrants in terms of who deserves it. Individuals should be granted citizenship simply because they are human and they are here. But perhaps more importantly, they

are here because we were there. We must be honest about the American legacy of military invasions, economic exploitation, and political interference in other countries that has pushed people to migrate to the United States.

We owe immigrants not only because their backbreaking labor subsidizes our cheap food and undergirds our economy, but because often the reason why they have to leave their homes can be traced to the United States—its corporations, its government, its military and its enormous footprint in the climate crisis.

So, here’s another way to think about a path to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants: a small and long overdue first step towards justice.

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<https://inthesetimes.com/article/undocumented-immigrants-citizenship-essential-workers-covid-19>*

THE US SAFETY NET IS DEGRADING BY DESIGN

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TAMMY THOMAS MILES - SENIOR ORGANIZER AT COMMUNITY CHANGE

The pandemic has thrown millions of people out of work while mean-spirited government policies ended emergency Unemployment Insurance benefits. More and more families are left with no choice but to turn to public assistance programs like the dysfunctional Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF).

But built on racist and sexist stereotypes and degrading by design, the harsh TANF program often harms poor people more than it helps, while the more popular food stamps and rental assistance have too many strings and reach too few people.

Rivalling the Great Depression, the twin public health and economic crises have laid bare the dysfunctional safety net. The deepening adversity calls upon us to imagine a strong safety net that will ensure economic security for all. But first, how and why is it that our nation's leaders, from the outset, built the system to fail?

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Some 40 years ago, after Republicans and Democrats joined hands to destroy the safety net, things became much harsher. Republican President Ronald Reagan cut

the public assistance programs. Democratic President Bill Clinton declared that “the era of big government is over” and promised to “end welfare as we know it”—purging millions of women and children from the rolls. And Republican President George W. Bush tried to privatize the beloved Social Security Program. Evoking Reagan’s “welfare queen,” the racist and sexist myth that Black women game the system to buy fancy cars and name-brand clothes and pushing Clinton’s flawed welfare “reform” to its logical extreme, the Trump administration wants to end the entire safety net. It brutally cuts more funds, cruelly seeks to require work by people seeking Medicaid or food stamps, and to implement the so-called “public charge” rule to punish immigrants seeking cash support.

Between 1996 and 2018—before the pandemic—these stigmatizing and humiliating policies had already reduced the percentage of families eligible for cash welfare from 68 percent to 22 percent. In states like Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, less than 5 percent of eligible poor families get help. All the hassling and threats send a clear message: “Do not apply.” Fear, exhaustion, and despair further keep too many people away from harsh programs that they nonetheless need to survive. The portion of poor families getting cash help nationwide is the lowest in decades.

We are reaping a bitter harvest of this hardship as 12 percent of all adults in America report not getting enough to eat during the previous week, nearly double that number for Black and Latinx families. One in five renters have fallen behind on rent, and that’s true for nearly a third of households of color, many headed by women. Over a quarter of the nation’s children live in families that sometimes don’t have enough food or clothing for school.

As Covid-19 throws more working- and middle-class people into poverty, some for the first time, Senate Republicans and Trump refuse to pass a relief package. This will ensure catastrophic consequences for millions of people living on the brink, sending them to

apply for abusive public assistance benefits they never thought they would need. The pandemic recession has exposed the nation’s deep-seated economic inequality and systemic racism already too well-known and widely experienced by the poor. It has started to open the eyes of others to the stigma and oppression built into safety net programs.

The human consequences have been devastating to people from all walks of life. Mary Reinbold is a single mom of three living in West Virginia who reached the five-year time limit for cash welfare. The loss of welfare forced her to do community service for 40 hours per week for a paltry \$301 in monthly cash benefits, plus food stamps and Medicaid for her family. She’s worked on and off, but each time she got a job, welfare reduced her benefits, leaving her to pay 30 percent of her earnings towards rent. When her teenage daughter got a job hoping to save for a car, the state cut the family’s food stamps. Her daughter quit. “It’s a trap with so many obstacles and hurdles that it’s almost impossible just to escape,” Reinbold said. The conservative policies that claim to incentivize people to work have only forced Mary’s family to quit just while they were starting to get ahead.

Millions more families are now experiencing the red tape, the delays, and the stinginess of our systems. People like Tia Ferguson, a substitute teacher in Ohio who waited for months for unemployment benefits she was entitled to receive, and Thomas Miles, a commercial roofer in Florida, who is still waiting for his. Jeff Quattrone, a now-unemployed artist in New Jersey, applied for housing assistance, but the state lottery allocates just 8,000 vouchers—60,000 people applied. Only one in six families eligible for child care get it. This was always wrong, but for “essential workers” it now creates impossible and unsustainable choices.

But with these experiences come the need and possibility for something better. Struggling families have a shared view of what we need to do. They are imagining and fighting for a different future. Co-author Tammy Thomas

Miles, whose husband is still waiting for unemployment benefits, has been organizing for a better safety net for over a decade, grounded in her lifetime of experience with systems that don't help families, even though their taxes pay for the programs. She radically reimagines government's role and believes that we need a system that doesn't perpetuate stigma and oppression through racist and sexist stereotypes. She fights for a system that provides a solid foundation for everyone and levels the playing field for marginalized people and those down on their luck.)

Tia Ferguson joined a community organization, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, to help her navigate the unemployment system. She has since spoken out in a town hall event with Senator Sherrod Brown and Representative Tim Ryan and testified before the House Ways and Means Committee about her struggles. Jeff Quattrone believes that the government intentionally disinvests in crucial programs and deliberately discourages people from applying for needed benefits, while giving huge tax breaks to the rich and corporations. That's why he supports the House-passed HEROES Act and vice presidential nominee Senator Kamala Harris's proposal to give \$2,000 in unconditional cash assistance to people until the pandemic is over. He adds that we should cancel rent and provide massive housing assistance to families. Reinbold wants to see a universal basic income that provides unconditional cash payments to all families.

All of these bold goals are necessary to ring in a Third Reconstruction that replaces our racial and gender caste system with a just and equitable one. These changes will be made by a grassroots movement of people like Mary, Jeff, and Tia who have experienced the brokenness of these systems and who have the courage and radical imagination to replace the old safety net with something new, bold, and available to all

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<https://www.thenation.com/article/economy/coronavirus-social-services/>



LIFT EACH OTHER UP, DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING

DEEPAK BHARGAVA - DISTINGUISHED LECTURER,
CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES



Defeating populist authoritarians at the ballot box is always hard, even unusual, especially in the present historical conjuncture. And yet, right now, I feel confident in saying that Donald Trump was in fact defeated. He lost the popular vote by a very large margin, and the margins in key states that decide the Electoral College, while close, are not in doubt. In the context of how hard authoritarians are to displace once they take power, this is a monumental win. It is a testament to the power of the people's organizations and movements that set to work right after Trump was inaugurated and never stopped. Not all victories, in my experience, feel good to the people who win them when they win them. But let's not let the clouds obscure the sun, or the significance of what was accomplished. In this authoritarian era, Modi won (twice!), Johnson won, Bolsonaro won, Putin "won," Orban won, Duterte won. Yes, Trump won, but then Trump LOST. Because of us. The fact that we will NOT continue a slide into authoritarianism – that we won some precious time to breathe, organize and reset – is a very, very big deal.

The victory needs to be defended. We must protect the results and make sure that we count every vote. I was shocked to see Fox News subdued on election night, calling Arizona early for Biden, and even, in a few moments, scolding the President in a “fair and balanced” way for prematurely claiming victory. That’s a good sign about how some portion of our corporate overlords have decided to play their hand. A Biden Presidency, even more so if it is constrained by Mitch McConnell and a hostile Supreme Court, is not likely to be bad for business or Wall Street (and you can tell they think that by how financial markets have responded).

Even so, we should, in my opinion, which I know is not universally shared, mobilize non-violently to show that there is people power behind this win, power that is prepared to joyously defend it, to demonstrate that we are confident and not cowed. Donald Trump and his fleet of lawyers don’t decide who won – we the people decide who won. The doleful sentiment in many progressive circles – behaving as though we’ve lost – could become a self-fulfilling prophecy if we don’t find our game face. Nothing is certain until the electoral vote count is certified by the new Congress in January. We must remain mobilized, confident, and engaged.

It is not 100% certain at this writing that the Republicans will win the Senate. If it comes down to two Senate seats in a special election in Georgia in January, we should do all we can to support the extraordinary, visionary Black leadership in that state that has made so much progress already to finish the job they have started. It will be hard – but it can be done.

Governing will be very hard, even if Republicans don’t end up controlling the Senate, but we have opportunities in front of us. The risk is obvious – that a Biden administration will be left with accountability for manifold economic and health crises without the power to fully redress them, and that a fierce institutional resistance from not only the Senate and the Supreme Court, but also an emboldened, grassroots Trumpian resistance will sabotage all progress. However, there are things Democrats can win in Congressional negotiations, ways that the bully pulpit of the Presidency can be used to build popular support and change the narrative, and as Stephen Miller, the evil force behind Trump’s immigration agenda, showed, many things a mobilized federal executive branch can

accomplish. Democrats have not recently been skilled at this kind of work to use government to alter relations of power – but they can be pushed and taught to do it. If they do it right, this will set up the 2022 midterms (with a more favorable Senate map) that produce bigger Democratic majorities in Congress. Much more to say on this topic of governing for power – but that’s for another time.

Change in Washington never comes from people in Washington. Change comes from mobilized social movements. If millions of people facing hardship, racial injustice, evictions, and joblessness take action, that will create cascading pressures upwards that force action from elites and policymakers. This is the real history of what produced the Great Society and the New Deal revolutions in social policy, once you correct for the elite bias that pervades most historical narratives. Organizations can’t produce those kinds of movements, but they can fan the flames of movement. And this has been a golden age of social movements. We shouldn’t feel defeated by the constraints of narrow margins in Congress – we should feel emboldened to build grassroots movements that make the impossible possible. That’s always how we win.

It has been clear to many of us from the beginning that Trump is not an aberration who beamed to America from Mars. Rather, he is a mirror for the deep racism, misogyny and cruelty bred in the bone of American society and culture. The reality that millions more people voted for Trump in 2020, knowing who he is and what he has done, is hard to take – for people of color, especially – even if it is not surprising. My working-class students of color at CUNY were not at all surprised by Trump’s political success, and most of them thought it likely that he would win again, even when the polls showed otherwise. They know America better than most of the pundits do. I don’t think this profound, painful reality about who we are is subject to any quick fixes, including the electoral “treatments” or issue “messaging” that are so in vogue these days or to happy talk about “reconciliation” and “healing” in the absence of truth or justice or repair. No shortcuts. As Perry Anderson put it, “A resistance that dispenses with consolations is always stronger than one that relies on them.”

I don’t plan on questioning any of my values or political commitments as a result of this election – quite the contrary: I’m doubling down. But I do plan to bring some humility and open-mindedness to the question of what paths we can pursue to best achieve them. I

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“It has been clear to many of us from the beginning that Trump is not an aberration who beamed to America from Mars. Rather, he is a mirror for the deep racism, misogyny and cruelty bred in the bone of American society and culture.”

hope that we all look at the evidence over the next few months not as a way of confirming our own pre-existing narratives and strategies but as an invitation to disrupt them and think freshly and imaginatively about the path forward.

But that reflection is probably not a task for the next few days and weeks. In the meantime, so close to a big, important, historic, monumental victory – let’s push it over the line, insist that we count every vote, and – yes – appreciate, honor and celebrate all the millions of people – especially those working class people of color in Detroit, Milwaukee, Phoenix, Philly, Vegas and elsewhere who once again saved the country from its worst impulses. Knocking on doors in Philly, having challenging conversations with understandably skeptical prospective voters, I had a moment where I felt viscerally connected in a web with millions of people who were doing some version of that same thing – pouring bodies and souls into the historically crucial project of confining a narcissist, racist, misogynist, would-be authoritarian to the dustbin of history. And, friends, we’ve almost done that. So let’s lift each other up, get some rest, care for each other, and do the next right thing.

*Originally Published in ORGANIZING UPGRADE
<https://organizingupgrade.com/hot-take-7-lift-each-other-up-do-the-next-right-thing/>*

JULY 1, 2020

AN INHERITANCE FOR OUR TIMES



PRINCIPLES AND POLITICS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM



EDITED BY

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CHAPTER 17

SOCIALISM CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY

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CHAPTER 20

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM, SOCIALIST FEMINISMS AND THE US WELFARE STATE

MIMI ABRAMOVITZ - PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL POLICY, SILBERMAN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL
WORK; CONSORTIAL FACULTY, CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES



Wealth Tax is Essential for Economic Recovery

“The wealth tax is the most important factor to economic recovery, over any other stimulus. Without it, we are in the dark about where the future holds.”

by Steve Brier | March 30, 2020

READ MORE AT <https://www.crainsnewyork.com/op-ed/wealth-tax-essential-economic-recovery-be-bold-albany>

From Defunding to Reinvestment: Why We Need to Scale Participatory Budgeting

“What we know is that system change is going to require inclusive, democratic processes that themselves are sustainable and repeatable and can spread rapidly. Fortunately, the last decade provides us with a few lessons that can frame responses.”



by Michael Menser | June 25, 2020

READ MORE AT <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/from-defunding-to-reinvestment-why-we-need-to-scale-participatory-budgeting/>



“Just-in-Place” Labor: Driver Organizing in the Uber Workplace

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with contributions from Kafui Attah

August 10, 2020 | READ MORE AT

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0308518X20949266>

The Perils of Privatization: Bringing the Business Model into Human Services

“Privatization means not only transforming public programs such as Social Security, but also managerialism—the incorporation of business principles, methods, and goals into public and nonprofit human services organizations”



with contributions from Mimi Abramovitz

August 14, 2020 | READ MORE AT

<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa024>



**EDUC
ATION**

**IN
THE
TIME
OF
COVID**



AUGUST 12, 2020

Teaching During the Pandemic

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2020

My last term teaching was very unusual, to say the least. Scheduled to retire from the City University of New York (CUNY) at the end of the Spring 2020 term, my normal rotation had me teaching a masters-level course in labor history at the School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU), a course I had taught many times before. It was just a matter of chance that this course came up as my last, but I liked the idea, because when I went to graduate school, nearly a half-century earlier, my aim had been to teach working-class students labor history. It would be completing the circle to end my career doing exactly that. Also, if my last class was at Queens College or the CUNY Graduate Center, where I had done most of my teaching, stopping would seem like a bigger deal, I thought, with more of a need to mark it as an occasion, which I did not want to do.

Just over half the twenty-one students in my labor history course were working-class, a typical SLU mix of public employees and private-sector union activists, mostly female, mostly non-white, mostly middle age. They included members of the Teamsters, AFSCME, UNITE HERE, and a couple of CWA locals. The other students were younger, mostly white, and about evenly male and female. They included one student from the CUNY Law School, one from the Hunter College Urban Policy Program, and a handful from the Union Semester program, which brings young social justice types to New York to intern at a union while taking courses at SLU.

For the first seven weeks, the course seemed routine. The sessions went pretty well and the work was not particularly onerous. Still, nothing happened that made me feel retiring was a mistake.

Everything changed when the Coronavirus epidemic began hitting

New York. By the second week in March, things were beginning to shut down. My reading group, set to meet Monday, March 9, cancelled. My family was supposed to do a group cooking class – a present to me from my daughters – two days later, but we cancelled because my older daughter was feeling sick with what, in retrospect, we suspected might have been COVID-19. I had taken my bicycle from the house we rent upstate to the city to be serviced and fretted that the store would close before I could retrieve it.

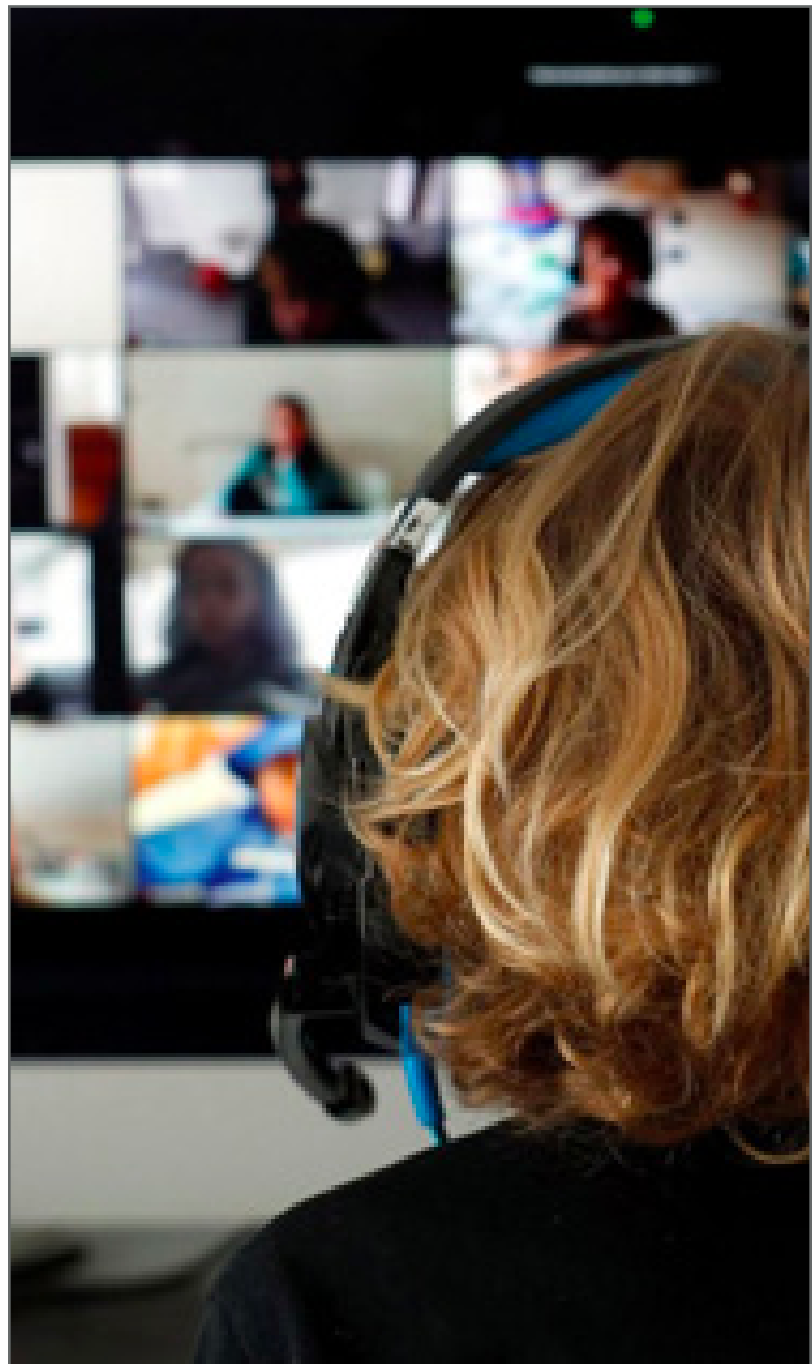
By the time my class met on Tuesday, March 10, it was clear to me that in-person classes would have to be ended soon. I told my class that evening that we might not be able to meet in person the next week and made sure I had everyone's correct e-mail address. Within a couple of days, CUNY announced it was moving to distance learning (what pretty-much everyone called online teaching). My wife was still going in to her office by subway, with my daughters and I increasingly anxious about it. That Friday she drove. After some agonizing about where to settle in for the epidemic – mostly about the fear that entrance and exit from the city would be shut down, along the Wuhan model, separating us from our children – we decided to go upstate. Friday night we had dinner at a favorite neighborhood restaurant, figuring that it probably would be the last time we ate out for a while. Rules had been announced that restaurants were supposed to distance diners and fill only to half capacity, but the place was pretty crowded. Saturday morning we packed up a lot of stuff and drove upstate. My wife had a meeting scheduled for the following Tuesday, which she felt she had to go to, so we thought we might come back soon for a couple of days. As it happened, we did not return to the city for two months, and then only briefly.

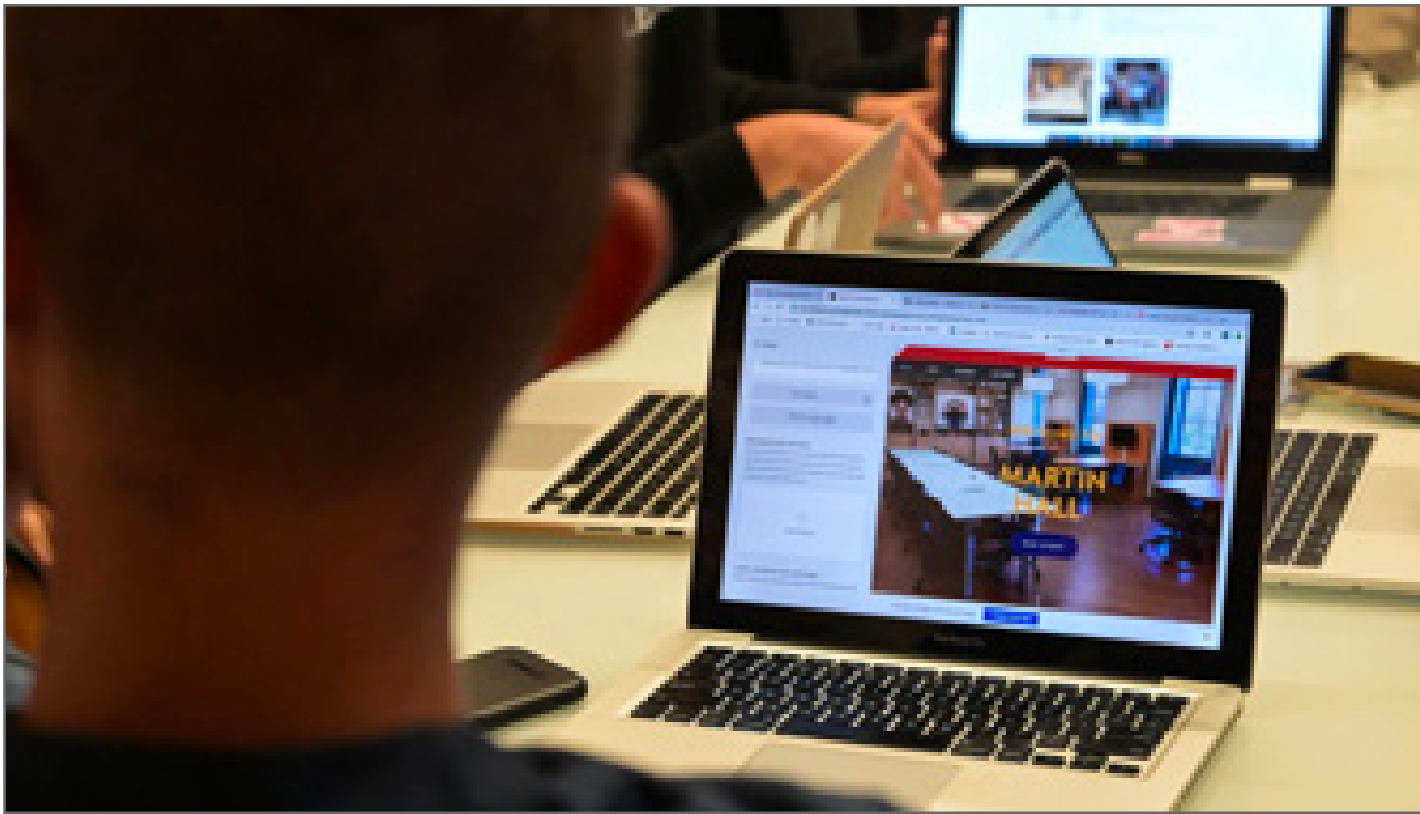
To facilitate the transfer of classes online, CUNY instituted a week-long teaching hiatus. Since I already was using Blackboard, an online teaching site, to have students post comments about the reading assignments, I had something of a leg up, but I never had used its video conferencing feature (I did not even know it had one), nor had I ever participated in any sort of video conference. I sat in on a couple of online training sessions, played around with the program, and picked up tips from colleagues online. When I felt confident that I could do a live online session, I sent out a long email to my students explaining how we were going to proceed, including detailed instructions for taking part in Blackboard video sessions. I decided that more than anything else I had to convey to the students that I understood that there were many things that they had to deal with that were much more pressing than the course and that I did not want school to be a source of anxiety.

In that first message and at every subsequent class I made it clear that they should do what they could with the readings and the assignments but not worry at all if they could not get course work done. I signaled that no matter what they did or did not do going forward, they would all do OK in terms of a grade.

For the first online class session, I set myself up in makeshift bedroom office, with water, coffee, and cough drops at hand, after practicing the process repeatedly, amid considerable anxiety. I had no idea what to expect – many students had not responded to my e-mail, as I had asked them to – but it proved pretty amazing. There were some technical difficulties, but just about everyone showed up. During the two weeks since we had last met, the Union Semester students had scattered to the wind. One had returned to Tanzania, two to Canada, one to her childhood bedroom in her parents' home in Oklahoma, another with his girlfriend to the South. Three of my students had lost their jobs. Moira, a stage hand active in her union (IATSE), determined to see more women in leadership, had

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“I had no idea what to expect -- many students had not responded to my e-mail, as I had asked them to -- but it proved pretty amazing. There were some technical difficulties, but just about everyone showed up.”





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“As we checked in with one another at that class, a sense of attentiveness and mutuality came through, even with the mediation of video conferencing.”

been laid off, as had been almost every other member of her local, with Broadway and the Javits Convention Center shut down. Mariana, a South American immigrant, lost her job at a midtown Manhattan hotel after twenty-three years in the industry.

The topic for the class was a discussion of William Attaway’s novel, *Blood on the Forge*, an explosive look at labor and race relations at a Pennsylvania steel mill during and after World War I. When I teach the book, I usually break the class into discussion groups, to try to get everyone involved. Meeting as a whole, online, we managed to discuss the book reasonably well, all things considered, though some students had trouble staying connected. Students had made a real effort to inhabit the situation of the characters in the only work of fiction we read in the course. Its tragic end, when racial violence overcomes any chance of class solidarity, seemed to confirm for many of them, especially but not only the African American students, a somewhat fatalistic belief in the fundamental role of racism in American life.

The next week I tried breaking into online discussion groups for part of the class session, though managing it on my end was so complicated I have no idea how it worked and never tried it again. With the initial rush of reconvening behind us, that class was something of a slog. As I quickly learned, a two-hour online class session is exhausting. I needed a stiff drink after every class.

The course then went on a two-week break that had been scheduled all along, one week when in inimitable CUNY-style the college followed a Wednesday schedule on a Tuesday

and one week for Spring break. My wife and I had planned to take advantage of this long quirk of an interlude with a trip to Sicily, which turned out to be an early COVID causality. Instead, I kept busy writing a couple of short articles, planning a COVID-related labor panel, and acclimating to our new, strange circumstances.

When our course reconvened after nearly three weeks, I began by having everyone say how they were doing. It was pretty dramatic. Some of the younger students kept it short, reporting they were fine, with only mundane inconveniences. One said that he shared his apartment with three roommates and none of them was working. A Union Semester student fretted about finding a job after his internship ended. The two hospital workers taking the course were in bad shape. Both were clerks in public hospitals, not normally involved with patients. Both had been redeployed. One was now escorting families for final visits with COVID patients about to die. The other, the head of a chapter of her union, was working on a ward and trying to pressure both management and higher-level union leaders to get proper PPE for her members. To avoid infecting her son, she had sent him to live with relatives. Both seemed traumatized.

The students who lived in COVID hotbeds in Queens and Brooklyn, with danger and death around them, also seemed highly stressed. Worst off was Mariana, the laid-off hotel worker. She called me a few days before the class (I had given everyone my upstate phone number; she was the only one to use it), saying she could not get the class work done because

she was so upset. She lived in a dense section of Queens, a national epicenter of infection, and was too terrified to leave her apartment. She said that she was scared she would die and her daughter back home would have to use up all her money to bring back her body. I tried to reassure her that the last thing she should be anxious about was course work, urging her to just show up.

As we checked in with one another at that class, a sense of attentiveness and mutuality came through, even with the mediation of video conferencing. The level of engagement remained high when we moved on to the regular part of class, which was devoted to the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). I had assigned several chapters of Robert Zieger's *The CIO, 1935-55*, which I think only a few students read. But many of them read the other assigned reading, an old left-wing pamphlet about the Flint sit-down, which they found a real eye-opener. For my generation of historians, activists, and leftists, the Flint sit-down is part of the landscape, something we all know about, somehow, but for my students it was completely new, a revelation. The students seemed particularly taken by the tactical ingenuity of the strike leaders and the discipline of the strikers. It seemed like something they could learn from and maybe even emulate. All in all, the class was one of the most memorable of my career.

Those last weeks of April were the most difficult period for the students, with a sense of fear, danger, loss, and uncertainty. Some students had family members or friends who died. The two Canadians dropped out of the class and the Union Semester program, keeping open the possibility of reenrolling when things got back to normal. Moira, the stage hand, was so moved by the descriptions by the hospital workers in the class of what they were going through that she got her union colleagues to contribute \$500 to buy personal items for out-of-town medical workers who had come to New York to help out. Later she joined a group of unionists sewing masks. At

least two students were having real mental health issues from all the stress.

I had been planning to show the class *At the River I Stand*, a documentary about the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike and the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the most powerful movies I know, and I was determined to find a way to make it happen. The film is not available for free on any easily accessible website and the DVD I have of it was in my office in a shuttered building. I might have been able to post a downloaded copy online, but the IT people at the university would have no part of it, because it would violate copyright agreements. After hours of working on it, we managed to come up with a work around by which the class was able to watch the movie as a group on Blackboard during our normal class time. Many students said it was a highlight of the course. When I show the film in person, there is usually a stunned silence at the end that makes conversation difficult. Online, for some reason, we were able to have a rich discussion afterward.

Another highlight was a discussion of *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, a history of the healthcare workers union 1199SEIU, written by Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg. Many of my students, both the young social activists and the older ones, knew the union, a big presence in New York labor. Usually lauded by historians and leftists, my students took a more critical view. One announced that years earlier she had been a home health aide, represented by 1199, and it was the worst union she had ever belonged to, completely ignoring the needs of her group. Others criticized the white leftists who had founded and long led the union for the alliances with hospital management they had constructed over the years and their bungling of the transition to a new, non-white leadership. I found myself surprised by how little my students felt the need for deference to such an iconic labor group (though they all acknowledged its achievements) and proud of their independent thinking.

The last weeks of the course were hard to get through, as things settled into a routine. The level of reading and assignment submission varied from student to student and class to class, but overall was considerably below the usual norm, which made discussions, already difficult because we were trying to mimic the classroom experience via video, even harder. Increasingly weary, I was eager to be done with it and to be done with teaching, period. But I continued to find the contact with students enriching. And the students kept showing up, usually every single student or all but one or two, including the union activist now back in Tanzania, where it was 2 a.m. when the class began.

The final class, on "The Future of the Labor Movement," had some lively discussion of the topic. Students had insightful comments on the reading and thoughts from their own work and activism. But more memorable were the comments people made about the experience of the previous months, of the course and their lives amid COVID. We had bonded, and a real sense of affection had developed among us over the two months since we had last seen each other in person. Saying goodbye felt very poignant. I knew I would miss the students, and I have. At the end of that week, my SLU colleagues held a joint Zoom retirement party for me and tenure celebration for a colleague, a very nice gesture. Over the next week the students' final papers trickled in. (I had changed the assignment from one that would have required access to a library to a short essay reflecting back on what we had read and discussed over the course of the semester.) On May 27 I handed in my grades. A very odd way to end a teaching career, but one I will cherish.

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RACIALIZED AUSTERITY: THE CASE OF CUNY

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In the aftermath of the covid outbreak and in a moment of Black Lives Matter national organizing in response to police brutality the issue of racial justice has lit up cities and towns across the country. Racist policing practices have had a huge impact on public opinion, with polling data showing that even more white suburban voters favor policy reforms. The shift has been public, sudden, and potentially electorally-decisive during this political season.

What remains less visible are racialized and racist choices to deepen state disinvestment in institutions critical to the health and welfare of Black and brown communities, what we term racialized austerity.

Austerity policy-making over the past 50 years has been racialized, withering services in public agencies ranging from K-12 schooling to hospitals to higher education. Matters of race must be made more visible and placed at the very center of both past and present austerity decisions and policy-making.

Disinvestment in and privatization of public services incorrectly assumes three things: 1) the state can no longer afford earlier levels of public investment in public services; 2) increased progressive taxation is not a solution to austerity because the wealthy can and will migrate themselves and their money elsewhere; and 3) the reduced quality of services matters little because basic access to public services rather than the content and quality of those services is the most

important factor in assessing the worth of public goods in a democracy.

Reliance on public services by Black and brown communities grew at exactly the moment austerity policies produced one wave after another of public disinvestment. The conjunction, for example, between shifts in the composition of the student body at CUNY from largely white to Black and brown, which began in the 1970s, and deepening public disinvestment in CUNY cannot simply be explained solely as a specific byproduct of fiscal austerity. The roots of racialized austerity policy-making also grew out of choices about the degree to which specific groups are deserving of public investment.

Over the past 50 years there have been periods of economic expansion in the United States that have produced sharply-growing wealth and income inequality. Despite growth in wealth and income in the top tier of earners, redistributive tax policies have been deemed all but off the table. These political decisions have not been driven alone by austerity policy making to cut public budgets but also by the concerted political opposition of dominant economic interests to any kind of new taxation. Politicians of both major parties have made and continue to make real choices, deferring to the needs and desires of powerful economic interest groups, rather than embrace policies for the common good.

The issue of race, although not the only factor driving austerity, is central to these fiscal decisions. What has been

created over the past half-century is the latest iteration of “separate but (un)equal” policy-making. Basic access to public services is consistently privileged over higher public investment to assure the quality of those public services. The policies of “separate but (un)equal” as seen through the prism of the defunding of the City University of New York reveals a regime of racialized austerity.

CUNY: RACE AND AUSTERITY

Despite the city’s commitment in 1847 to provide free tuition for all New York City residents, a commitment it maintained for nearly 130 years, the student body in the municipal colleges remained overwhelmingly white and increasingly middle class until the 1970s. Even in the decade after CUNY was formally created in 1961, the city’s policy of providing free tuition proscribed its ability to respond to the vocal demands of the city’s growing Black and Puerto Rican population for increased access to CUNY’s senior and community colleges.

The Brooklyn College student body in the tumultuous year of 1968 was still 96 percent white and middle class. CUNY as a whole remained overwhelmingly white and middle class until the spring of 1969, when student-led struggles for “Open Admissions” erupted across the system. Over the next half-dozen years CUNY became the model of how a major public university system could rapidly diversify its student population.

By 1971, CUNY’s Black and Puerto Rican overall student population had already more than doubled to 24 percent. Half-a-dozen years after open admissions, however, the state forced the city, in the midst of a fiscal “crisis,” to impose tuition for the first time on CUNY students in exchange for enhanced state support of the system. While the student population of CUNY continued to be radically recomposed racially over the next three decades, students of color, unlike the largely white student body that had preceded them, had to pay tuition for the privilege of attending the city’s public colleges.

On the basis of data collected by CUNY about 70 percent of CUNY’s student body is students of color and almost 60 percent of all CUNY students’ family annual incomes are below \$30,000. Current tuition at CUNY’s senior colleges is almost \$7,000 annually while at its community colleges it is nearly \$5,000, exclusive of student fees.

The changes in the composition of CUNY’s student body and rising tuition have been accompanied for decades by the steady erosion of public funding support from New York state government (which has provided the lion’s share of CUNY funding since 1976) and New York City government (which supports the

system’s seven community colleges). Between 2008 and 2020 there has been a 21 percent reduction in the full-time student equivalent (FTE) investment by the state adjusted for inflation in CUNY senior colleges, according to the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) of the City University of New York (the faculty and staff union of CUNY).

The state’s level of disinvestment in CUNY has resulted in larger class sizes, a growing number of courses taught by underpaid and overworked part-time faculty, the decay of much of the physical plant, labs that cannot meet even the most basic needs of science students, and ever greater reliance on too-large online classes. As a point of comparison, California’s three-tier public university system, which is similarly racially stratified from top tier (the UC system) to the bottom tier (the state’s community colleges) as CUNY’s senior and community colleges are, has experienced a striking differential level of public investment based on race.

In our book, *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education*, we showed that California’s community colleges, which have the highest concentration of Black and brown students (nearly 45 percent), state aid per FTE student in 2011-12 was less than \$4,000 while in the UC schools (where only 21 percent of students are Black and brown) FTE student aid is more than \$7,200. This associative relationship between race and disinvestment is highly suggestive and compelling in both New York’s and California’s public university systems. Yet race has essentially been ignored by policy makers in California and New York as even a partial explanation for declining investment in public higher education.

Unsurprisingly, economic explanations, absent race, have dominated the discourse about CUNY.

What has remained consistently positive in the public discussion and perception about CUNY is its role in raising its students out of poverty and into the middle class. According to Raj Chetty’s 2017 national study of higher education CUNY moved more students out of poverty than every Ivy League school, MIT, and the California Institute of Technology combined. The ability of CUNY to fulfill this part of its historic mission is in jeopardy, however, as deepening state and city budget cuts undermine the quality of instruction and support services like counseling and advising.

COVID and CUNY: The Intensified Fallout of Budget Cuts on Black and Brown Students

In the midst of the intensifying economic and health crisis triggered by COVID-19, CUNY management announced it was laying off 2,800 part-time faculty members. The budget cut was not a consequence of revenue loss but rather the anticipation of that loss.

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“What has remained consistently positive in the public discussion and perception about CUNY is its role in raising its students out of poverty and into the middle class.”

Institutional Stimulus 3 (the federal CARES Act) money totaling \$132 million publicly allocated to CUNY has been reserved, according to CUNY management, as a revenue buffer despite its stated purpose to sustain employment for university faculty and staff. As estimated by the CUNY Professional Staff Congress the cost of retaining the 2,800 faculty members is estimated to be \$30 million annually, or a fraction of the \$132 million in CARES Act funds allocated to the university system. Equally important for CUNY’s future, additional money may be dedicated to CUNY as part Stimulus 4, currently before Congress.

The implication of this decision is significant, both economically for the CUNY part-time faculty who have been “non reappointed” and lost their health insurance in the middle of a pandemic, and educationally for the largely Black and brown student body of CUNY. Laying off 2,800 part-time faculty represents a loss of about 25 percent of the adjunct faculty workforce at CUNY, which already comprises nearly 60 percent of the overall teaching workforce in its senior colleges.

CUNY courses will almost certainly be fully online during the upcoming fall semester and perhaps even through the spring semester in 2021. The cuts ensure that the size of online classes will grow substantially. During the Spring 2020 semester, a survey of campuses by faculty chairs of the PSC estimated that many of CUNY’s online classes will average about 29 students. The standard for online course sizes nationally is 12 students per class because of the greater pedagogical and other teaching and learning demands of virtual classrooms as compared to in-classroom learning, in-classroom learning. The course enrollment ceilings for online classes at CUNY are likely to rise as high as 35 students per class or almost three times the national suggested ceiling.

For every CUNY student this is part of a continuing, historic degradation of

their learning environment at CUNY. The opportunities to build working relationships with faculty, empirically validated as a key indicator of students' academic development, will become even less available. Equally important, larger online classes are less able to meet students' basic needs to develop competency in areas ranging from basic writing to scientific exploration and experimentation.

To enact policies that dramatically reduce CUNY's instructional workforce is at best short-sighted and at worst underscores a lack of will by CUNY management and state and city leaders to protect instructors' jobs and students' quality of education. Other courses of action including, but not limited to, reallocating institutional dollars to protect the instructional workforce, utilizing Stimulus 3 money to close the budget gap, or short-term borrowing against Stimulus 4 monies as a hedge against workforce disruption might have been taken while awaiting both state and federal budget decisions.

Shortly after New York City became the epicenter of COVID-19 infection and while Governor Cuomo was delivering politically-popular daily national briefings on the spread of the infection, the governor simultaneously announced there would be deep budget cuts (as high as 20 percent) to state-supported public services in the absence of federal aid. The game of "Who blinks first?" between Cuomo and the Feds continues.

For three months New York State public agencies have been faced with both huge prospective cuts and the governor's decision to delay state distribution of public revenues to localities. At the same time, many groups have pressed state leaders to tax the very wealthy to close the state budget gap of \$15 billion. Cuomo has repeatedly indicated his opposition to imposing additional taxes on the very wealthy despite mounting pressure from a cross-section of unions, non-profit agencies, and more than 100 state legislators, among others.

This is only the most recent example of state and institutional policy-makers choosing to compromise the quality of Black and brown students' higher education rather than commit

additional public funds. It is important to reiterate that these decisions have occurred historically in both good and bad economic times. They occur despite CUNY's stellar record of moving students out of poverty and into the middle class. They occur as the proportion of Black and brown students in CUNY's student body has grown to nearly 70 percent. Policy-makers laud the greater access of students of color to CUNY at the same moment that they choose to unravel the basic fiscal underpinnings of what is needed to provide the kind of quality education students need and deserve. These contradictions are profound and race is a critical, if not the critical, factor in these decisions.

It is time to name these policies and choices and their relationship to race. The disinvestment in CUNY is influenced by many factors. But we should not allow complexity to cloud the fundamental relationship of the past 50 years between race and public disinvestment. These trends are not specific to CUNY. Across the country, spikes in Black and brown college attendance have been accompanied by similar levels of public disinvestment. To call these policies anything other than racialized austerity is at best a misnomer and at worst a calculated evasion of the forces driving such public policy and fiscal choices.

A NEW DEAL FOR CUNY

What might an alternative approach to racialized austerity at CUNY look like? A New Deal for CUNY, with significant new investment of state and city tax funds over a five-year period, would help to bring CUNY back from two decades of systematic erosion of public funding. This New Deal for CUNY would be justified as part of New York City's, New York State's, and the nation's long overdue response to the fundamental need of all students attending public universities for a quality, fully-funded public good.

A New Deal for CUNY would have an immediate and positive impact on all of our 275,000 students, especially the 70 percent who are students of color, and 60 percent who have annual family incomes below \$30,000. Despite

the state's Tuition Assistance Program, many CUNY students presently pay full or partial tuition. Expanded investments in CUNY would also require:

- Increasing the ratio of full-time faculty to students; dedicating a substantial number of new full-time positions and making them available to adjunct faculty; and incentivizing the hiring of a new generation of faculty of color across the system; creating new labor standards for part-time faculty that ensure a livable wage.
- Expanding the number of academic advisors and mental health counselors to support all CUNY students.
- Eliminating all student tuition and fees, returning CUNY to its tuition-free roots.
- Providing a significant increase in capital renewal and investment across the 25-campus system to allow CUNY to modernize its facilities and make them fully safe and accessible.

Spread over five years we believe a New Deal for CUNY will help to overcome decades of racialized austerity, fundamentally returning CUNY to its 1847 founding ideal of creating a public institution of higher learning that is by and for "the children of the whole people."

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AUGUST 31, 2020

CREATING AND ASSESSING LEARNING IN A DIGITAL CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

GLADYS SCHRYNEMAKERS - ASSOCIATE DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

Before COVID-19, faculty teaching traditional, face-to-face courses were already grappling with how to connect with students who prefer to communicate and retrieve information through mobile phones and social media. These challenges were magnified when the pandemic compelled colleges and universities to shift their educational delivery to online learning. Now, as many institutions continue remote learning this fall, two questions are particularly urgent: How can we digitally create an engaging community for students, and how can we effectively assess their learning?

Low-income students already beset by socioeconomic challenges and minoritized students affected by longstanding societal pressures will struggle more than most of their peers to persist, complete courses, and earn degrees via distance learning. Many of these students may face additional barriers to success including a lack of technology, lost income or increased work and family responsibilities, or unequal access to healthcare. For urban institutions like mine (CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies), ensuring the success of these students is both an ethical imperative and integral to accomplishing our mission. Creating a campus climate that addresses today's unique situation will require creative faculty who are open, approachable, and resourceful as they plan how their content can be delivered to diverse student populations.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a well-respected instrument used by more than 1,600 colleges and universities, identifies five themes of student engagement that can be helpful as faculty plan their digital learning curricula:

- Academic Challenge: students emphasize analysis and application instead of definitions and memorization.
- Active and Collaborative Learning: students are engaged through class discussions, group presentations, and experiential learning.
- Student-Faculty Interactions: students learn to think about and solve problems by interacting with faculty.
- Enriching Educational Experiences: students have a variety of opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge.
- Supportive Campus Environment: students are supported by structures that address academic and social issues.

While these themes are essential targets for any institution that wishes to give students a worthwhile education, they are even more important for institutions that serve large numbers of students of color, low-income students, or other students who must surmount barriers to their education even during normal times.

By following NSSE's themes, institutions can engage students through digital learning communities that help students collaborate as they read and write about complex texts, find and analyze digital resources, and reflect on their learning with peers. Peter Honebein's seven conditions for constructing knowledge are one possible framework to use when developing effective pedagogical strategies within such an environment. Below, I explore how these seven conditions could be aligned with a sample set of assignments based on Plato's allegory of the cave, a philosophical thought experiment that examines how prisoners chained in a cave struggle to move beyond their imagined reality (represented by shadows moving on a wall) to see the truth of the world outside the cave.

CONDITION 1: PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH AN EXPERIENCE OF CONSTRUCTING THEIR OWN KNOWLEDGE. Instead of simply reading an assignment for class discussion, students can work together to analyze the text, form an understanding of its narrative and themes, and make connections to other texts and real-world events.

CONDITION 2. PROVIDE ENGAGEMENT WITH MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES. In addition to reading Plato's original version of the allegory and scholarly interpretations of it, students can watch a YouTube video with a strong visual representation of the allegory. They can follow this up by watching a clip from *The Matrix* in which the main character must make a conscious choice between becoming aware of reality or deciding not to know.

CONDITION 3. EMBED LEARNING IN REALISTIC AND RELEVANT CONTEXTS. The faculty member can develop a reflective writing prompt using the basic theme of the allegory: the difference between illusion and reality. Students could be asked to reflect about how the allegory of the cave can help them interpret their experience with COVID-19 and racial justice protests. How, for example, could the world before COVID-19 be considered a shadow world, where protection from economic, social, racial, and health disparities was merely illusory?

CONDITIONS 4 AND 5: ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP AND VOICE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS AND EMBED LEARNING IN SOCIAL EXPERIENCES. This assignment provides a social, collaborative opportunity for students

to integrate their own experiences, real-world events, and literary representations with the classical framework of Plato's cave allegory. Students find meaning in their day-to-day existence and gain practice in transforming abstract ideas into practical insights.

CONDITION 6. ENCOURAGE THE USE OF MULTIPLE MODES OF REPRESENTATION. Students respond to the prompts through a digital narrative or sequence of blog posts, embedding video clips or news articles to support their arguments. To gain more practice in considering multiple perspectives (condition 2), students must respond to two of their classmates' posts using multimodal evidence to agree or disagree with the perspectives.

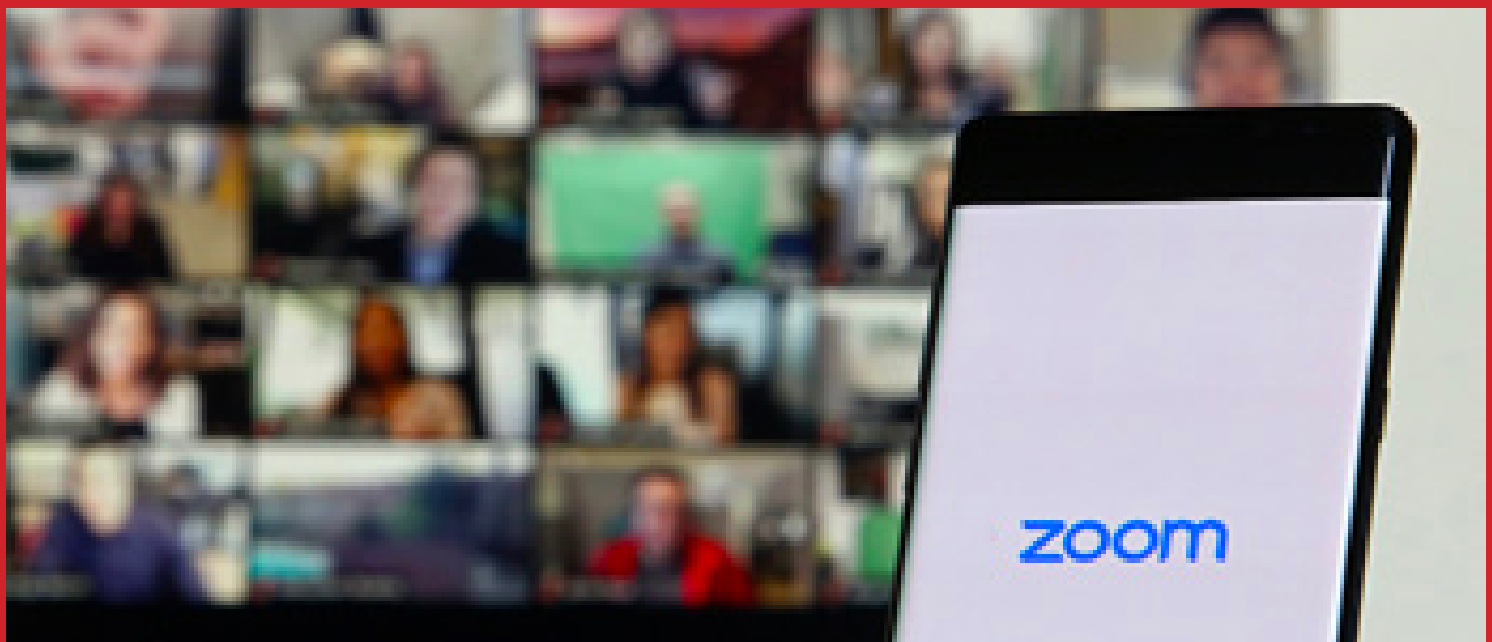
CONDITION 7. ENCOURAGE SELF-AWARENESS IN KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION. The final assignment in the project asks students to reflect on their work and on how they reached their conclusions and connected the allegory of the cave to COVID-19 and other real-world issues.

Faculty can use AAC&U's Integrative Learning Value Rubric to assess the work that students produce in their digital learning community. VALUE rubrics can be tailored by faculty members to measure how students make connections between theories and real-life situations and between "relevant experience and academic knowledge." Faculty using the rubrics can gather valuable data on students' assignments and their responses to classmates' work in order to see whether students are making connections, synthesizing ideas, and, most importantly, using theoretical

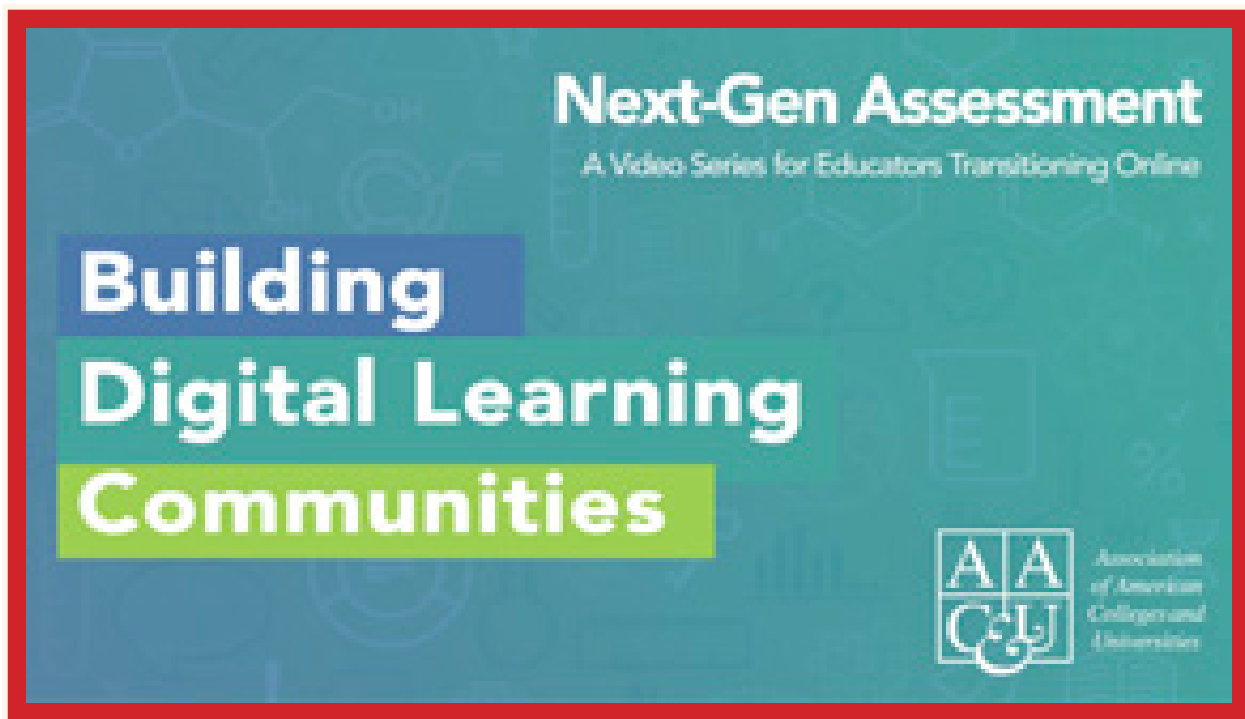
concepts to understand experiences outside the classroom.

Unlike the reality constructed by the prisoners inside Plato's cave, the benefits of this learning community project are not hypothetical. As part of a Predominantly Black Institution Grant from the US Department of Education to improve the retention and graduation rates of minority students enrolled in STEM majors at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus, we piloted a digital learning community similar to the one described above. The project, which asked students to apply the allegory of the cave to the Copernican Revolution, drew on NSSE's five themes and Honebein's approach to constructing knowledge. Faculty created an engaging digital community that connected students with their peers and professors through a digital dialogue about theoretical concepts and real-world events. What is more, this approach prepared instructors to assess their students' ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate information. Of the students who participated in the two-year project, 98 percent were retained in their STEM majors and continued to graduation.

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[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=OTS2DEAQISA&FEATURE=EMB_LOGO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTS2DEAQISA&feature=emb_logo)

NEXT-GEN ASSESSMENT: BUILDING DIGITAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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**Hosted by Tammie Cummings, CUNY Brooklyn College
and M. David Miller, University of Florida**
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**Guest: Gladys Palma de Schrynemakers,
CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies**

COVID AND THE CITY

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Thank you to Ruth Milkman,
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