

Joan Greenbaum, Editor
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psc-cuny.org/retirees

**CHAPTER MEETING: MONDAY,
MARCH 6, 1-3 PM
WOMEN'S WORDS—SOLIDARITY
IN STRUGGLE**

On March 6, the beginning of Women's History month, we will experience a special event at the PSC chapter meeting. Award-winning CUNY authors will join us to read selections from their work and to engage us in discussions about the daily struggles of teaching and learning and the broader struggles of confronting the actions of this steam-rolling administration. The five authors who will be joining us took part in CUNY Writers Against Austerity, the extraordinary PSC literary event at Cooper Union last spring. Barbara Bowen will introduce the afternoon. Come hear poems, stories, tales, short essays and opinions, as we join in this storytelling session. Here are

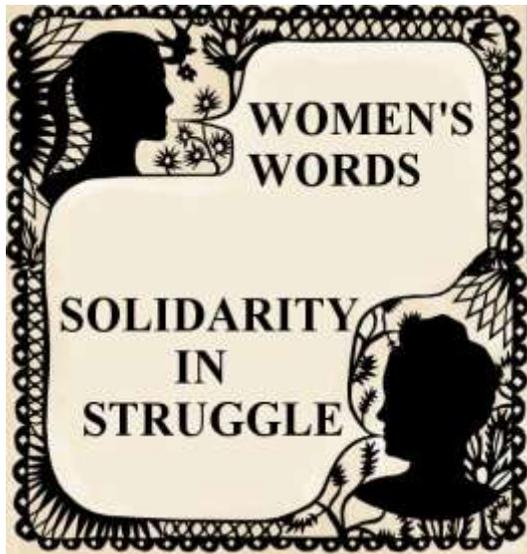
snippets about the authors to whet your appetite:

Meena Alexander: Meena Alexander, described in *The Statesman* (India) as "undoubtedly one of the finest poets in contemporary times," was born in India, raised there and in Sudan and educated in England. She is an award-winning poet and scholar, and a distinguished professor of English at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY. In January, she told an NBC reporter: "Remember and do not forget the power and creativity of shared expression, the ability to repair and remake the fabric of this fragile world we share." She has two new books forthcoming in 2018: her eighth book of poetry *Atmospheric Embroidery* (TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern U. Press) and the anthology she edited: *Name me a Word: Indian Writers Reflect on Writing* (Yale U. Press). Her poems have been translated into several languages and set to music, most recently by the Swedish composer Jonas Sandstrom. Sandstrom's arrangement was performed by the Swedish Radio Choir and the Serikon Music Group.
www.meenalexander.com

Page Dougherty Delano's poetry has been published widely in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *American Voice*, *Gettysburg Review*, and *Agni*. Her collection *No One with a Past Is Safe* was published by Word Press. Her honors include a NYFA grant for poetry, and residencies at Blue Mountain Center

and Yaddo. She is the recipient of a CUNY Chancellor's Fellowship to support her work on American women in Europe during WWII. A part of this project on Kay Boyle and Mary Reynolds appeared in *Revue électronique d'études sur le monde Anglophone*

<http://ereva.revues.org/3132>. She is also working on a (collaborative) memoir, *Red Heads*, about her years as a radical organizer/ coal miner's wife in the coalfields of West Virginia.



Kimiko Hahn is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts, as well as a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, the Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Prize, and an Association of Asian American Studies Literature Award. She is a distinguished professor in the English department at Queens College and lives in New York. Kimiko is the author of nine collections of poetry, including *Brain Fever* (W. W. Norton, 2014); *Toxic*

Flora (W. W. Norton, 2010); *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (W.W. Norton, 2006); *The Artist's Daughter* (2002); *Mosquito and Ant* (1999); *Volatile* (1998); and *The Unbearable Heart* (1995), which received an American Book Award.

Joanna Sit has taught at Medgar Evers College since 1991—as an adjunct through 2006 and since 2007 as a full-time associate professor for creative writing in the English department. In teaching creative writing, Joanna has called upon her wide-ranging teaching experience, her skills as a poet and freelance writer, and capacity as a mentor to help students develop their writing and critical thinking skills, thus preparing each of them to meet the challenges in their academic careers and beyond. Joanna is the author of *My Last Century*, *In Thailand with the Apostles*, and the upcoming poetry collection *Track Works*. Her poems and translations have appeared in *Connecticut River Review*, *Ezra Literary Review*, *Five Willows Literary Review*, and other journals. Joanna Sit was born in China, lived in Hong Kong, and immigrated to New York by way of Canada as a refugee.

Poet and filmmaker **Michelle Yasmine Valladares** is the director of the MFA program in creative writing at City College. Her first book is *Nortada, The North Wind*. Her poems have been widely published and she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She won Distinguished Documentary Achievement from the Independent Documentary Association for "*El*

Diablo Nunca Duerme,” co-produced with Lourdes Portillo and Best Latin American Film at Sundance Festival for “*O Sertão das Memórias,*” co-produced with José Araújo.

As always, our chapter meetings are accompanied by coffee, tea, fruit, cheese and cookies. All PSC Retiree Chapter meetings are held in the Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. The building is just south of Wall Street.

**FEBRUARY CHAPTER MEETING:
SOCIAL SECURITY WORKS!**

Steve Leberstein, Retiree, CCNY

Eric Kingson, co-founder of Social Security Works and a recent candidate for Congress, sounded the alarm for the coming attack on Social Security and other safety-net programs at the chapter’s February meeting, attended by 75 members ready to voice their concerns. To signal the victims of proposed changes to Social Security, Kingson displayed a photo of his recent congressional campaign t-shirt, which featured a photo of his grandson, Sammy. The t-shirt has a photo of Sammy, then 3 years old, with the line “Hands Off My Grandpa’s Social Security!” The other side of the shirt shouts “Hands Off Sammy’s Social Security!” Proposed Republican plans would affect only future retirees younger than 55 years old.

Kingson framed his talk by saying that Social Security and other elements of the Social Safety Net like Medicare and Medicaid should

be understood as the nation’s respect for human decency.

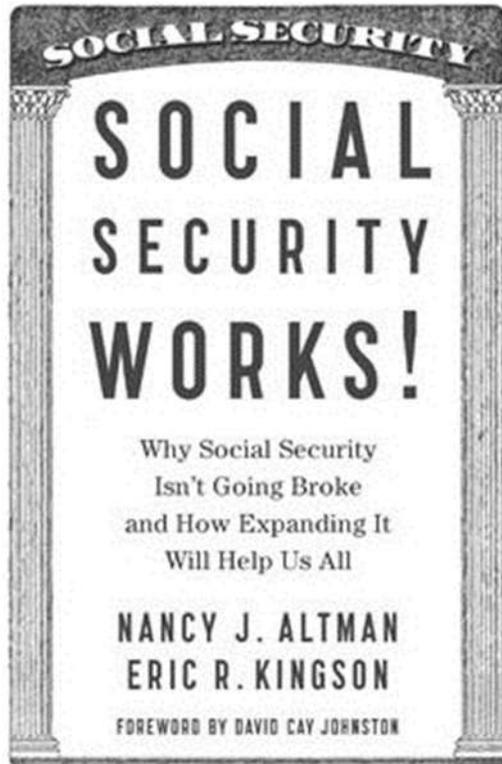
Together, these programs provide a measure of income security not just for retirees but also for survivors of a deceased income provider, people who have disabilities and people who are experiencing poverty. For a substantial proportion of retirees, Social Security benefits now provide most of their income. The average monthly benefit for U.S. retired workers, their survivors and people with disabilities was just \$1,291 in December 2016.



However meager these benefits are, Kingson pointed out, workers earn them by paying a tax matched by their employer on their income up to \$127,200, a threshold just raised for 2017. A fair way to guarantee Social Security and provide for its expansion is to raise or eliminate that threshold, he said, noting that Social Security benefits are paid out of the Social Security Trust Fund, *not* the federal budget.

Kingson reminded us that the top 1% of the population own 45% of all wealth in the country. The next 9% own the next 40% as well. In other words, the top 10% own 85% of all wealth. A system that creates such

crushing inequality is one that undermines democracy. While Kingson primarily placed blame on Republicans, he wondered if “the Democratic party has now lost its soul,” given its willingness to make compromises on safety-net issues as part of a “grand bargain” earlier this decade.



With Donald Trump in the White House and surrounded by proto fascists like Stephen Bannon, foxes have now been put in charge of every federal hen house, putting our democratic rights and institutions in greater peril. Some might hope the President does try to destroy Medicare, because the attempt would spark a popular uprising that would stop him. Kingson reminded us that *no* one was elected this past November on pledges to destroy

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Kingson called on us to form multi-generational alliances to defend these vital programs through mobilization with congressional representative meetings, town hall demonstrations and all other imaginable means. He suggested a Red State Strategy for the 2018 election, targeting three Republican Senators. Most importantly, he noted that today he was speaking to others of his generation. Now is the time to think about what we leave for our children and grandchildren. It is the time to stand up and speak out!

Following Kingson’s talk and discussion, the meeting continued with retirees eager to join the campaign to defend the Social Safety Net. The chapter’s Social Safety Net Working Group presented a plan for a political campaign. Its aim will be to press our congressional representatives to oppose the looming plans to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid and scale back Social Security. The group was divided by congressional districts, each of which chose a coordinator responsible for arranging a meeting with their representative. Each coordinator got a list of all retiree members in their district with contact information. In addition to district meetings, chapter members will be phoning their representatives. The battle to defend these important programs for our children and grandchildren, and for our active members, has been joined.

TELL CONGRESS: DEFEND AND EXPAND THE SAFETY NET!

PSC retirees are mobilizing to defend retirement and safety-net benefits across generations. (See the report on the February chapter meeting.)

Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and other safety-net programs are in the crosshairs of the 115th Congress. Given the louder and louder drumbeat of cutbacks and privatization, we need PSC members—in-service as well as retiree—to **become 15-minute activists** by making phone calls to their representatives in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

In addition, the Retiree Chapter and the Social Safety Net Working Group are organizing face-to-face meetings at district offices with congresspersons in the NYC metropolitan area. If you wish to join one of these visits, email us at safetynet@pscmail.org. Provide the name of your congressperson. We will get back to you to figure out the best time to schedule a group visit to his/her district office.

PHONE CALLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

We are scheduling a phone call once every two weeks, each on one of four issues: Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the ACA.

The first phone call on MEDICARE extends through the month of February. From February 20 to March 6, the issue will be **SOCIAL SECURITY**. We will call Congress about another safety-net issue after March 6.



GO TO psc-cuny.org/SafetyNetCampaign.

There you will find suggested **PHONE SCRIPTS** as well as links to talking points, resources and a site to identify who represents you in Congress.

To call your member of Congress, dial the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at [\(202\) 224-3121](tel:(202)224-3121). An operator will connect you directly to your congressperson's office.

When we call, we are asking each congressional office to make a commitment NOT to cut or privatize. We need feedback on these commitments. After you complete your call, take a minute or two to fill out the webform at: psc-cuny.org/SafetyNetCampaign.

We hope that you share our sense of urgency. Become a 15-minute activist to preserve the Social Safety Net across generations for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

--Bill Friedheim

SINGLE PAYER FOR ALL: WHY THE PSC SUPPORTS THE PROPOSED NEW YORK STATE HEALTH CARE ACT

Jim Perlstein, Retiree, Borough of Manhattan Community College

The “New York Health Act” is sponsored in the Assembly by Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried (A.5062) and in the Senate by Bill Perkins (S.3525). It would provide comprehensive, **universal** health coverage for every New Yorker and would replace private insurance company coverage. You and your health care providers work to keep you healthy. New York Health pays the bill. Here are some of the solid provisions:



1. Freedom to choose your health care providers. There would be no network restrictions. Only patients and their doctors—not insurance companies—would make health care decisions.

2. Comprehensive coverage. All New Yorkers, regardless of

immigration status, would be covered for all medically necessary services, including: primary, preventive, specialists, hospital, mental health, reproductive health care, dental, vision, prescription drug, and medical supply costs. The coverage would be more comprehensive than commercial health plans.

3. Paid for fairly. Today, insurance companies set the same high premiums, deductibles, and co-pays, whether it's for a CEO or a receptionist, and a big successful company actually pays less than a small new business.

Under the New York Health Act, individuals and employers would not pay premiums, deductibles and co-pays.

Instead, coverage would be funded through a graduated assessment on payroll and non-payroll taxable income, based on ability to pay. For 98% of New Yorkers, it will be a substantial reduction in what they now spend. There would be savings for New Yorkers with incomes up to \$400,000, with the biggest share of savings going to middle-class families.

4. Less administrative waste, better care, more accountability. The total cost would be \$45 billion less than what we now spend, because we wouldn't be paying for huge insurance company administrative costs and profits or for the costly time and paperwork health care providers spend dealing with insurance companies. Health

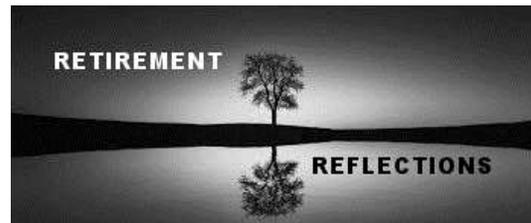
coverage would be accountable to the people of New York, not to insurance company stockholders.

5. **Job-friendly.** Health care costs are a significant and unpredictable problem for business. These costs as a share of payroll have increased 50% in a decade, with small group rates increasing almost 7% on average in 2014, and New York businesses spend over \$2 billion annually just to administer health benefits. The New York Health Act simplifies and reduces costs for employers large and small by taking them out of the business of buying health coverage. That would make New York dramatically more job-friendly, especially for small businesses, start-ups, low-margin businesses, local governments and taxpayers, and non-profits.

6. **The most affordable way.** Any plan that keeps insurance companies in the picture means wasting close to \$50 billion a year. The cost of eliminating financial barriers to health care and providing universal coverage would be more than offset by savings on administration and through negotiated pricing for pharmaceuticals and other services.

FIVE MINUTE ACTIVIST: The New York Health Act (Gottfried, A.5062/Perkins, S.3525) has passed the NYS Assembly and is, at the time of this writing, tied up in the Senate Health Committee. Here are the names of Democratic members of this Committee. **Please call your State Senator and ask him/her to bring this critical bill to the floor of**

the Senate: David Valesky (13th District, Oneida); Gustavo Rivera (33rd District, Bronx); Simcha Felder (17th District, Brooklyn) Brad Hoylman (27th District, Manhattan); Todd Kaminsky (9th District, Long Island); Velmanette Montgomery (25th District, Brooklyn); Roxanne Persaud (19th District, Brooklyn); Toby Stavinsky (16th District, Queens).



*Joan Greenbaum, Retiree,
LaGuardia CC & Graduate Center*

This past November, as the dark days of winter drew near, the election results piled on for a period of deep reflection. Now the energy of demonstrations and organized opposition brings spring-fed thoughts of looking forward. This poem, however, written in November after the election, looks back at an activist past, and may strike a chord with some other retirees.

We are the parents

We are the parents who held the children
to watch the flickering black
and white images
of the moon landing.

We are the parents who marched
with strollers
and placards for peace,

for civil rights, and for ending war.

We are the parents who laughed at levitating
the pentagon and put flowers in national guard riffles;
soldiers younger than ourselves.

We were the parents who believed deep
in our beings that we could leave
the world a better place.

But this year alone,
after wars erupt and continue like rolling thunder,
and racism tattoos into never-ending patterns,
and a non-reality character won an election,

and the earth's ozone is layered on our children.
And their children's children.

Should we say we tried?

How do we say we are sorry?

REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN'S MARCH

Marching in my Pussyhat

*Barbara Winslow,
Retiree, Brooklyn College*

Like probably many of our readers, I woke up November 9, 2016 feeling as if I had been punched in the gut. I was shaken to my core—horrified, embarrassed and profoundly

depressed. I vowed not to watch the news; found myself watching more escapist movies, listening to more live music and visiting art museums and galleries. Anything to escape the inescapable Trump. I can't remember how many days after the election disaster I read on my Facebook page about a possible angry woman's march on Washington. That (along with my wonderful grandson) was the only news that brought a smile on my face. IMMEDIATELY! With a close friend, sister retiree and historian, we booked a train to Washington. Finally! Something encouraging.



There were hundreds of pink-hatted women on the train the Friday night before the March. The conductors announced that their union would be marching with us. Cheers erupted throughout the cars. At one point, one of the conductors announced that the bar car was open. Beer for the men; then wine for the women. We women shouted, "we want beer!" And in the bar car, we got free drinks.

We got to the subway very early Saturday morning, and so elated to see crowds of pink-hatted women and men holding funny, pithy,

original and to-the-point signs. Since I was the founder and director emerita of the Shirley Chisholm Project of Brooklyn Women's Activism, I made and carried a sign with a portrait of Chisholm, with the words, "We are marching with Shirley Chisholm, she is marching with us." The picture of Chisholm was a replica of her portrait that hangs in the Capitol Building. Hundreds of people took pictures of the sign and several media outlets interviewed me.



At the Mall by 10:30 AM, we could not move. The crowds were polite, helpful and above all joyous. For the first time since the election (save being with my grandson) I was truly happy. I ran into members of the Washington D.C. teachers' union wearing their red, not pink hats; sister and brother alums from Antioch college, people I had known from Seattle, Cleveland, and Detroit;

chatted with people who liked my Chisholm poster.

I have been on marches on Washington since the 1960s. This was the largest, and in some respects the most important. In past marches, we knew there were some people in Washington in the halls of power that had our backs. In this march, we were marching against a 100% hostile government—misogynist to the core—equally racist, homophobic, elitist, xenophobic and Islamophobic, and bellicose. This march gave us confidence, sisterhood, solidarity.

I came home far less depressed and demoralized. Ready to get even more involved with my union and my community; equally ready to work with any and all who wish to fight for our pussyhat revolution—social justice, Black Lives Matter, women's liberation, an end to racism, xenophobia, homophobia and a commitment to a sustainable climate.

AND ANOTHER MARCH ON MLK DAY

Marva Lilly, Retiree, John Jay

I attended the "**We Shall Not Be Moved**" march in Washington on January 14, organized by the National Action Network and many other groups. Many of the participants wanted to honor the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. and to remind then President-elect Trump and Congress that the fight for equality and justice will not cease. We walked from the Washington Monument to the MLK Memorial.

A NEW DEAL FOR OUR TIME

At the PSC Annual Winter Luncheon in January, Professors Sheila Collins and Trudy Goldberg previewed *The Map and Guide to Living New Deal New York City* that will be launched this spring. This map and guide, prepared by the Living New Deal project at the University of California, Berkeley, celebrates the illustrious achievements of a government that cared for people, coped creatively with their problems, and changed the face of New York and the nation. The map and guide is not only an opportunity to celebrate great past achievements. It is also an opportunity to address current problems and needs such as the continuing, or perhaps chronic, “recession” for many who remain unemployed, particularly, but not only, in the economically disadvantaged areas of the city. It is also an opportunity to redress serious deficiencies in the city’s infrastructure, human services, and environment.

The two-pronged New Deal model—coping with mass unemployment by putting unemployed people to work in jobs that enrich human, physical, cultural, and environmental resources—can be adapted to current problems.

The National Jobs for All Coalition (NJFAC) has taken the opportunity provided by the Map and Guide to New Deal New York City to advocate an Updated New Deal Model to meet the city’s problems of unemployment and resource deficiency. Updated? The model developed by NJFAC that

is based on its estimates of New York City’s job and resource deficiencies is race and gender inclusive and for all who want work. It is a proposed Job Guarantee for New Yorkers. The upcoming Celebration of New Deal New York City will, along with lectures, exhibits, and symposia, include a public meeting that will unveil the Job Guarantee for New Yorkers and mobilize advocacy for its enactment. Consult the NJFAC website for a schedule of spring and fall Living New Deal New York City events: www.njfac.org

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Turning the Page* is looking for contributors. It was welcoming to see that so many members joined in at the February meeting by getting together to go see their Congressional representative about saving and expanding the Social Safety Net. A large number of retirees are engaged in the PSC's Social Safety Net Working Group, as well as involved in the union's Environmental Justice Committee, and the International Committee (see PSC-CUNY.org). If you are active with other groups, please let us know. And if you would like to comment on things that you have read here, or tell us about what retirement looks and feels like for you, write to us at retirees@pscmail.org with “newsletter” in the subject line. Look for next month's newsletter for updates on spring walking tours and a possible rematch at Citifield with the Mets.