

FEBRUARY 2018



Joan Greenbaum, Editor

Academic Year 2017-8 No. 5

psc-cuny.org/retirees

CHAPTER MEETING, MON., FEB. 5, PSC Union Hall, 16th Fl., 61 Broadway, 1-3 PM.

Theme - Good and Welfare. Speakers:

- **Donna Costa**, executive director of the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund, will update members about latest benefits and answer questions.
- **Molly Krakowsky**, JASA, speaking on the landscape of retiree/senior services and programs in NYC, both government and non-profit.
- **Safety Net Working Group** will make a short presentation and lead a discussion on the expansion and defense of key social programs in the present political climate—particularly Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

As always, we will provide an assortment of light refreshments.

CHAPTER MEETING, MON., MAR. 5.

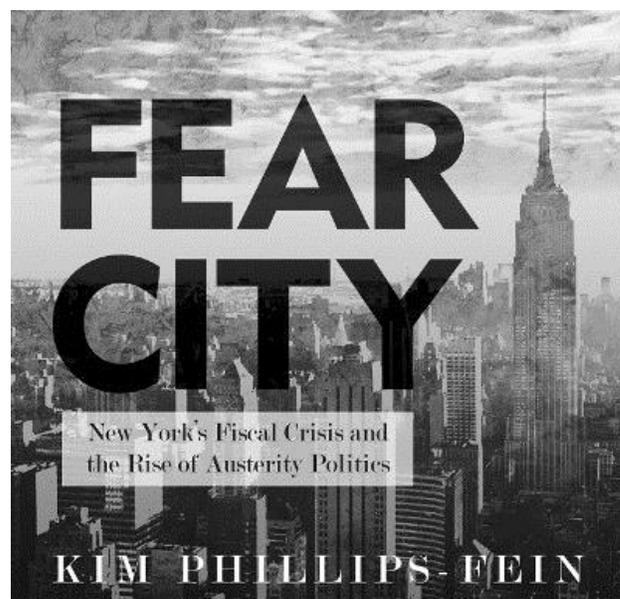
Leith Mullings, distinguished professor emerita, anthropology, Graduate Center, and brand new retiree will talk about:

Racism, Resistance and Activist Scholarship in Dangerous Times

WARM RECEPTION FOR A COLD JANUARY LUNCHEON

-Steve Leberstein, Retiree, CCNY

About a hundred intrepid retirees, most of us old enough to have lived through the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, attended the January luncheon on January 8th at John Jay College. For the City University and those who worked there, the austerity—the hard times—brought on by the fiscal crisis never quite waned. To better understand how that “crisis” created the playbook for diminishing or dismantling New York’s progressive, labor-supported traditions and institutions, Kim Phillips-Fein, an associate professor of history at NYU’s Gallatin School, spoke about her new book, *Fear City: New York’s Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics*.



In a lively, warmly received presentation on a very cold day, Phillips-Fein framed her discussion in terms of race and class as the parameters of the austerity program. Like me, many of us at the time worried whether our paychecks would be honored, our classes suspended, our jobs “retrenched,” as happened to thousands of CUNY faculty

and staff. But the main victims of the crisis were our students, who faced tuition (for the first time since the Free Academy's founding in 1847), and the possible closing of their college (Hostos, John Jay, Medgar Evers). The main impact of the crisis fell on "the unmet needs of the city's population."

Were the people of the city willing to accept the cuts in City programs and personnel as "necessary?" Some were persuaded by the drumbeat of disaster peddled by William Simon, then U.S. Treasury Secretary, and others, but many were not, like those who turned out in militant demonstrations to save the Williamsburg Fire House as well as Hostos, John Jay and Medgar Evers. For Simon, whose background was in the City's financial sector and, ironically, who served on a municipal financing oversight committee, this was an opportunity to wage an ideological war on a progressive municipality. CUNY's free tuition and new Open Admissions policy were emblems of what was 'wrong' with the City, and Simon made CUNY a target. Phillips-Fein's presentation explored the militant response to that attack, whether the march of uniformed officers and firefighters from John Jay across 57th St., or the Hostos students and faculty or those at Medgar Evers who made their powerful voices heard.



She pointed out that the colleges slated for closing were those that served primarily

Black and Latino students. By spring 1976, as many remembered, the University ran out of money and spring classes were temporarily suspended. No grades were posted, and the faculty and staff were laid off for two weeks. Tens of thousands of students disappeared when the colleges re-opened in the fall. A bitter new age had begun. "What lessons are there for today?", Phillips-Fein asked in conclusion. She questioned whether Mayor de Blasio's view of New York City as a new chapter in urban progressivism holds up against rising inequality, the crisis in public health care, a burgeoning homeless population and diminishing affordable housing.

Two members of the Newt Davidson Collective, Nanette Funk and Gerry Markowitz, who published the prescient "Crisis in CUNY" a year before the crisis struck, were on hand to offer their remarks. Unaware of the imminence or the long-term goal of the fiscal crisis, they commented that the booklet was a research and writing project by a group of young assistant professors afraid of retribution, who attributed its authorship to the collective named for the then vice chancellor for faculty-staff relations, David Newton.

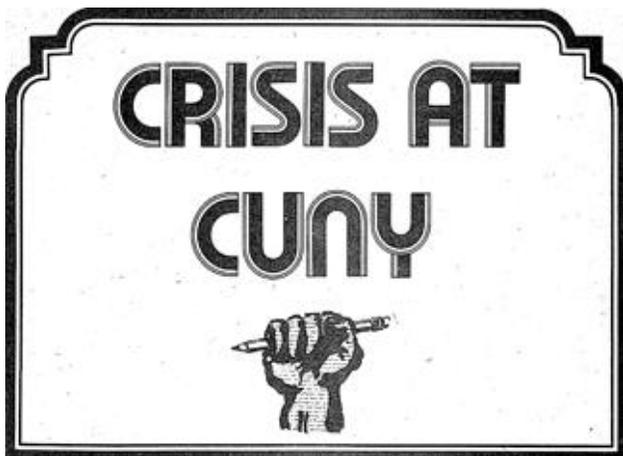
As usual at our chapter meetings, an enlivened audience then spoke up: about the role of the unions, that of rank-and-file workers who flooded the streets while union officials like Victor Gotbaum (DC 37, AFSCME) and Albert Shanker (UFT, AFT) wavered amidst widespread labor unrest. Was a general strike possible when sanitation workers, firefighters, the police, highway and hospital workers struck in the summer 1975 before teachers walked out in September? Gotbaum, later described as a "labor statesman," wavered, and Shanker finally agreed to let the UFT pension fund invest \$150M in NYC bonds to avert a collapse. Others spoke about activism beyond that directed at saving CUNY. What

lessons can we draw today from that era?
To be continued.

CRISIS AT CUNY THEN...

-Nanette Funk, Retiree, Brooklyn College

I was a member of the collective that wrote *Crisis at CUNY* at the moment of transition of CUNY, the City and the world economic order, with the coming of neoliberalism and greater global competition, not all of which we understood. *Crisis at CUNY* was a 120 page pamphlet, published in 1974, by the Newt Davidson Collective (a play on the name of an onerous CUNY official). It told the story of the origins of CUNY in 1845 in the Free Academy, through the reorganization of individual NYC colleges into CUNY, the struggle for Open Admissions, and the fight against tuition.



From the cover of *The Crisis at CUNY*

While the pamphlet was modeled on exposés such as “Who Rules Columbia?”, we knew CUNY was different because we were dependent on tax levy monies, not endowments. We wrote about how universities in general, and CUNY in particular, were anything but ivory towers, driven and guided by capital’s ideological and economic interests. We saw this in U.S. foundations’ plans to use funds in order to reformulate curricula in U.S. universities, as revealed in, for example, the Report of the Carnegie Commission on

Higher Education. As a working collective, we did extensive research, relying often on publicly available reports especially from various foundations, and using some ruses to get information within CUNY.

Our basic claim was that CUNY was being structured to meet NYC’s corporate and business employment needs, and to do so with a race, class and gender bias. We documented and analyzed the growing hierarchization of CUNY, the differential racial and class tracking of students to senior vs. community colleges, and the watering down of liberal education at CUNY, as all part of that agenda. We understood CUNY to be tracking students by race, class, and gender, into different colleges in CUNY, whose overall role was to train students for lower rung city jobs, diminishing the idea of providing a liberal education for informed city residents.

Many of the themes have tragically been woven into today’s struggles. In 1973, we were already worried about the increasing use of adjuncts, aghast that 37% of the faculty were adjuncts, and that the PSC at that time was not responsive to their needs.

In some ways we were prescient, but we did not foresee the extent to which things would develop. Although we feared “techtch”—the use of technology in academia—our concern was TVs in classrooms, which we feared would lead to replacing teachers, although we could not foresee much of it.

As a collective, our goal was to create a document to be used in both teaching and organizing, and to that end we distributed about 10,000 copies. The Newt Davidson collective had about seven young junior faculty, supported by perhaps 30 others, and connected since the 1960s through the synergy of left politics in CUNY and the city more generally.

Today neoliberalism is in full swing, whereas we wrote at the moment of its build-up. We did not know that full picture, did not foresee the looming 1975 NYC financial crisis that was staring us in the face and about to explode and restructure the development of CUNY, but we nevertheless were right on many trends.

What are the agendas and issues today? Perhaps surveillance, immigration, the impact of the changing position of the U.S. in the world on CUNY, the changing racial and ethnic composition of the U.S.? How do they fit into the broader national, international, political, economic, and cultural agenda? I think I can speak for many of us in that collective almost 45 years ago, saying that we would hope that junior faculty today would write a new analysis of CUNY, knowing that you will miss some things but illuminate others. Here is to the continuation of the CUNY story for use in teaching and learning and organizing today!

VERY CURRENT EVENTS: RAVI RAGBIR AND THE WAR ON IMMIGRANTS

Bill Friedheim, Retiree, BMCC

In a piece entitled “Trump, ‘Shitholes,’ and the Nature of ‘Us,’” *New Yorker* columnist Masha Gessen wrote: “On Thursday [January 11], Trump called Haiti and African states “[shithole countries](#),” and that was, in a way, the least of it this week. The same day, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in New York City arrested the immigration-rights activist Ravi Ragbir during his scheduled annual check-in with the agency. On Wednesday, ICE raided 7-Eleven stores in seventeen states and the District of Columbia, arresting twenty-one people. And on Tuesday [January 9] the Justice Department [announced](#) that it had secured an order revoking the U.S.

citizenship of Baljinder Singh, who had been living in the United States since 1991. That was this week in America’s war on immigrants.”

Gessen’s piece provides context for the latest chapter in the saga of Ravi Ragbir. [Last May, I wrote a piece](#) for *Turning the Page* on Ravi, the executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition, an interfaith network of congregations and activists. I have a very personal connection to Ravi. He and his wife Amy are among my dearest friends.



Often working twelve-hour days, Ravi has been a tireless advocate, counselor, strategist and activist for immigrants facing detention and deportation, including many undocumented CUNY students and their families.

But Ravi advocated with a target on his back, constantly living with the threat of his own detention and deportation. Yet he chose a highly visible role of leadership in the sanctuary movement.

Ravi’s legal case is complex, as I explained [in the article last May](#), but until Thursday, January 11, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had exercised “prosecutorial discretion”—that is they let Ravi stay in the U.S. as his case works its way through the courts with the provision that he check in with ICE at prescribed intervals (anywhere from every six months to every other year). The latest check-in was January 11.

Politicians and faith leaders had Ravi’s back on 1/11, together with over a thousand New

Yorkers (including several of us from the PSC) who marched silently outside ICE offices at Federal Plaza. When Ravi entered the building for his check-in, he was detained by Homeland Security and held for deportation.

Ravi passed out when this happened. ICE then dispatched an ambulance to a local hospital, with his wife Amy accompanying him. Upon arriving, Amy was asked to get out of the vehicle, after which it sped to another hospital. Within hours, ICE, in violation of a court order to keep him in the NYC jurisdiction, flew Ravi in cuffs to a detention center in Miami. From there, on two occasions ICE sought, unsuccessfully, to put him on a plane to Trinidad and Tobago – again in violation of a court order. Ravi, when he finally saw Amy at the Miami detention center, joked that he never moved through TSA security as quickly and seamlessly as he did on the ICE escorted flight from Newark to Miami.

The NY media (newspapers and TV) was abuzz about the detention, particularly since two City Council members were among those arrested for civil disobedience outside Federal Plaza. Hundreds more stood silent vigil at the Varick Street ICE Detention and Processing Center that evening, not realizing that ICE had secretly transported Ravi to Miami.

As reported by the *NY Times*, Amy, his wife, commented, “basic human decency requires that his wife and lawyers know where he is, so that we don’t live in a country where people are whisked away to secret facilities.”

ICE does not seem to traffic in niceties such as civility and the rule of law. It seems hell-bent on a mission to demoralize if not destroy the New Sanctuary Coalition, detaining not only Ravi, but also one of its founders, Jean Montrevil, just days before

he was supposed to report for his annual check-in. On Tuesday, January 16, ICE deported Montrevil to Haiti.

Trump seems particularly obsessed with Haitians. Not only did Haiti head his “shithole” list, but, as reported in the *NY Times*, Trump proclaimed in June 2017 that Haitians “all have aids.” In December, his administration removed humanitarian Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 59,000 Haitian allowed to work and live in the U.S. after the 2010 earthquake (and then removed TPS for 250,000 El Salvadorans here since a 2001).



ICE did lots of damage under Obama, but has been particularly emboldened by the Trump administration, increasing arrests, detentions and deportations many fold over the last year. Now it is moving full force against the sanctuary movement. That puts hundreds—maybe thousands—of CUNY students in ICE’s crosshairs.

Back to Masha Gessen, who argues in the *New Yorker* that Trump uses fear of the “other” to mobilize his base. She writes: “Trumpism traffics in fear and demands mobilization. Mobilization demands an enemy. With every passing day, and every tweet, the image of the immigrant as the

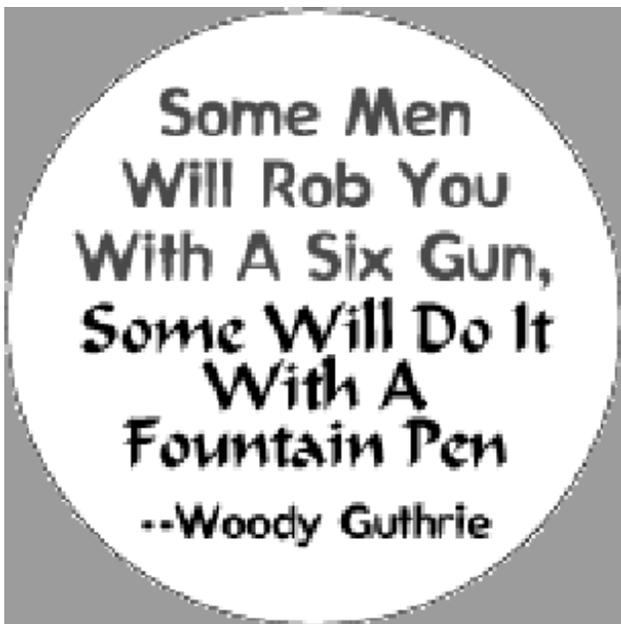
enemy looms larger, while the circle of “us” continues to get smaller.”

But as a rally at Judson Memorial Church on MLK day, the sanctuary movement was defiant. Supporters of Ravi and Jean are more motivated than ever to engage and extend the battle for just immigration policy. A luta continua.

[On January 17, federal immigration officials agreed to return Ravi to the New York area, where he will remain detained pending the outcome of his legal case.]

THE GOP TAX BILL: A LATE CHANGE WITH A BIG PAYOFF (not for us)

Dave Kotelchuck, Retiree, Hunter College



As I said in our last issue, the core goal of the GOP tax bill, which passed in December, is to lower taxes on corporations and the wealthy, requiring the rest of us to pay more taxes to make up for the resulting budget shortfall. So starting with our 2018 tax bill, due by April 15, 2019, the 99% will have to pay more taxes to fund a tax cut for the 1%.

This is not news to any of us, but what is

not widely known are the changes in the tax bill which were made at the last moment in December—some of them pulling back from the worst features of the proposed House and Senate bills and one an outrageous new giveaway to, of all groups, the real estate industry. Consider this:

House and Senate GOP leaders, after conferring, presented a single joint proposal to be voted upon by both Houses, which contained among other provisions one which lowered the tax rate for so-called “pass through” businesses to 20 percent. For self-employed persons like individual dentists, tax accountants and academic (sometimes retired) consultants, this would significantly lower their federal income tax rates from levels that were likely to have been in the 32 to 39.6 percent range. Businesses in which income is passed through to the business owners’ individual tax returns also include LLCs (limited liability corporations) and partnerships. Nothing new here, this provision to help small businesses had been in both proposed Congressional bills.

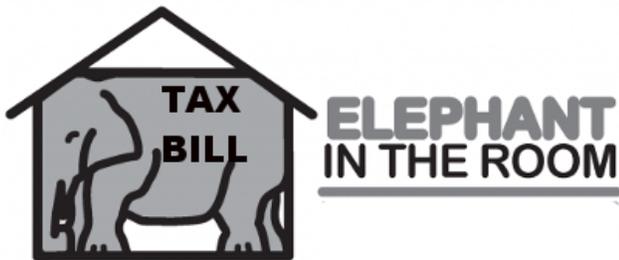
But a provision by the GOP-dominated joint House-Senate conference committee (and not in either the of the separate House or Senate tax bills brought to this joint committee) was proposed and passed to add real-estate companies to the list of pass-through businesses! This would mollify, greatly benefit and win the vote of GOP Senators like Bob Corker of Tennessee, a real-estate investor who had previously expressed concern that the entire tax bill would blow a \$1.5 trillion hole in the federal deficit. But of course this provision will enormously benefit President Donald Trump. This is the President who went around the country in the weeks preceding the vote saying that the proposed tax bills would not benefit him personally—which was a lie then, since tax rates on the wealthy were to be lowered and Trump is

nothing if not wealthy.

But this new presidential bonus provision will put many more millions into Trump's pockets. According to Steven M. Rosenthal of the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, Trump's 2017 financial disclosure forms show *more than 500 pass-through entities*. (J. Drucker and P. Cohen, NYT, 12/2/17) Trump's 2005 tax return, of which two pages were uncovered, showed that he had more than \$109 million in income from businesses, partnerships and pass-through entities, although without current tax returns his gains from these pass-throughs are not known. (D. Paletta, Wash. Post, 11/27/17)

Rubbing Salt into our Wounds

After threatening worse, the GOP finally decided to tax combined state and local income, property and sales taxes beyond \$10,000—In short, a tax on a tax. This provision is well known and well publicized in high-tax states such as New York and California, both of them solidly blue. This will be a heavier federal tax burden for most taxpayers in these states, including wealthy ones, and may well disrupt long-standing fiscal arrangements in New York and other states for funding education and health-care services.



But Republicans try to take care of their own, even in these states: In 2017, the highest income tax rate was 39.6 percent for married couples earning over \$470,700. Not only did the December GOP tax bill drop this top rate to 37 percent, but it also raised the threshold at which this rate kicks in to \$600,000 for married couples—so married couples earning the same

\$470,000 in 2018 will then only pay at a 35 percent rate. *"The new tax break for millionaires goes beyond what was in the original House and Senate bills, with Republicans seeking to ensure wealthy earners in states such as New York, Connecticut and California don't end up paying substantially higher taxes as a result of the bill."* (H. Long, "Class warfare, anyone?", Wash. Post, 12/15/17.)

DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUELS

-Nancy Romer, Retiree, Brooklyn College

Hey folks! We just won something big!! The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group has been an active member of DivestNY. The goal of DivestNY has been to get the NYC and NY State public worker pension funds divested from all fossil fuels and this is going to happen!!

On Jan. 10, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that trustees of the New York City Employees Retirement System (NYCERS) and Teachers Retirement System (TRS) had agreed to divest their funds from all fossil fuels by 2022. De Blasio called on the three other retirement boards—police, firefighters, and Department of Ed managerial employees—to divest as well.

If all five funds divest, that will mean pulling out \$5 billion worth of fossil fuel stocks and setting off movements across the nation to follow suit. Further, de Blasio announced that NYC had filed suit against the top five fossil fuel corporations—ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, BP and ConocoPhillips—for damages to NYC during Hurricane Sandy and to the planet for harm due to climate change. The suit charges the corporations with knowingly pushing their deadly product with full scientific knowledge of their major contribution to climate change.

With this, Mayor de Blasio declared war on the fossil fuel corporations:

“And we never make the mistake of waiting on our national government to act when it's unwilling to. This city is acting.We're going to lead the fight against climate change as if our lives depend on it because they do. If we no longer assume that the fossil fuel companies are innocent – in fact, if we identify them as guilty – it changes the reality. If we no longer assume we have to invest in them, it changes the reality. And that can spread like wildfire.” (NYC press conference, Jan. 10, 2018.)

This is a huge victory for DivestNY, the coalition that pushed this effort over the last five years. It is also a victory for the labor unions most engaged in this process: PSC, AFSCME District Council 37 and UFT. Our closest ally in government has been NYC Public Advocate Letitia James. Finally, our mayor and comptroller have joined the divestment cause as well. Persistent organizing wins the day!



**DIVEST
NOW**
FOSSIL-FREE

PSC President Barbara Bowen, offered these comments:

“...[this] action today offers national leadership and sends the message that it is not too late to halt the destruction of our beautiful planet. Workers have always been at the heart of the movement for climate justice, and the resolution you have announced today demonstrates how workers' collective financial power can be an essential force in that movement. Working people and the poor are always hit hardest by the ravages of climate change, so it is especially important New York City's workers now have your support to be part of the solution.”

The arguments for divesting pension funds from fossil fuels are two-fold:

1. Fossil fuel stock values are going down and will harm pension values.
2. Fossil fuels are the main contributor to catastrophic climate change and thus harm our futures and those of our families and communities.

As a DivestNY and union activist involved in this campaign, I am proud of labor's support for divestment. Labor's capacity to help keep the planet safe from catastrophic climate change is vast through its billions of dollars of pension funds that can be re-deployed to labor- and climate-friendly investments and through its political power. It creates a platform in which labor and climate activists can unite, work and win together. Let other unions in other places join us in our struggle to save our pensions and our planet! Let's create a just transition to a renewable energy economy with good jobs for all. Let labor be a leader in creating this just transition.

**PSC ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
WORKING GROUP'S NEXT MEETING:
TUES., FEB 13 @ 6 PM AT THE PSC**
All interested activists welcome.

READERS WRITE IN
Hidden Histories Continued

-Harvey Carroll, Retiree, Kingsborough

I loved your December issue of the Retirees Newsletter. I too have looked at manhole covers in NYC and the Seattle area, and am attaching a picture of one I took in Kirkland, WA today. Kirkland is a small upscale city near the northeast end of Lake Washington. As you can see, they take their manhole covers very seriously. The artwork attempts to describe the nature of the city. Note that it is made in the USA!



The answer to the pop quiz: Manhole covers are round so they can't fall into the hole they cover when tipped vertically (note that there is a small ledge that holds them in place, making the diameter of the hole slightly smaller than the diameter of the cover. If they were square, they could fall into the hole at a diagonal, or else the ledge would have to make the hole too small to get into, at least with the current size of holes—just big enough for workers to climb in and out.

When I saw my first manhole cover in NYC that said "Made in China," I was really upset.

By the way, in Washington State, a few years ago they wanted to make all official words gender neutral. One of the few they could not figure out how to do this with was "manhole," mainly for safety reasons. Emergency workers might get confused if they were called something like "drain covers" or "sewer covers" or "person covers" and this could delay a rescue.

A Research Question

Professor Lilia Melani of the English Department of Brooklyn College is researching the student movement and union activism at Brooklyn College in the 1930s and 1940s, the Rapp-Coudert investigation of BC students and faculty in 1940-41, and the HUAC investigation of BC students and faculty in the early 1950s. If you know any students, faculty, or staff who were at the College between 1930 and 1956 and might be willing to be interviewed, please let her know. She can be contacted at the Brooklyn College English Department, at lmelani@brooklyn.cuny.edu, or at 212-369-7672.

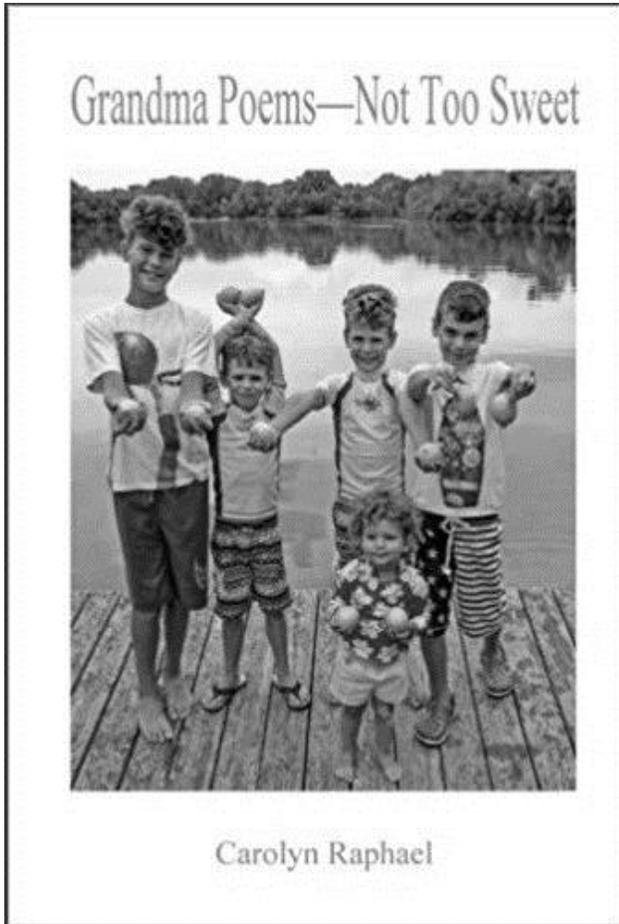
A New Book

Carolyn Raphael writes: After teaching at Queensborough Community College for thirty-seven years in the English Department, I retired to publish my poetry. My fourth book has just come out, *Grandma Poems—Not Too Sweet*. My friends and colleagues are raving about it. For example X. J. Kennedy a poet, novelist, and children's author says:

As its title indicates, you won't find any saccharine platitudes about grandmothering in Carolyn Raphael's arresting new collection. She gives us sharp-eyed views of actual grandmas and their grandchildren, and captures perfectly the wistfulness of infrequent visits over a distance of 800 miles. These poems

will hold special interest for anyone who has ever had a grandma, or been one, and yet will appeal to all readers who care for skilled poetry, memorable and true to life.

Grandma Stories—Not Too Sweet, by Carolyn Raphael is available on Amazon.com.



Outing My Age

As big as life—the numbers of my years flash purple on his homemade birthday card.

I praise the artist for their perfect shape.

The next blow is his declaration that I'm five years older than his other grandma (subtraction lesson in his first-grade class).

To practice sums, he slowly calculates—

When I'm eighteen, then you'll be 82,

and when I'm 30, you'll be...94.

I sit down as my decades flutter by,
afraid to tell my chronicler to stop.

-Carolyn Raphael

Grandma Poems—Not Too Sweet

Kelsay Books/ Aldrich Press, 2017.

Booktalk



Talk by David Kotelchuck: PSC Retiree Chapter member David Kotelchuck will be talking at Tamiment Library on Tuesday, March 6 from 4:30–6 PM about his book on the FBI persecution of his parents during the Cold War: "Abe and Julia: Honor and Survival during Hoover's Reign." Tamiment is located on the 10th floor of NYU Bobst Library, [70 Washington Square South](#). All are welcome.