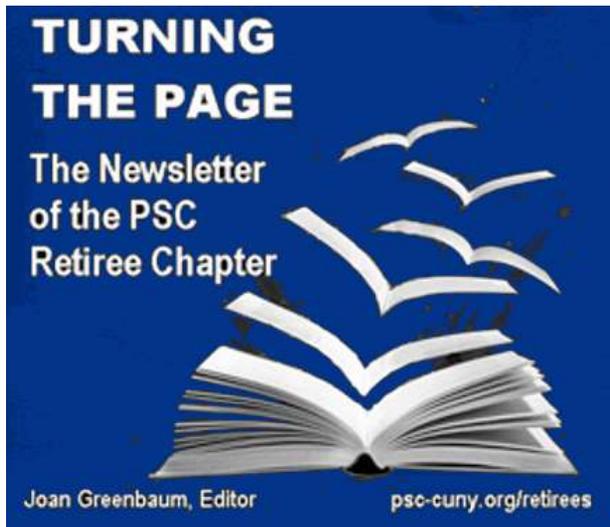


FEBRUARY 2021



Academic Year 2020-21 No. 4

[psc-cuny.org/retirees.org](https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees.org)

**VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING.
MONDAY, FEB. 4, 1-3 on ZOOM**

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Speakers:

From the Welfare Fund

Donna Costa, Executive Director

Patrick Smith, Communications
Director

An update on Welfare Fund Benefits

Other speakers to be announced. We hope to have a speaker from the NYC Department of Health on the availability of COVID-19 **vaccinations** for eligible members.

For full details, go to:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees#UPCOMING%20EVENTS>



IMPORTANT LINKS:

Retiree Chapter:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

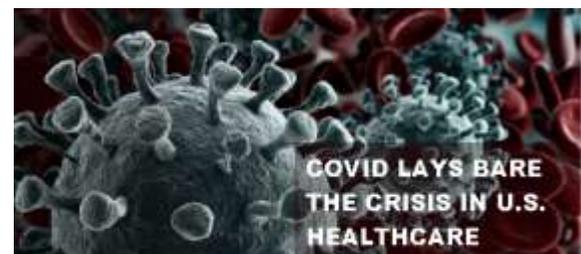
Health & Safety Watchdogs

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/about-us/environmental-health-and-safety>

Welfare Fund

<http://psccunywf.org/>

THE MONTH THAT WAS



**THE STATE (AND CITY) OF
VACCINES AND TESTING**

Joan Greenbaum, LaGuardia & GC

This is being written at the end of the first week of vaccine roll-out for those of us 65 and older. As so many of us know—much has been promised and little has been delivered. An article in the January 15 *Washington Post* explained that in fact the reserves of vaccine had already been used up when this roll-out for 65 and older, began. Both New York State and City opened a large number of vaccination sites, but did not get the vaccine to supply them all. Perhaps those of you in other states have had more successful access to vaccine shots, but for many in New York City, it has meant navigating a thicket of websites, entering information and then finding out that there were no appointments available! Is this a fair system? People with poor or no internet

will end up at the back of the line. Perhaps a sane public health system would have people on Medicare registered for allocated vaccines.



Hopefully the manufacture and distribution of vaccines will be smoother once the Biden Administration is in place. We still need to bear in mind that even two shots do not make us immune. Drs. Heidi Jones and Denis Nash, epidemiologists and professors at CUNY's School of Public Health, reminded us that the vaccinated public still needs to be tested routinely for COVID-19. As you probably have read, there is little longitudinal data to show how long the vaccine will be effective for. The FDA only authorized emergency approval for the two vaccines now in use. Still, we hope that you will be successful in getting both doses of the vaccine *and* in reminding your friends and family to keep wearing masks and social distancing at all times. As persons of a certain age we should continue getting tested and avoiding people outside of our immediate pod or group. Traveling is not in our future...yet.

Check the Retiree Chapter webpage for updated information on vaccines at:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org//retirees#COVID-19> □

RACISM, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND US

Anne Friedman, BMCC

Over 100 PSC retirees met on Zoom **January 11** to explore social and racial justice in the United States. In Part 1 of a two-part session we heard from three speakers: **Kelly Smith**, a national organizer with the Poor People's Campaign, and a board member of the NY State Labor-Religion Coalition; **Anthony Beckford**, a faculty member at Brooklyn College, president of Brooklyn Black Lives Matter and a community leader for "the underserved, voiceless and ignored;" and **Rachel Boccio**, a leader of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) at LaGuardia Community College, where she is also a faculty member in the English Department. Cecelia McCall facilitated the first part of the program.

Kelly Smith began her presentation by recounting the over six-decade history of the **Poor People's Campaign**, a nonpartisan but highly political organization, starting with the 1955-56 Montgomery Boycott when Martin Luther King observed that racism is intimately entwined with the structures of poverty and militarism. More recently, the campaign has added to its focus topics that include the right to vote, ending police brutality, honoring the rights of First-Nation and indigenous peoples, re-establishing free higher education, ending environmental devastation and combatting the distortion of religious narrative.

Anthony Beckford followed the theme of interconnectedness by highlighting that **Brooklyn BLM** is aligned with labor unions, housing advocacy, immigrant rights and education groups. Cutting his activist teeth at the age of twelve, he became a youth leader in calling out voter redistricting and housing rezoning in Brooklyn. Beckford, a Marine Corps veteran and two-time victim of police brutality, observed that “complicity and complacency are the same as a direct act of racism.” People of privilege must become allies in the anti-racist struggle.

Rachel Boccio discussed the importance of reflection and personal action as the role of white-identified people in fighting racism as allies with black communities. Through her work teaching in a maximum-security prison, she became acutely aware of what it means to be a person with white privilege. Currently a leader of **Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)** at LaGuardia, she works with over 100 white-identified faculty and staff offering workshops as well as developing anti-racist pedagogy.

When whites show up to support Black struggles, they should *not* be taking center stage, she argues, as concerns of the most disadvantaged must do so instead. In an apt segue into the second part of the program, Boccio emphasized that anti-racist work is not just the responsibility of young and working people, but that retirees have an important part to play – everyone has a purpose in this cause.

TED TALK BY PEGGY MCINTOSH

Part 2: The aim of the second part of the program was to get participants thinking about what we can do to build self -

awareness and take action against racism. Joan Greenbaum introduced the video of a **TED talk by Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley Center for Women**, in which she tells us about her journey to experience, as her title indicates, “How to recognize your white privilege and use it to fight inequality.” https://www.ted.com/talks/peggy_mcintosh_how_to_recognize_your_white_privilege_and_use_it_to_fight_inequality?language=en



McIntosh argues that white-identified persons should not blame ourselves for the failings of the society that we were born into. Instead we who so identify should look toward the future by acting to change the racial, gender and other social inequities within which we live.

In the discussion that followed, members of the chapter were asked to think about issues raised in the video that resonate with their own experiences, both personally and at CUNY. We then transitioned to brainstorming about what we might do as a Retiree Chapter to build on what we heard from the speakers to fight racism and inequality at CUNY. Ideas included joining in activities/groups that the speakers spoke about, talking to others about white privilege using some examples from the McIntosh talk,

developing a suggested readings list, starting book groups and sharing other ways that retirees have been active in fighting racism.

Clearly, addressing racism is a complex issue that can't be adequately addressed in a two-hour meeting. Our chair, Bill Friedheim, asked participants to share their reactions to the program with the chapter Executive Committee and indicated that we would be following up by providing a reading list to further educate ourselves.

Several speakers and retirees mentioned that the topic of white privilege was keenly on people's minds after witnessing the riotous attack of predominately white, right-wing males on the Capitol less than a week before, and noting the differences from the ways peaceful Black Lives Matter protestors were treated last summer.

[Editor's note: Those of you who attended the meeting were sent a follow-up email with links and a reading list attached. We plan to put these useful resources on the PSC retirees website.]

SURVEY: YOU SPOKE. WE LISTENED

Bonnie Nelson, John Jay

This past fall, 183 of you responded to the survey the Retirees Chapter Executive Committee conducted to find out what content our members wanted to see in chapter meetings and in this chapter newsletter, *Turning the Page*. We thank those of you who took the time to take the survey and particularly those who took the extra time to write

comments. Now we would like to report to you about what we learned. (The summary of the responses to the survey is on pp. 12-14.)

Strikingly, a key question was about chapter meetings, and we found that 80 of the respondents had never attended an in-person chapter meeting at the union, and over half (94) had never attended a virtual (Zoom) chapter meeting. This, of course, immediately made us regret our lack of follow-up questions (i.e., Why not?).

Overwhelmingly, respondents want future meetings to be a hybrid of in-person and virtual, and the EC is committed to making this happen.



Regarding which general subjects respondents were interested in, the clear top three choices were:

- Health (116),
- Politics and Labor (115)
- Social and Racial Justice (111)

But there was significant interest in all subjects, with the least popular garnering 82 votes. The EC was reassured that our past emphasis on programs around politics and labor, and social and racial justice have not been

misplaced, yet clearly there is a need to address health, a subject of critical concern to those growing older.



Overwhelmingly, the most popular specific topic for chapter meetings was Welfare Fund Benefits, chosen by 127 (69%). The next three most popular topics were clustered within 3 points:

- Continuing educational opportunities for retirees (100)
- Medicare for All – what’s in it for those already on Medicare (98)
- Staying healthy in retirement (98)

Those commenting on other possible topics pointed out a glaring omission in our list—climate change and environmental justice—topics we have offered in the past and surely will again.

The question about what should appear in *Turning the Page*, the chapter newsletter, revealed three clear favorites:

- Reviews of art exhibits, concerts, movies, books, etc. (95)
- In Memoriam (87)
- Taking classes—in person or online (83)

Six of the comments asked for more information in the newsletter about benefits and pensions. Gratifyingly, many of you responded by offering to write articles for *Turning the Page*, and five of the articles in the January issue were a direct outgrowth of the survey!

WHAT WE ARE DOING AS A RESULT

The survey showed very clearly that, while you have wide-ranging and eclectic interests, overwhelmingly you are also concerned about the benefits owed to you as a result of your many years as CUNY faculty and professional staff represented by the PSC. Your comments on the newsletter said you wanted to see “updates on benefits” and “specific information and directions for requesting specific CUNY benefits (e.g., IRMAA, Differential, etc.)” and expressed confusion about the recent (biannual) opportunity to change health plans. As already noted, Health and Welfare Fund benefits were the top choices for chapter meeting topics. As a result, the February 1 Chapter meeting will be on “Health and Well Being” with presentations from Donna Costa and Patrick Smith of the Welfare Fund and, hopefully, a speaker on COVID-19 vaccination. And future issues of the newsletter will have regular updates on benefits and how to access information about them.

OPPORTUNITIES

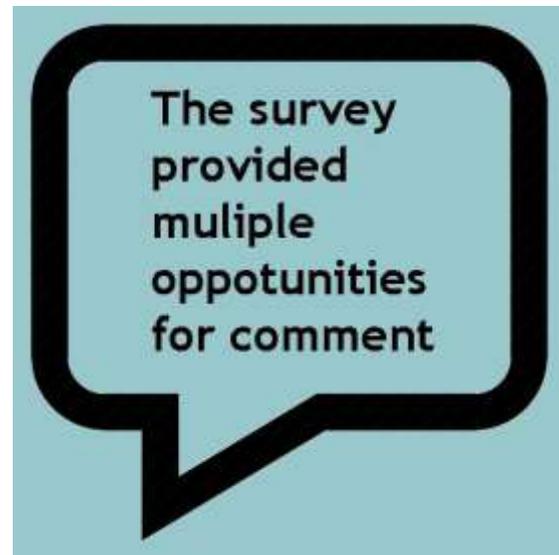
Continuing education opportunities was the second most popular topic selected for chapter meetings and the third for newsletter articles. Should we be surprised that educators want to keep learning? The article in the January newsletter by Carol Smith on the CUNY Senior Citizen Audit Program is a first response on that topic but, of course, it

is useful only to those who are residents of New York State. Surely many of our members have experience with similar programs in other states, or have taken online courses through Coursera or the free online programs offered by Harvard, MIT and others. Share your experience by writing for *Turning the Page*. The EC is also discussing how else we can disseminate information about continuing ed opportunities.

While “The Arts” was the least popular general subject for chapter meetings, still 82 respondents were interested and would like to see such programs. Rather than a full monthly chapter program on art, EC members are exploring whether it is possible to offer a different experience—perhaps a virtual museum tour—just for those interested in signing up.

MEMBERS WRITE IN

The most immediate result of the survey, as mentioned above, was the publication of so many articles from our members in the January issue of *Turning the Page*. These descriptions of how retirement allowed members to follow their passions were a pleasure to read and, frankly, inspiring. If some of you reading them were similarly inspired to write your stories for the newsletter see the contact information at the end of this article. Also, 95 of you wanted to read “reviews of art exhibits, concerts, movies, books, etc.” In this issue of *Turning the Page*, Gail Green-Anderson from LaGuardia wrote a fascinating review of the novel *Jack*, by Marilynne Robinson. Why don’t you write reviews of what you have seen of read and send them to us? Clearly, there is an eager readership.



The survey provided multiple opportunities for comments and many of you were generous with your thoughts and opinions: 18 suggested other topics for meetings; 26 other ideas for newsletter articles and 43 (nearly a quarter of those who answered the survey) took the time to “tell us anything that’s on your mind about the Retirees Chapter.” The most common comment asked for more information about benefits. But many also wrote about missing the personal interaction afforded by the in-person chapter meetings:

- “Miss the opportunity to visit PSC folks in person”
- “My experience with virtual meetings is that I’m usually ‘muted.’ I would enjoy a round table where ideas are exchanged and social interaction occurs.”
- “Institutional meetings feel dictatorial with the only interesting items on ‘chat.’”
- “The Retirees Chapter has been a great way to keep up with former colleagues and to make new friends.”

GETTING UNSTUCK

Stuck as we are in a virtual environment, it is difficult to know how to respond to this expressed desire for more social interaction. Only 37 respondents said they would be interested in Zoom breakout rooms at a chapter meeting, but 93 were not sure. The EC is not sure how this would work either. Unlike our still active colleagues, who have been teaching via Zoom for almost a year now, Retirees Chapter members have less experience with this technology. But the EC will explore whether it is possible somehow to recreate the experience of our semi-annual luncheons by having Zoom breakout rooms organized by college campus or by affinity groups (e.g., HEOs, librarians).

Another way to increase socializing among members might be to substitute a virtual experience for some of the in-person activities the chapter sponsored pre-COVID, such as walking tours or theater parties. Virtual visits to museums, briefly mentioned above, are another possibility. An advantage of doing these virtually, of course, is that they would allow members separated geographically or by immobility to take part.

Among the comments on the survey were “thanks for...sending out this survey” and “this survey was a good idea.” Your comments and responses to the survey gave us much to think about and have already changed some of what we are doing. We intend to survey our members again, possibly in the fall. But Retiree Chapter members need not wait until then to give us feedback. Write to us anytime with your ideas and concerns at retirees@pscmail.org.

See detailed survey results at the end of Turning the Page (pp. 12-14). □

WE ARE WORKING ON IT

TIAA MUST DIVEST FROM LAND GRABS

Mark Goldberg, Hunter



Land grabs are just what they sound like: farm lands owned by individuals or communities are ripped from them, often by force, legal compulsion and/or financial chicanery. Small farms are then consolidated into much larger tracts where agribusinesses can grow their crops, like soy beans or corn, mostly for the export market. Farmers who lived off of the land are then thrust into poverty without access to the food they once produced. Sustainable farming practices become a thing of the past.

This is happening around the globe, in the savannah of Brazil and the Mississippi delta on farmland owned for generations by African America farmers. TIAA, where many CUNY faculty have their retirement funds, has invested billions, directly or through its subsidiaries, in agribusiness companies whose land-grab practices lead to deforestation, labor abuses, human-rights violations, and severe climate impacts.

The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group (EJ) has initiated a campaign to get TIAA to divest from land.

As part of this campaign, our Dec. 13 meeting heard from three guests who discussed different aspects of land grabs. **Elizabeth Henderson**, a farmer herself and long-time leader in developing and fighting for rational organic-farming policies, spoke passionately about the relationship between organic practices and the reduction of greenhouse gases and energy expended, as well as preservation of healthy soil.

Maria Luisa Mendonça, research scholar in the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the CUNY Graduate Center, and co-Director of *Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos* (Network for Social Justice and Human Rights), described a seeming anomaly that puzzled her group in Brazil: they found that as acreage of land for sugarcane for ethanol production was increasing, there was a large financial loss. They soon realized that although the price of agricultural commodities was decreasing, the price of agricultural land was increasing, driven by speculation by international organizations as opposed to improving production. **One of these organizations is TIAA**, which was establishing fronts to target land, driving up its price.

The last speaker was **Tristan Quinn-Thibodeau**, a National Campaigner at ActionAid USA, focusing on biofuels, land rights, and food sovereignty. He tied together TIAA's modus operandi in pitching land as a safe investment. Tristan clearly laid out the very real financial risks to investors. He also reviewed actions other universities and professional organizations have taken to push TIAA to divest. After a lively discussion among the speakers and EJ members, we voted for a PSC resolution that calls upon TIAA and its corporate

subsidiaries to halt investments in land grabs and agribusiness and divest itself of any land already acquired.

Please join us. Our next meeting is **Mon. Feb. 8, 5:30-7:30 PM (Zoom)**. For more info contact Nancy Romer, nancyromer@gmail.com. More about the EJ Committee at: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/environmental-justice-committee>



ADJUNCT BLUES

Connie Gemson,
LaGuardia

It was over. After seventeen years, in 2014, my adjunct college teaching ended. I had taught for-credit classes on choosing a career at LaGuardia Community College's Cooperative Education Department. The department now closed and its students' internships were reassigned to other programs.



In going to class I usually I rode the number seven train, informally known as *the International Express*. This title was due to the varied immigrant groups who used this route to work, school, and home. The diversity of languages, clothing and groups on this line changed over time.

Traveling to the college, subway track work was an additional problem. Track changes meant endlessly checking the train schedule and developing alternative routes. It always took too long from my Upper West Side home to Long Island City, the site of my college. I knew there was no alternative but to get up, leave early, and begin the endless trek via subway to Queens. A cab ride was not an option; the fare would eat up my earnings. Adjunct workers developed an internal GPS system. We knew the alternate routes, the best subways or the most frequent buses. Like others, I had my favorite Long Island City place for hot coffee in the winter, iced coffee for my summer sessions. My destination was always the same but I had different strategies for getting there on different train lines. Sometimes my teaching assignment was in late afternoons or evenings. I also taught back-to-back classes. A quick bagel was lunch or dinner. My favorite slot was Saturday mornings when I greeted the security guard and saw a passing colleague in a classroom. I recalled the song *Working Nine to Five*, the spirited 1980 anthem about the daily grind. Even with all office jobs changing, stability and specific hours were present for the workers. The idea of a set place and time for work is so foreign to today's adjunct world. For part-timers, classes may be added or reduced based on the college's scheduling needs. The adjunct was the last to know.

Discovering New Careers

But like so many other adjunct teachers the pleasures of my job at LaGuardia centered around my students. When the college began in 1971, students spoke about their Queens addresses. Later

neighborhood communities changed, references to homes meant Poland, Argentina, India, Greece, the Dominican Republic, China or Nigeria.

During those early years, many students worked at LaGuardia Airport. Two African American students shared their airport stories. One flight attendant wanted to become a psychologist. "I want to handle bigger problems," was her remark. For a class assignment, she interviewed a Black Panther. A former football player, unsure of his permanent career, needed a new job. His current position involved checking all the dead bodies in special boxes when they arrived at the airport. He made sure they were all in their mandated boxes. Home health aides in my classes had limited money and even more limited time.

My sole responsibility at college was to be a student. Those enrolled at LaGuardia had more complex and demanding lives. College was a great awakening and challenge. Student lives expanded. Their opportunities increased.



But for all students their constant juggling never let up. They lived with constant and shifting demands in their lives. Occasionally babysitting plans crashed and the overworked parent

brought the offspring to class. The youngster was almost always given paper and crayons and told to behave well. Children were aware of this classroom mood. They were quiet in class. Youngsters were respectful in this place.

Looking back, I wonder how my students' lives turned out. Was their work a source of satisfaction or disappointment? How did new technology developed since their classroom days change their work activities and career prospects? At the same time I assess how much I learned, shared, and experienced in this box-like classroom setting in a former candy factory.

I remember the pre-Coronavirus story of LaGuardia Community College and the unknown destinations for us all. I think of all the adjuncts and other part-time teachers who have been laid off from their jobs after many years of devoted teaching and those still working today. And most of all I remember the students. □

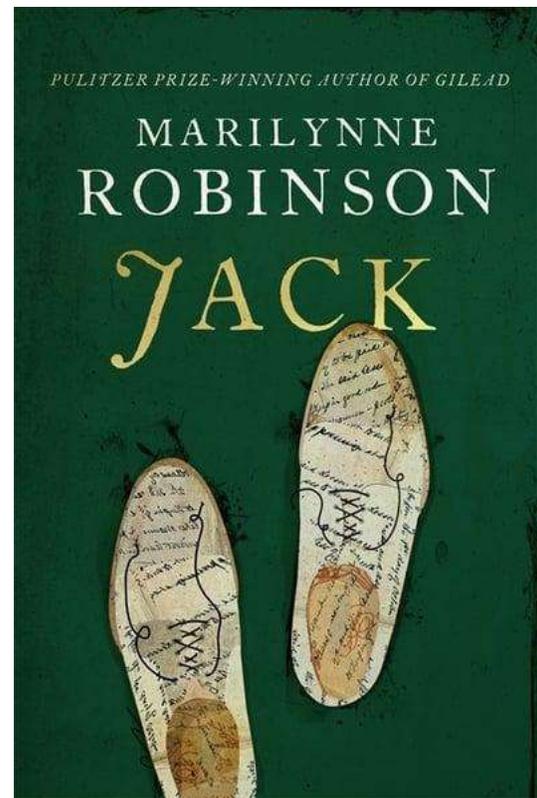
REVIEW OF MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S NOVEL *JACK*

Gail Green-Anderson, LaGuardia

As we embark on 2021, and as I complete reading *Jack* by Marilynne Robinson, let me say this: I hate current pronouncements referring to the time ahead when we will “get back to normal.” I find despair in the idea that we will return, with relief, to the “normal”—the racism and accompanying inequities—that have contributed to the suffering and death of

so many. If I am to find hope in our moment, I need to think of us as going forward towards something radically different.

Jack, Robinson's most recent novel, fuels that hope. That is not something I came looking for when I started reading the novel, but I have found it there



The novel's main characters, Jack Boughton, a white man who describes himself as “a confirmed, inveterate bum” and Della Miles, a Black woman, whom Jack describes as “a preacher's daughter, a high school teacher, a young woman with excellent prospects in life,” meet following World War II in Jim Crow St. Louis. There is much on the surface to keep them apart, and much in Robinson's portrayal to make them fall in love.

Among the elements that draw them to each other and that also reveal them to us, are the books they read. Our understanding of Jack can be shaped by his repeated references to the first two lines of Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night."

I have been one acquainted with the night./
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.

Boughton muses, "Much of the time this was his favorite poem. The second line seemed to him like very truth."

Robinson provides a compassionate portrayal of Jack's despair, without giving us easy answers concerning its origins. This portrayal could make for unbearable reading were it not for the crucial meeting between Jack and Della, not their first, that suggests a way out of despair. In an extended night-time scene, beautifully rendered by Robinson, Jack and Della speak in a cemetery where the gates are locked. Jack has intentionally gone there with a bedroll to spend the night. Della has found herself staying too long on a walk through the cemetery. Jack and Della spend the night in conversation. They are falling in love. Both know that what they are experiencing is dangerously illegal. Della, the hopeful one, speaks to the possibility of the world changing. Annihilation of the present world, as it exists in daylight, would be required for them to be safe: "It just seems to me sometimes as though—if we were the only ones left after the world ended, and we made the rules—they might work just as well." However, dawn comes; the guard opens the gates; the world has not ended.

Jack continues to wander through much of the novel. Della does not wander; she is resolute, devoted to Jack and to their "marriage" that she believes is recognized by God and sealed by their lovemaking, even if that lovemaking is outside the law and a marriage between them is not a legal possibility. We wander with Jack, hoping he will not continue to find "very truth" in Frost's second line of "Acquainted with the Night."

I hope we will not, in 2021, be "getting back to normal." Walking "back in rain" does not have to be by our choosing.

□

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the Retirees Chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT. We welcome contributions from our several thousand members: articles of special interest to retirees, short essays on your activities during this period of politics and plague, and your comments on recent publications of interest. Our newsletter collective is made up of Michael Frank, Bill Friedheim, Joan Greenbaum and Dave Kotelchuck. Please write to us at retirees@pscmail.org, with 'Newsletter' in the subject line, and visit the Retirees webpage <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

LIFE DURING WARTIME

Josh Brown, the retired director of the American Social History Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, has produced a series of weekly political illustrations, beginning in 2003 with the war in Iraq,

called Life During Wartime. You can view them by going to the entire collection, 2003- 2019, which is online at: www.joshbrownny.com/ldw.htm.

Here is one of his latest, from January 6th, a date that will certainly go down in infamy.



January 6, 2021

MORE ON SURVEY RESULTS

PSC Retirees Chapter Survey: Summary of Results (183 responses)

1. What GENERAL SUBJECTS do you think Chapter meetings should cover? Check all that apply:

Health	116
Politics and Labor	115
Social and racial justice	111
Current PSC campaigns	92
Personal finance	90
Science	83
The Arts	82

2. Possible SPECIFIC topics for chapter meetings. Check all that you would be interested attending

Welfare Fund benefits	127
Continuing educational opportunities for retirees	100
Medicare for All – what’s in it for those already on Medicare	98
Staying healthy in retirement	98
Personal Finance for retirees	83
The crisis in long-term care	71
New scientific research by CUNY faculty presented for a lay audience	70
Election reform	64
Recent work in art history by a PSC member	56
Recent work in music by a PSC member	54
Socially responsible investing (ESG)	52
CUNY history	51
Transitioning to nursing homes, Medicaid	45
Defund the police – perspectives from left to right	39
Constitutional Originalism	32

3. Have you attended Retiree Chapter meetings in person at the PSC in Manhattan?

Never	80
Occasionally	55
Often	42

4. Have you attended Retiree Chapter meetings virtually (via Zoom)?

Never	94
Occasionally	43
Often	42

5. After the pandemic is over, what format would you prefer for Chapter meetings?

Virtual (e.g. Zoom)	32
In person at the PSC	32
Hybrid (members can attend in person, but speakers are broadcast for a remote audience)	113

6. Would you be interested in participating in a Zoom chat group or breakout room (separate Zoom session) before, during, or after a Chapter meeting?

Yes	37
No	50
Not sure	93

7. Newsletter: What kind of articles would you like to see in Turning the Page?

Reviews of art exhibits, concerts, movies, books, etc.	95
In Memoriam	87
Taking classes-- in person or online	83
Current events	73
Life during COVID	70
Transitions—downsizing, moving to another state, new relationships, etc.	70
How climate change changes life in retirement	59
Books and/or articles you have recently published	52
Learning a new instrument, language, etc.	42
A Highlight of my life at CUNY	40
Trips I have taken or modifying travel for COVID	34
♣	34