

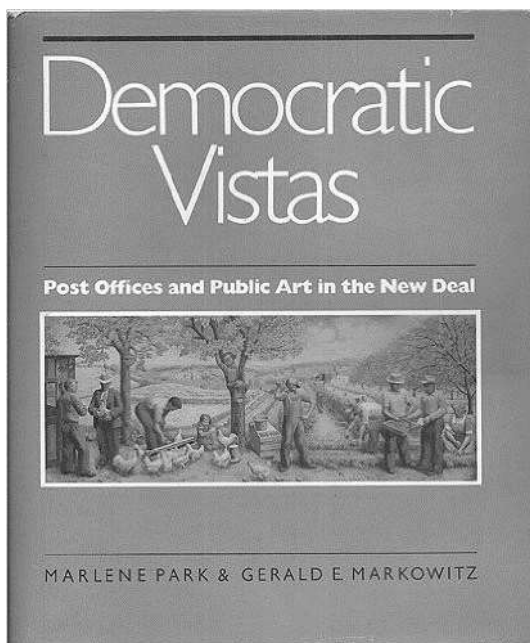


**June 2016
Academic Year**

**Issue 8
2015-2016**

**RETIREES
NEWSLETTER**

Professional Staff Congress
Joan Greenbaum, editor
psc-cuny.org/retirees



Democratic Vistas: The U.S. Treasury Department commissioned artwork for 1,100 post offices between 1934 and 1943. The result was a rich legacy of art representing the lives of ordinary Americans: 1,400 murals commissioned for over 1,000 cities. Notable among these were thirteen murals, painted in 1937 for the Bronx Post Office by noted American artist Ben Shahn and his wife Bernarda, entitled “America at Work.” The murals were under threat of destruction in 2013 as the U.S. Government prepared to close and sell the property. But intervention by the NYC Landmarks Conservancy saved the murals.

**ANNUAL JUNE PSC RETIREE
CHAPTER LUNCHEON, MONDAY,
JUNE 13.** Speaker: **Gerald
Markowitz**, Distinguished Professor,
John Jay College of Criminal Justice.
Topic: **Democratic Vistas: Post
Offices and Public Art in the New
Deal.**

Come early for the **coffee hour at
10:30 AM** with a review of the year
that was, and vote for a name for this
newsletter, followed by
the **Luncheon at 12:30 PM.**

Prof. Markowitz will tell the story of
these murals and others as part of
his narrative and slideshow in his
talk at **John Jay, 12:30 PM,
Monday, June 13** in the **Faculty
Dining Room.**

You can download
a **RESERVATION FORM** with full
details
at tinyurl.com/RTspringLuncheon.

To make your reservation,
complete the form and send it with
your check to the PSC (address is
on the form). Checks must be

received by June 6. **If you cannot make that deadline**, call Sharon Tonge at the PSC (212-354-1252) to register and to arrange to pay at the door.

THE MONTH THAT WAS

STRIKE AUTHORIZATION VOTE:

On May 12, the PSC announced the results of the recent strike authorization – **92% YES!**

The “yes” vote represented not only 92% of the ballots cast (over 10,000), but also an absolute majority of every PSC member in the bargaining unit.



YES!
92%

That 92% vote is a powerful message that gives the leadership much greater leverage at the bargaining table and in Albany as the PSC makes the case for funding a new contract with legislators. It also empowers our members on the campuses, where administrators will certainly take note of the resolve and

unity of faculty and professional staff reflected by a 92% vote.

While retirees could not participate in the strike authorization vote (except for the few who were adjuncting and hence are members of the bargaining unit), many of us provided very visible support – phone banking, demonstrating, lobbying in Albany and (some even) participating in civil disobedience.

More than forty years ago, in 1972 and 1973, significant numbers of current retirees participated in strike authorization votes. The second of those votes, conducted in June and July 1973, is particularly instructive for the current contract campaign. Just over 79% voted “yes” for strike authorization at a time when management was refusing to negotiate our first union contract and trying to bust the newly constituted PSC. The results of the vote were announced on July 8. Three days later, stalled negotiations resumed. By July 19, there was a contract agreement, subsequently ratified by a 7-to-1 margin by membership.

79% spoke volumes and provided instant leverage in the 1973 negotiations. 92% should speak even louder today.

-Bill Friedheim

MAY CHAPTER MEETING: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS, THEN AND NOW

Although the United States is considered "A Nation of Immigrants," many descendants of these immigrants want to restrict further immigration. Blending historical perspective with personal experiences, a panel of speakers enlightened the Chapter on an issue that is in the forefront of the current presidential campaign.



Peter Kwong, distinguished professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate School, noted that for over 100 years in the United States there was no restriction on immigration. In 1882 however, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act. Kwong described the political and economic climate, which led to that law, as well as to the 1924 Immigration Law, which was "Anglocentric" in its design. The 1924 law established quotas for immigration based on the number of people of each nationality as indicated in the 1890 census, thus disadvantaging newer immigrants like Eastern and Southern Europeans. And once again, all Asians were barred entry under this

law.

A new immigration law, enacted in 1965, allowed more nationalities to enter as the quotas for each country were equalized. Yet, Prof. Kwong observed, there were continued tensions between workers already in the U.S. and workers arriving to the U.S. As large numbers of Mexican laborers entered the country—some under the "guest worker" agricultural program of the 1950s and early 1960s others "illegal"—efforts in Congress arose to address the situation. In 1986, a new law enabled more than 2 million people to become legal residents if they were in the United States before January 1982. Other provisions of the 1986 Act were designed to prevent companies from hiring "illegal" workers. However, as Professor Kwong pointed out, companies would violate the law only if they "knowingly" employed undocumented workers. Proving 'intention' was difficult, so, in practice, there were no effective penalties for employers and they could exploit their workers without fear of any consequences under the law. Today, as the number of undocumented workers and their families range from estimates of 12 million to 20 million, there are calls in the political arena demanding actions ranging from mass deportation to providing a path to citizenship.

Beginning with a familiar sounding story of an attempt to cross the

border between Mexico and the United States, **Libby Garland**, associate professor of history at Kingsborough Community College, revealed that the event occurred in 1928, and that those involved were all Jews, not Mexicans. Drawing on research for her book, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States 1921-1965*, Professor Garland demonstrated how quota laws in the U.S. and political unrest and anti-Semitism in Europe led to networks set up to smuggle Jews into the United States. She described the routes employed, and the constant dynamic between the enforcers and the violators. Her research revealed that major Jewish organizations in the United States were opposed to illegal immigration, and she showed that then, as now, people will enter the United States in a variety of ways.

Anayeli Gomez put a human face on the research and historical timelines to deepen the Chapter's understanding of the immigration issues. A graduate of Kingsborough and Brooklyn College, she was brought to this country at the age of four as her parents crossed the border in a flatbed truck covered with vegetables. She shared her life story, highlighting the difficulties of a child growing up with no legal status in this country. Although she was able to complete public school and graduate from high school, entry to CUNY was impossible without a social security number, at that time.

She recounted her emotional state as her dream seemed impossible. With the help of an activist student group, she was able to enter CUNY (Today, the entry process to CUNY is the same for all applicants). Now Gomez wants to teach, but she is not allowed to file an application. Instead she works in various jobs—all below the minimum wage. Her parents will have legal status if President Obama's executive action is not overturned by the Supreme Court. She will obtain a two-year renewable work permit and will be exempt from deportation if DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is implemented.



Following the presentations by the three speakers, there was lively and informed discussion.

-Joel Berger

A New Film about Immigrants by Retiree Film Makers: A few years ago a wonderful documentary, "Bitter Bread" (Pane Amaro), described the story of the Italian emigration to the East Coast. It was a milestone in this field, and now the two authors and producers, *Gianfranco Norelli* and **Suma Kurien** (LaGuardia Community College retiree), are back with another marvelous documentary, this time about the Italian emigration to the West Coast: "Finding the Mother Lode." For more about this film about immigrants see www.findingthemothelode.com

RETIRES TOOK ON CITIFIELD IN MAY



Scoreboard at Citi Field: PSC is in the house – sort of!

On a rainy, cold May 4th, a group of PSC retirees saw the Mets beat the Braves 8-0, in a game that featured four Met home runs flying around us in the outfield. The young Stephen Matz took the win for the Mets, with the mechanical "Big Apple" below the center field scoreboard raising

for homers by the new catcher René Rivera, Asdrúbal Cabrera, and two by the laconic Lucas Duda. Keeping warm for the PSC 17 took a lot of pastrami, hot dogs, fish soup, coffee and of course, beer, as we were nicely seated near the Food Court. The event was organized by Marva Lily. Next year, we hope to try a dry, warmer day. (See photos on the website for more action pictures.)

RELATED BASEBALL STORIES: REMEMBERING JACKIE ROBINSON

Some of the PSC retiree Mets fans, not surprisingly, were old Brooklyn Dodgers fans. Others, who weren't living in Brooklyn, might have fond memories of the Dodgers' Jackie Robinson, as this story from Dave Kotelchuck illustrates.

In the summer of 1946, when I was 10 years old, the Montreal Royals of baseball's International League, came to town to play our own hometown team, the Baltimore Orioles – and Dad and I went to the game. What made the game special was the presence of Jackie Robinson, then the first African-American to play for a farm club of any major league baseball team.

Baltimore was the southern-most franchise in the International League and Jim Crow still ruled. So along with great excitement among many black and white Baltimoreans was

the anticipation of trouble with racist fans. I no longer remember who won the game that day, nor how many hits Robinson got, but I remember clearly that he got at least one hit and we went home happy, confident that he would go on to major league success. In the years following, I thrilled not only at Robinson's batting skills and aggressive base-running but at his willingness to speak his mind against racism in baseball following his two-year enforced silence [by Dodger management] on retaliation for racist slurs.



After his playing years ended a decade later, he became corporate Vice-President of a (then) major U.S. corporation, Chock Full O' Nuts, a first for an African-American. I wasn't happy when I realized his main role was director of employee relations, not a union-friendly position. A few years later, in the midst of the 1960 election campaign between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon, Robinson publicly supported Nixon!

Then he went on to active support for Nelson Rockefeller in future GOP contests. This bummed out my enthusiasm for him during his post-baseball career.

Now recently, on the 70th anniversary to his marriage to Rachel Robinson, who survives him, public television stations have begun replaying Ken Burns' video recounting of Robinson's career. This video look-back has given me some new perspectives on Robinson's life after baseball. In particular, Burns reminds us of his active support for Martin Luther King and the NAACP, both by participating in civil rights marches and fund-raising for the cause. It also reminded me that he never stopped speaking out against racism either in baseball or in the broader society, whatever his misbegotten activities (in my opinion) in electoral politics.

With some of the heat of the '50s and '60s behind us – but not the struggles, which continue – this overview of his life reminds us of his great contributions in baseball and his civil-rights activism later. As Rev. Jesse Jackson said at his funeral in 1972:

“Jackie as a figure in history was a rock in the water, creating concentric circles and ripples of new possibility.”

And this is certainly how he deserves to be remembered.

-Dave Kotelchuck

SOME HISTORY ABOUT EXPANDING THE SAFETY NET

As we have reported, the PSC Social Safety Net Working Group has been running workshops to activate people for expanding and saving the Social Safety Net. Particularly in this (endless) election season, it is worth remembering some of the history of how Social Security and the Safety Net have been expanded through collective actions in the past. If you are interested in working with our PSC group, please email us at retirees@pscmail.org.

Here are some Social Security (SS) facts that were part of a presentation by UFT Treasurer Mel Aaronson at the April membership meeting of the New York City Chapter of the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans.

- SS survivors' benefits were added in 1939.
 - Disability benefits became part of SS in 1956.
 - New York City public employees were covered by SS in 1957.
 - Public employees in 10 states are not covered by SS.
 - The COLA was added to SS benefits in 1972 when President Nixon signed legislation passed by Congress.
 - Federal employees were included in SS in 1983.
 - SS income became taxable in 1983.
- Self-employed people had to pay individual SS taxes as well as their non-existent employer's taxes in 1983.
 - Members of Congress were covered in 1984.

Now 95% of Americans are covered by Social Security and 170 million workers contribute to SS. The struggle continues to prevent Congress from lowering benefits and to expand actual amounts to all.

-Francine Brewer

VERIZON STRIKE SUPPORTED BY PSC MEMBERS



At the last PSC Delegate Assembly, delegates were asked to 'adopt' a Verizon store near them to join their picket lines. Meanwhile, members of our Retirees Chapter have been active with the striking Verizon workers. What follows are some of their accounts. Given that these reports were written before the tentative settlement just announced, the calls for support are on hold

pending ratification of the agreements.

First, some background on the strike: In one of the longest and largest national strikes in recent U.S. history, 40,000 Verizon workers, members of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have been on strike since April 12. On May 1 Verizon cut off their health benefits. Then on May 17 Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez sent in a federal mediator with the consent of labor and management to help seek agreement to end the strike.

Key issues in the strike included Verizon's intention *to outsource jobs* to other countries, which the current contract forbids. Also Verizon Wireless retail workers, who joined the union in 2014, have not been able to secure first contract. And as ever, workers were striking to protect their wages and negotiated benefits.

What do the striking workers do? They build, install and maintain the state-of-the-art FiOS broadband system, and ensure that the millions of customers reliant on copper networks receive high quality service. According to a statement by 88 Congressional Representatives on May 20: "Verizon Wireless retail store workers and technicians work in one of the most profitable sectors of the economy." The union reports that Verizon has made \$39 billion in

profits over the past three years. The Congressional representatives went on to say:

"We are troubled that the lack of a negotiated labor agreement could increase the likelihood that good jobs will be offshored to the Philippines, Mexico and other locations overseas or outsourced to low-wage, non-union domestic contractors."

Remembering the old union motto that "An injury to one is an injury to all," PSC members helped the Verizon strikers in their time of need.

-Dave Kotelchuck

A report from the field:

Communication Workers of America (CWA) from Massachusetts to Virginia were on strike against Verizon for six weeks. It was potentially a breakthrough strike against job loss and outsourcing, but Verizon's main goal was to break the union. One of Verizon's tactics involved dispersing workers, whom they want to move for month-long stints to different sites. In addition to Verizon stores, workers successfully picketed hotels, where scabs from out of town were being housed. The Verizon workforce is racially and ethnically diverse, but there are few women in the better paying technical jobs. Many women work in low paying jobs in the mostly non-union Verizon Wireless stores.

When some PSC members joined a picket line with our union signs, the workers were very appreciative and we found them to be very militant and committed. They have already seen numerous layoffs and are fighting for their jobs. The CWA is one of the more progressive unions—it endorsed Bernie Sanders, who has supported the strike—and the national union under President Chris Shelton was fully committed to the strike. Rank and file workers organized a solidarity committee with members of various unions and radical organizations and worked to get support from the community as well as link their struggle to those of other unions like the PSC. To this end they held forums in Queens and another in Brooklyn.

-Jackie DiSalvo

CONNECTING WITH RETIREES AROUND THE COUNTRY California Dreaming

Greetings from San Francisco! As a couple who left the NYS nest, Lynn Byk (30 years at LaGCC), and I bask in the beauty, politics and weather of the Bay Area every day. That said, there is nothing like the instant camaraderie that we experience when we come upon other native New Yorkers. Instant recognition, instant simpatico. We would be delighted to hear from others who have resettled and who might be equally interested in exploring our shared CUNY connection.

-Marvin Weinbaum (LaGuardia, John Jay) mweinbaum@ggu.edu

PSC Retirees, if you would like to get together with others in your area, please email us at retirees@pscmail.org with 'Connect' in the subject line.

COMING UP

Summer is upon us, and even retirees take a break. Our next Newsletter will come out after Labor Day. We welcome your reflections and announcements. Some of the things we have covered this past year include new book announcements, short memoir type reflections, art works, union solidarity actions, and how transitions to retirement work in practice (and yes, some theories). Please send us something that you might want included by August 30th. Send to retirees@pscmail.org and note 'Newsletter' in the subject line. And enjoy your summer! Those of us retired, like myself for 8 years now, still think (and sometimes act) in academic calendar years. I wonder if this goes away?

-Joan Greenbaum

SAVE THE DATES:

September 12: Noon luncheon for New Retirees, and 1 PM Chapter Meeting with Barbara Bowen on the State of the Union, and Ruth Milkman (Murphy Institute) on the State of the Union Movement

Monday, October 3: Upcoming Elections: What's at Stake

IN MEMORIUM

**JUDITH
BRONFMAN
1934-2016**

From the turn of the new century until her death on May 7, Judith Bronfman was a mainstay of the Retirees Chapter.

Judith's work spoke volumes. She got things done – quiet, unassuming and collegial in work style; a consummate professional and orchestrator in her mastery of detail.

For years, she oversaw our semi-annual luncheons – events that called for planning and hard work on multiple levels; program, publicity, food, set-up, space, facilities down to the most mundane minutiae about audio equipment. She always made the successful end result seem so seamless and, amazingly, was supervising the nuts and bolts of our coming June luncheon just days before she died.

We had planned to honor Judith's work at our June 13th luncheon. Sadly, that will now happen posthumously.

Judith left her mark upon the academic retiree community as a long-standing member of the PSC Retirees Chapter as well as the Retirees Council of our statewide affiliate, the New York State United Teachers.

Judith's life was a rich mosaic: Loving mother and grandmother; Professor of English at John Jay; an accomplished scholar of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer; and the ultimate Upper West Side community activist. She was ubiquitous in her community, quietly moving and shaking on many levels: Her coop board, the Park River Independent Democrats, the local community board, the Westside Chamber of Commerce and multiple charities and book groups.

We valued her work and her many acts of kindness and generosity. What a privilege and joy it was to collaborate with Judith. We deeply miss her, honor her memory and celebrate her life.