

JUNE 2018



Joan Greenbaum, Editor
Academic Year 2017-8 No. 8

psc-cuny.org/retirees

LUNCHEON, MONDAY, JUNE 11
12:30 PM

VENUE HAS CHANGED*
PSC UNION HALL*
61 BROADWAY/ 16TH FLOOR)
11 AM COFFEE HOUR



*[*VENUE CHANGE: After telling us that we could have the venue at no charge, Baruch College, a month after we made the reservation, informed us that there would be a very hefty charge for the space. We immediately switched the venue to the PSC Union Hall—same date and time, same menu and same program. Everyone who made a*

reservation will be informed of the changed venue by mail and where possible, email and phone. Obviously, all reservations made for the Baruch venue are valid for the PSC Union Hall.]

THE POLITICAL USES OF CINEMA:

Jonathan Buchsbaum, professor of media studies at Queens College and the Graduate Center and author of numerous books on cinema, will explore the political dimension of film from the 1930s to the present. Using video clips, his presentation will focus on particular moments in the political uses of cinema: state-sponsored documentary films in the '30s; the cinema-verité of the '60s; and in the contemporary period, Michael Moore's work.

Professor Buchsbaum has curated the PSC's film series, Labor Goes to the Movies, since its inception.

There will be an **11 AM coffee hour** preceding the luncheon. The coffee hour is our yearly round up of what we as a chapter have done and what we plan to do. All are welcome, but don't fill up on pastry before the big lunch!

For more information about the program and menu, go to psc-cuny.org/retire-luncheon. Sorry to report that WE ARE NO LONGER TAKING RESERVATIONS. There has been a huge surge of interest in this program, meaning that we've literally run out of space. (The same would have been true at the original venue.)

THE MONTH THAT WAS **TEACHERS ON THE MARCH**

-Glenn Kissack, retiree Hunter Schools

The subject of the May chapter meeting was "Public-Sector Workers Rising" and we were fortunate to have two knowledgeable speakers: our own PSC Treasurer, Sharon Persinger, a native of West Virginia who

remains in touch with WV residents, and Sean Petty, a pediatric emergency room nurse who is on the board of directors of the New York State Nurses Association.

Sharon began by paying tribute to the inspiring 9-day strike of West Virginia teachers whose walkout closed schools in every one of the state's 55 counties. The walkouts succeeded in winning 5% raises for all state employees, not only for school workers. Sharon reported that the issue that precipitated the walkout was the rise in health insurance premiums under the state's Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA). Because teacher unions in WV do *not* have collective bargaining rights, when teachers want to press their issues, they must go en masse to the state capitol in Charleston and make their demands to the state legislature, which they've repeatedly done.

The sharp rise in health costs affected not only teachers but also 200,000 people in West Virginia, 12% of the population who receive health coverage under PEIA. Sharon made the point that teachers and the public have shared material concerns, so when teachers—who are closely embedded in their WV communities—protested unaffordable health premiums and decreased funding for schools, they were speaking on behalf of parents, students and many in the community. In closing, Sharon also pointed out that (1) teachers have proposed paying for their salary increases by raising taxes on the gas companies and not on other workers, and (2) the problem of high health premiums has not been resolved, it is only being studied.

Sean Petty began by stating that we're seeing something in the U.S. we haven't seen in a while: a strike wave. The teachers strike in WV inspired walkouts and mass rallies at the capitols in Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona. More recently,

20,000 workers at the University of California—custodians, gardeners, lab technicians, nurse aides, and truck drivers, all members of AFSCME Local 3299—conducted a three-day strike, with sympathy strikes from CWA and California nurses. Here in NYC, graduate students at Columbia University and The New School—locals of UAW—have gone on strike recently.



Sean pointed out that the strike in WV was the culminating response to years of: cuts to education; the continuing results of the 2008 recession; the decline of the coal industry and the loss of well-paying jobs; and the rise of social misery, as exemplified in the state's opioid epidemic. People in WV are looking for an answer. Some believe Trump's promise to bring back coal production. That partially explains why he beat Clinton 68% to 25% in the 2016 election, although Sean argued that another factor is that people don't see the Democratic Party as a defender of working people.

Sean finished by making a few special points:

- The strike in WV was a *school workers* strike. *All* school employees walked out—bus drivers, cafeteria workers, teachers,

aides. The decision of the bus drivers to join the strike was huge, because superintendents realized they had to close the schools at that point.

- Strikes can be a forceful political weapon, more powerful than a host of lobbying days. In all of the states where teachers walked out, they gained more than they would have without striking. In Arizona, teachers were offered 2% salary increases and no restoration of the \$1.1 billion reduction in state school spending since 2008. After the walkout, they achieved at least a 10% salary increase and a \$400 million restoration of money for schools. The teachers are now sponsoring a referendum to raise taxes on the wealthy and restore the remaining \$700 million.

- The wave of strikes in right-to-work states has given us confidence that even if the Janus decision is unfavorable and we lose agency fees, we will be able to have a vibrant labor movement.

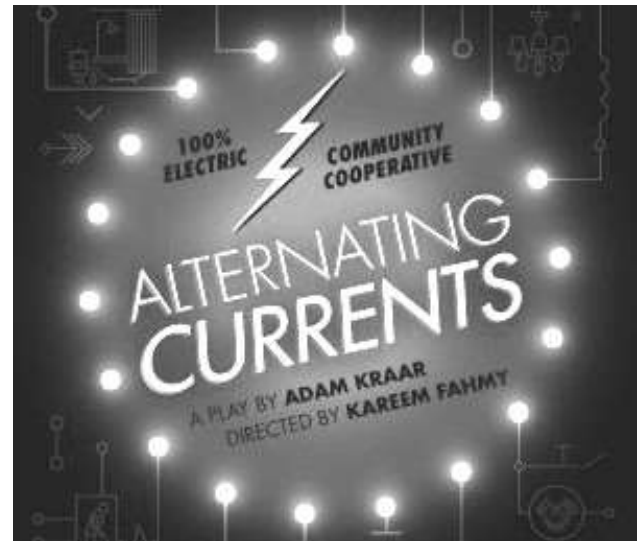
Following the insightful presentations, a full house of chapter members, as always, asked questions or offered interesting observations. □

ALTERNATING CURRENTS

-Joan Greenbaum, retiree LaGuardia CC

On May 6 more than 30 PSC members and friends poured into a cozy Urban Stages theater on West 30th St. to see the Working Theater's production of "Alternating Currents." The play presented an engagingly complex tale of community and race relations in the Queens housing development called "Electchester," built by the electrical workers union IBEW local 3. While written by Adam Kraar and directed by Kareem Fahmy, it was developed through a process where the Working Theater's Five Boroughs/One City initiative worked from conversations with residents of

the actual Electchester and the neighboring Pomonok Housing.



David Esler, the scenic designer, created a set that marvelously moved from place to place with a backdrop of—not surprisingly—bright electric lights. The cast of six, with a wealth of off- and on-Broadway credits, played a variety of convincing roles creating a sense of people and place around a central theme of what makes community.

Look for an announcement of their next production next season. □

THROUGH THE RAINDROPS

-Joan Greenbaum

An unusually hardy and extremely bedraggled group of PSC retirees gathered in the left outfield of Citified on May 16 to watch the Mets fail to score until two outs into the ninth inning. While our seats, which had good sight lines between rain drops, were sheltered from the pouring rain, our gang of mostly those over 70 years were squeezed into a section of bouncing school children who were mostly under twelve years of age. And yes, the Mets lost to Toronto by a score of 12-1. This time, however, the announcement on the Jumbotron in center field almost got our

name right—it welcomed the PS CUNY Retirees Chapter—the case of the missing “C”. We may have had bad weather and a bad game, but we did enjoy good company.



Wait till next year. □

NEWS AND NOTES

CAFETERIA WORKERS UPDATE

-Steve Leberstein, retiree City College

A spirited rally and press conference took place outside John Jay College on Tuesday, May 8, organized by the Retail Action Project of the Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union. The union released its report on the conditions facing CUNY’s cafeteria workers, “Struggling to Feed Their Own Families: A Survey of CUNY’s Food Service Workers,” and heard greetings from Leticia James, NYC’s Public Advocate, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. RWDSU President Stuart Applebaum sharply called out MBJ, a CUNY cafeteria operator, for its treatment of workers and called on the college “to do the right thing” and cancel their contract. Applebaum said, “If President Karol Mason won’t, then the college should be re-named the John Jay College of Criminals,” concluding to chants of “Shut Them Down!”

I brought greetings from Barbara Bowen, pointed out PSC members with solidarity signs, and told the workers that they have the power to change those [disgraceful] conditions by engaging in collective action. In January, MBJ, the cafeteria operator at

four CUNY colleges (BMCC, LaGuardia CC, NYC Tech & John Jay), was cited for violating federal law by retaliating against its workers for their collective efforts to better their working conditions. When the union RWDSU learned of the attempted retaliation, it immediately filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board and notified the CUNY Legal Department. The NLRB recently ruled that the ULP charge had merit, and the CUNY General Counsel’s Office notified MBJ that violations of labor law would not be tolerated. Board of Trustees Chair Bill Thompson said that Board members were “outraged” and were “committed to ensuring that food service workers enjoy dignity in their workplaces on our campuses” and that “it is something we are not going to let slide.”

When our PSC Retiree Chapter Executive Committee learned of this latest incident, it promptly cancelled its June luncheon at the John Jay cafeteria. It is now scheduled to be held in the PSC Union Hall, as it was last year.

CUNY’s pledge to remedy the wretched conditions of cafeteria workers consisted of centralizing the hiring of food vendors at all the colleges, requiring potential vendors to abide by all relevant labor laws and pledging neutrality in a unionization campaign. In the past, the vendors were chosen by the Auxiliary Benefits Corporations, with elected representatives of the faculty and student government at each college. The new system was already at work to replace MBJ, whose contract was supposedly cancelled when it was charged with unfair labor practices. But at the beginning of May the John Jay administration announced that CUNY had failed to find a qualified vendor and the college had renewed its MBJ contract. Vice President for Finance & Administration Steven Titan announced that the college had gotten concessions from MBJ,

including thousands of “free food vouchers” and an annual \$5,000 student scholarship.

Would their own workers be eligible for the food vouchers? □

MYTH AND REALITY: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN NEW YORK CITY

-Tom Angotti, retiree Hunter College

Since billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg branded New York City as a world leader in environmental sustainability, it has become more difficult for us to discern the reality of what is actually taking place. Bloomberg created myths that were seconded by a host of economic boosters who claimed that high density is *prima facie* evidence for more energy efficient, necessary for mass transit, and the antidote to suburban sprawl.

The truth is not so simple. Throughout its history, New York City, the global center of capital, has been an environmental laggard despite the higher densities at its core. Lawsuits forced it to comply with federal requirements on air pollution, wastewater treatment and ocean dumping, yet the city still fails to fully comply in many ways. After contaminating large swaths of the city with landfills, the city finally was forced to shut them down, though they remain toxic. Industrial waste continues to pollute waterfront areas. The city’s smaller per-capita energy footprint is overshadowed by its hyper-consumption, hyper-waste and hyper-pollution. And it obscures the long history of environmental injustice affecting the health and welfare of communities of color.

The branding continues. Bloomberg launched PlaNYC, the city’s first long-term sustainability plan, in 2007, and Bill de Blasio followed it with OneNYC, which threw in the ideas of resilience and equity, the latest themes prompted by the

devastation of Superstorm Sandy and promoted by establishment foundations. However, these plans build on the myth of New York City as a model for environmental policy and fail to address the deep historic patterns of environmental injustice.

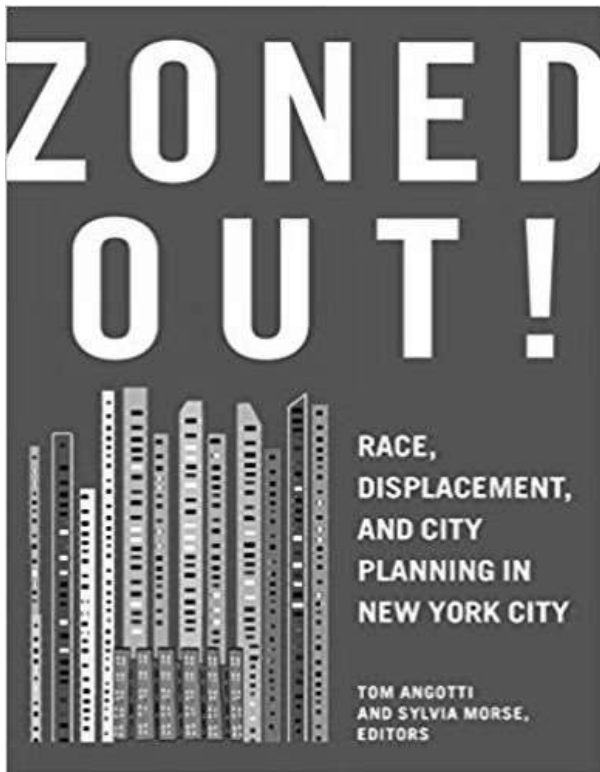


Bloomberg’s PlaNYC was essentially a growth plan dressed up in green. It was premised on the prediction—essentially a self-fulfilling prophecy—that the city must grow to accommodate a million new residents. The assumption is that that growth will be green. This is a gift to real estate developers, who might build more energy-efficient buildings, which nonetheless, have external environmental impacts that are not counted. It included flashy gimmicks like the Million Tree program and piggy-backs on reforms that were in place long before Bloomberg took office. For example, the plan pledges to complete the city’s 1997 Bicycle Master Plan, but the plan is still far from completion and looks nothing like the advanced bikeway networks in Copenhagen and Amsterdam.

Bill de Blasio followed Bloomberg’s drive for new real estate development. He re-branded it as progressive and necessary in order to build and retain affordable housing, eschewing Bloomberg’s outright advocacy for building the luxury city. De Blasio instead doubled down on the myths, promoted by big real estate, that high densities like those in the Manhattan core

are *de facto* better for the environment and necessary to promote affordable housing.

De Blasio's environmental and resiliency policies, in practice, are very much the same as Bloomberg's. They are premised on the neoliberal philosophy that private investment is the key to public good and luxury development trickles down. One form of the density myth is Transit-Oriented Development – i.e., high densities promote mass transit. New Yorkers remain incredulous as they watch the mass transit system fall apart (it should be called Development-Oriented Transit).



While Bloomberg rezoned 40% of the city's land, de Blasio chose 15 neighborhoods, mostly communities of color, for development. He remains oblivious to the intense opposition from residents and small businesses who see new development as feeding displacement. De Blasio continues to pursue high-rise luxury development on large swaths of the waterfront that are vulnerable to flooding while at the same time doing little to sustain the public

housing blocks and low-income residents there. The unspoken policy is one of resilience for the rich while the rest take part in endless meetings about resilience and prepare to scramble to find higher ground. This is climate injustice, green gentrification and disaster capitalism.

Tom Angotti is a member of the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group. Related publications by Tom include: Is New York's Sustainability Plan Sustainable?, a paper presented to the joint conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning and Association of European Schools of Planning (ACSP/AESOP), Chicago, July 2008.

Zone Out: Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City (Edited with Sylvia Morse)

<http://www.urpub.org/books/zonedout>.

2017. □

NY HEALTH ACT PASSES ASSEMBLY (again)

-Dave Kotelchuck, retiree Hunter

On May 15, the New York State Assembly for a fourth time passed the New York State Health Act (A5062), this time by a vote of 92-52. As we have reported, the Act would provide "universal, comprehensive health care to all New Yorkers without premiums, co-pays, deductibles, or limited provider networks," according to its lead Assembly sponsor Richard Gottfried. This single-payer plan now goes to the NYS Senate (S3525), where slightly less than half of all Senators have now pledged to support it.

Buoyed by the Assembly vote and a recent resolution of support from the PSC Delegate Assembly, members of the Social Safety Net Committee have mobilized PSC members and CUNY students for the Tuesday, June 5 Single Payer and New York Health Act rally in Albany.

Buses will leave from major sites around NYC at various times from 6-7 AM. To get a seat on a bus, you must register by May 29 at <https://www.nyhcampaign.org/lobbyday2018> Suggested ticket price: \$25-50 RT.

Currently over one million New Yorkers lack any health insurance, according to the NY State Dept. of Health.

“We should be able to go to the doctor when we need to, without worrying whether we can afford it. We should choose our doctors and hospitals without worrying about network restrictions. We deserve health coverage for all of us, paid for based on our ability to pay, not what the market will bear. I’m proud the Assembly has passed the New York Health Act,” said Assemblymember Gottfried. “I look forward to working with a great community of advocates ... to enact it into law.”



New York Health has been endorsed by the NYS Academy of Family Physicians, NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, NYS Nurses Association, Committee of Interns and Residents, Doctors Council SEIU, NY chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program, SEIU 1199, NYS AFL-CIO, Communications Workers of America, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1056 and 1179, United Auto Workers 9 & 9A, UFCW Local 1500, Capital District Area Labor Federation, Local 32BJ SEIU, NYSUT, United Federation of Teachers, Working Families Party, Green Party, Citizen Action,

Statewide Senior Action Council, NYPIRG, League of Women Voters, and others. □



-Jackie DiSalvo, retiree Baruch College

The Baruch Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly to reject the College’s adoption of the CIA’s Signature School Program. As reported in last month’s *Turning the Page*, the program would have given the CIA unique access to Baruch’s internationally diverse student body through on-campus interviews, workshops, and networking with student organizations. Since the faculty had not been consulted and has voted to reject the program, it is not certain that the Administration will go ahead with it.

A well-attended forum held by Baruch’s PSC chapter in April, focused on the CIA program. At the forum, David Price, Anthropology professor at St Martin’s University, pointed out that the CIA program would have potentially negative effects on course content and that it could undermine faculty research abroad. In a room hung with posters documenting some of the CIA’s notorious interventions in Chile, Indonesia, Nicaragua and Vietnam, Johanna Fernandez, Baruch professor of Black and Latino Studies, spoke about the CIA’s actions in other countries. □

ESSAY: ON BEING MONOLINGUAL

-Constance Gemson, retiree
LaGuardia CC

All my grandparents had firm roots in the United States soil. They lacked romantic dreams about the old country. Their speech was fully American via Brooklyn.

Yiddish was their secret code I never understood. My elders used the phrases as spice in their daily words. English was the main menu. Yiddish's homey qualities were present. Mama Loshen sounded welcoming with its hybrid of German and Hebrew. German sounded harsh and militaristic, yet it was the language of Beethoven and Mozart.

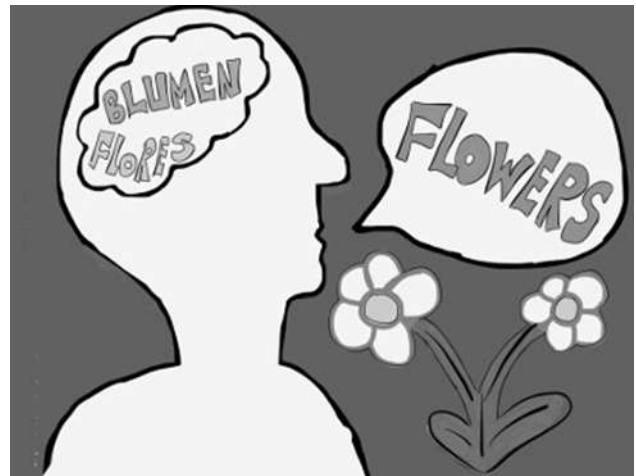
My father's father spoke English easily. The reason was simple. He came over from Russia when he was two. Through hard work, perseverance and multiple part-time jobs, he graduated from City College in 1906. He put himself through college by tutoring immigrants for twenty-five cents an hour, a good rate. City College tuition was free, and that made his entire college experience possible. He was a coach at Boy's High School in Brooklyn, then an elite place of education.

His wife, my grandmother, came over from "the old country" with her parents. She loved playing Chopin waltzes from memory. Her father got a job repairing watches in a small store and "spoke a fine German."

My other two grandparents were Brooklyn born and raised. My grandfather's passion was singing music from Italian operas. She taught kindergarten where native speakers were prized for their clear diction.

In Spanish, I knew the difference between the informal *tu* and the formal *usted*. *Tu* meant casual contact between peers and *usted* was for elders as a sign of respect. When I asked when to use the different forms of address, I was told you use the

informal, when you "are invited." One Mexican used the informal to pray. "Because God is my friend," he said. A woman from Spain favored the formal *usted* for her religious life. Most are struck by a linguistic choice they did not notice when in their church community. Mexicans spoke at a slower pace. Puerto Rican Spanish featured the drama of speed. When I spoke Spanish, I danced with my hands. Spanish from Spain had a different cadence. Newspapers and posters in Spanish were easier to follow to assess each word slowly.



Living near a Korean-owned deli, I learned from the owners: "hello, thank you, you're welcome." Native speakers say I have a good accent. I am fascinated by Swedish rhythm, like a sing-song aria. When I lived in that country I remembered when all the Swedes present spoke English to welcome me as the only American at a party. Sometimes, their English sounded quaint. "It is sunny today. Do you want to sit in the shadows?" Years ago in Sweden, the phrase for immigrants to a recent newcomer was, "the black haired one." I never spoke Swedish so it was hard to judge the context. Was the term descriptive or racist? The hidden meaning was missing. Now this phrase is obsolete and outdated.

Caribbean slang was always expressive. "Don't get on my last nerve" was the response to someone who is annoying. What a wonderful description!

Through all these encounters I wondered how rich my world would be if I was more than an English only speaker. □

READERS WRITE & EDITORIAL NOTES

NEW RESEARCH PROJECT FOR FAIR ADMISSIONS

Lawrence Rushing, retiree from LaGuardia Community College, is spearheading an important research project on the diminishing numbers of people of color at CUNY's selective colleges. He writes: "Did you know that the percentage of first-time freshman enrollment of Black students at Harvard and Columbia (14%) is greater than Black freshman enrollment at Baruch (9.2%), Hunter (9%) and Queens College(8%).

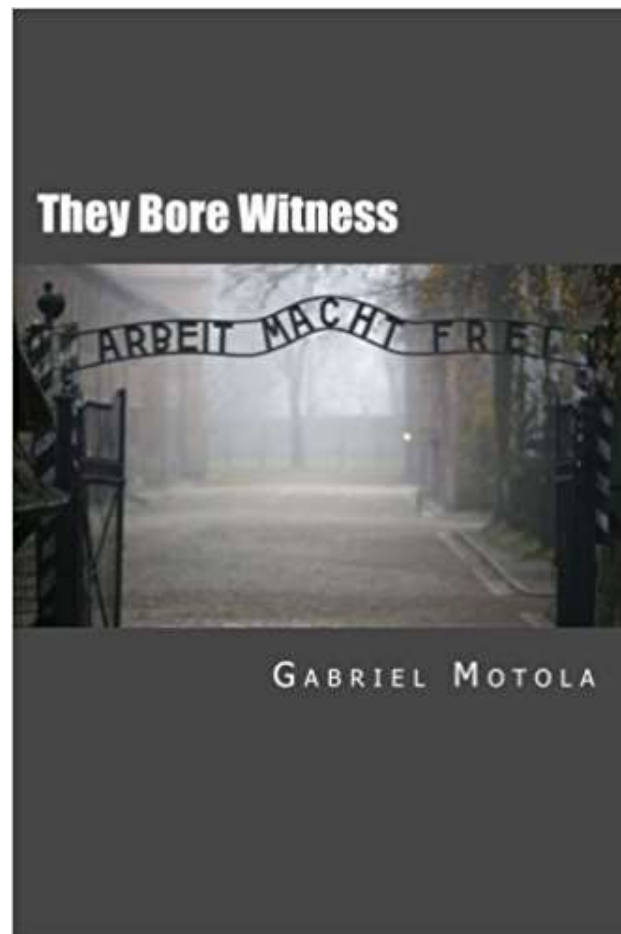
A new Retirees Task Force is being formed to examine underrepresentation of people of color at CUNY. It will develop strategies for raising awareness and correcting the situation. We welcome interested retirees to join us. Please contact Larry Rushing lrushing@aol.com. □

PLAYWRITING WORKSHOP PRODUCES

Connie Gemson, retiree and member of the Retirees Executive Committee, participated in a PSC sponsored workshop on playwriting about care-giving. The short plays written and performed by PSC-CUNY members who are involved with the care of a family member were performed at the Graduate Center on May 22. The plays focus on the care relationship, the labor involved, and its impact on the life and work of CUNY faculty, staff and retirees. The featured plays were written in a playwriting workshop led by Working Theater's Joe White as part of "The Labor of Care Archive: Caregiver Narratives from CUNY

and its Communities," organized by Kathy McDonald, as part of the Mellon Seminar on Public Engagement and Collaborative Research. □

NEW BOOK



Gabriel Motola, retiree from Bronx Community College, tells us about her new book, *They Bore Witness*, a Trade Paperback Original.

The essays in *THEY BORE WITNESS* probe the writings of the major authors who endured the horror of the Holocaust in the camps or hiding in plain sight. These European and Israeli authors are among the finest writers their countries have produced, regarded as such by literary and social critics in their own as well as those in other lands. Whatever literary techniques employed—realism, magic realism, stream of consciousness, or variations thereof—

these men and women, in being forced to confront head-on the issues of good and evil, of social and moral responsibility, of life and death, have produced a body of work that goes beyond the specifics of their own time and place. The book is available through Amazon and on order from local bookstores.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Our Retirees chapter has been a driving force within the union, responsible for initiating the Social Safety Net Committee and the Environmental Justice Working Group. In addition to our monthly meetings and semiannual luncheons we participate in the Legislative Committee and provide a sizeable force for Albany and City Council lobbying, as well as critical support for the New York Health Act.

The chapter is currently planning programs for the 2018-19 academic year. If you would like to submit ideas for programs, write or otherwise contribute to *Turning the Page* or any of our ongoing and new activities please write to: retirees@pscmail.org ☐

RETIREE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Retiree EC, the policy making body of the chapter, meets at 10:30 AM before every chapter meeting (except the January and June luncheons) at the PSC office. All members are welcome to attend and participate. Decisions are generally made by consensus. The chapter officers who sit on the EC are:

CHAPTER CHAIR

Bill Friedheim*

VICE CHAIR

John Hyland

SECRETARY

Eileen Moran

OFFICERS AT LARGE

Joel Berger
Francine Brewer
Connie Gemson

DELEGATES*

Jackie DiSalvo
John Hyland
David Kotelchuck
Cecelia McCall
Eileen Moran
Jim Perlstein

ALTERNATE DELEGATES

Miriam Balmuth
Judy Barbanel
Joan Greenbaum
Marva Lilly
Robert Wurman

WELFARE FUND ADVISORY

Irwin Yellowitz

RETIREE REPRESENTATIVES: PSC EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Joan Greenbaum*
Steve Leberstein*

*Bill Friedheim, as chapter chair, and Joan Greenbaum and Steve Leberstein, as members of the PSC Executive Council, are also DA delegates. ☐