



**DRUM
MAJOR**
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY

Progressive competition in the marketplace of ideas

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From Fernando Ferrer

PRESIDENT, DRUM MAJOR INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

It is an honor to serve as President of the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy. My commitment to protecting and extending the gains of the civil rights movement is deeply personal; I was able to attend college because of a scholarship created in honor of Dr. King's memory, after his assassination.

In more than two decades of public service work, I have seen that the dreams of equality, fairness and justice that characterized the civil rights movement have not been wholly achieved. The problems of poverty, racism and disenfranchisement are still with us in varying forms.

People are hungry for new approaches to public policy that are based on principles of fairness, justice and equality. Yet, inserting a progressive viewpoint into public debate is increasingly difficult. Policy institutes and think tanks on the other side of the political spectrum are well funded, highly-organized, and media-friendly. You see them represented on the editorial pages and the Sunday morning talk shows. But most importantly, you see those opinions reflected in the making of policy.

Recently, the Drum Major Institute sponsored a series of focus groups inviting people in the forefront of social change work to discuss broader issues of policy formation. Over and over, participants expressed a need to change the terms of the public policy debate and insert progressive values. Over and over they lamented that the demands of providing direct services, organizing, and advocating, leave them unable to do anything but react to the actions of the right.

The policy voices at the other end of the political spectrum have had the advantage in public discourse for a number of years. While it is unfortunate that progressives have been absent from the debate for so long, there is opportunity here as well. The intransigence of social problems shows that the old policies have not been universally effective. We need to gather data, create long-term agendas and coherently and effectively communicate a different vision.

The articles that follow, on issues ranging from expansion of the franchise to non-citizens, to the importance of extending unemployment insurance, are compelling and articulate policy pieces that represent the progressive ideal that governments act to protect the interests of the people.

Good Business: Why New York's Business Community Should Defend Public Universities and Their Students

BY MALIK LEWIS / APRIL 2003

The public universities of New York are an indispensable part of the state's economic and social fabric. Together, the two institutions enroll more than 800,000 students, representing every social class and community in New York, on more than 80 campuses in the state. As part of a continuum of educational achievement in this state, forty percent of graduating seniors in New York high schools continue on to State and City University schools to receive their bachelors and associates degrees.¹ Upon graduating, eighty percent of State and City University alumni continue to live and work in New York, contributing \$15 billion in revenue to the state every year, providing everything from health care services to classroom instruction to business savvy in New York's hospitals, grade schools, and boardrooms.²

While the estimated return to New York State on every dollar spent on public education is nearly 24 to 1, the social value of publicly funded higher education in New York is immeasurable.³

However, despite the regenerative economic value of public higher education in New York, it has not been paid its due respect.

In 1995, Governor George E. Pataki cut the State University of New York operating budget by \$200 million and championed the largest one-time tuition increase in the history of New York public higher education, forcing 29,000 prospective public university students out of the market for marketable skills.⁴

This year, in an attempt to plug what is expected to be an \$11.3 billion budget gap, the governor has proposed to cut SUNY and CUNY budgets again, this time by \$184 million and \$87 million respectively.⁵ Additionally, he has proposed to cut the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) designed to provide financial assistance to high-performing low-income students by \$82 million and saddle the remaining 40% of public university students not receiving financial aid with a \$1,200 tuition increase.⁶

¹ State University of New York, <http://www.suny.edu>.

² Professional Staff Congress (CUNY), <http://www.psc-cuny.org/>.

³ Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Ways and Means and New York State Finance Committees, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, The City University of New York, February 11, 2003.

⁴ John Giuffo, "Pataki's SUNY Shock," *The Village Voice*, February 12-18, 2003.

⁵ NYPIRG Higher Education Campaign, "The Facts on Governor Pataki's 2003-2004 Higher Education Budget Proposal," January 29, 2003, http://www.nypirg.org/higher_ed/releases/budget012903.html.

⁶ *Ibid*

Relying on the conservative conventional wisdom that taxes kill jobs, and speedy economic recovery is best achieved through spending cuts, the governor has offered New Yorkers a choice—a choice between “jobs and taxes.”⁷

However, while the jury is still out on whether taxes, or service cuts, or a combination of the two, will ultimately best serve the state on the rough road towards economic recovery, there is no deliberating that a tuition hike levied on SUNY and CUNY students is a tax nonetheless. In fact, it is the very definition of a “job killing tax”—killing the thousands of jobs that would be filled by future public university graduates.

New York public university graduates overwhelmingly live and work in New York. They earn more than their non-degree holding cohorts, work more than their cohorts, and contribute more to the New York State economy in the form of taxes than their cohorts. Policies that build barriers between the average New Yorker and a college education crumble the foundation of a sound New York State economy, and weaken the state as a whole.

The New York business community should rally to the defense of New York’s public universities and their students because it’s just good business. They are your board members, work force, consumer-base, and children. A defense of public higher education in New York State is a capital investment in the future of New York State businesses.

Public Universities Strengthen New York

New York’s current economic crisis, exacerbated by a state revenue deficit, requires that a wide variety of city and state agencies will have to endure cuts, and taxpayers, who rely on those services, will additionally have to pay more to plug the remaining hole. Across the board, New Yorkers understand this fiscal reality and marginally support combinations of responsible service cuts and tax increases as a remedy.⁸

But no other New York constituency has been saddled with as high a tax increase as the state’s public university students—41 percent in the form of a tuition hike! The governor’s penny-wise but pound-foolish proposal of shifting much of New York’s fiscal burden onto its public university students is expected to save the state \$310 million that would be otherwise spent on public universities, and raise an additional \$340 million in revenue by increasing the amount of tuition public university students are required to pay.^{9 10}

⁷ Governor George E. Pataki, 2003 State Budget Address, January 29, 2003.

⁸ Marist Institute for Public Opinion Poll, March 12, 2002, <http://www.maristpoll.marist.edu/docs/nycpolls/020312my.htm> [Question: The city is currently facing a budget deficit. In order to reduce the deficit, do you prefer to: cut programs and services, eliminate city jobs, or increase taxes? Answer: 24% cut services, 36% raise taxes]

⁹ John Giuffo, “Pataki’s SUNY Shock,” The Village Voice, February 12-18, 2003.

The Governor's short-run analysis glosses over the real long-term value provided by public universities to New York State and their benefit to the New York business community.

First, college educated people earn more than people who have never attended college.

Besides stirring the intellectual curiosity of enrollees, public higher education in New York is a means of social mobility for thousands of working-class families in the state.

Last academic year, according to CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, "almost half of CUNY students came from families in which neither parent attended college." Forty percent of CUNY students have adjusted gross incomes of less than \$15,000, and sixty percent earn less than \$30,000 a year. Every year, upon completion, the incomes of nearly 20,000 CUNY graduates double, breaking the cycle of poverty that many New York families find themselves in as a result of not having attended college.¹¹

College educated people are more likely to find high-paying jobs, offering greater healthcare benefits and job security than those who had never attended college.¹²

According to the United States Census Bureau, on average, bachelors' degree recipients earn roughly \$20,000 a year more than high school graduates, and \$10,000 more than people who have only partially completed a degree program.¹³

Increased earnings by New York State's 2.5 million public university alumni translates into \$11.5 billion worth of increased income tax revenue contributions to the state, as well as increased disposable income spent, by-and-large, in the state, on goods and services provided by New York businesses.¹⁴

¹⁰ NYPIRG Higher Education Campaign, "The Facts on Governor Pataki's 2003-2004 Higher Education Budget Proposal," January 29, 2003, http://www.nypirg.org/higher_ed/releases/budget012903.html.

¹¹ Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Ways and Means and New York State Finance Committees, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, The City University of New York, February 11, 2003.

¹² Ibid

¹³ United States Census Bureau, 'The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings' July 2002.

¹⁴ Professional Staff Congress (CUNY), <http://www.psc-cuny.org/>.

Second, a college education trains New York's future workforce.

Most experts agree that in 2003 Information Technology employment will see consistent growth nationwide despite downwards trends in nearly every other job sector.¹⁵ New York City, with the largest communications and computer services workforce of any U.S. city, will be the site of the majority of that growth between now and 2008.^{16 17}

Last year, CUNY graduated 14,000 IT specialists, and one third of New York's elementary school teachers, and registered nurses.¹⁸ These are jobs that will always have a place in New York State.

In the years to come, New York State employers are expected to fill an average of 49,000 high tech jobs each year, including over 18,000 newly created openings annually.¹⁹

Public higher education trains tomorrow's New York workforce, and responds to the demands of the state on the economy by transforming citizens into highly skilled workers. Business, for the most part, will benefit from having a residentially local labor pool available to them as the economy rebounds, and firms begin to re-staff departments cut in the wake of 9-11.

Third, in times of recession the college educated are more secure in their employment than people who have never attended college.

After September 11, 2001, jobs typically held by people without college experience were among the most severely affected by the economic downturn in New York State.²⁰ Of the 113,000 jobs lost in the months after 9-11, the majority were located in the service sector, contributing to a total loss of \$9.5 billion in tax revenue collection by the end of 2002.²¹

While unemployment rose throughout the country, it exploded in New York, climbing into the double digits in many of the state's most vulnerable counties.

¹⁵ David Jason Fischer, "After the Gold Rush: The Ongoing Opportunity in Information Technology," Center for an Urban Future, March 26, 2002.

¹⁶ Citizens Budget Commission, <http://www.cbcny.org> (2003)

¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov> (2003)

¹⁸ Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Ways and Means and New York State Finance Committees, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, The City University of New York, February 11, 2003.

¹⁹ New York State Workforce Investment Board, <http://www.workforcenewyork.org/swib.htm>.

²⁰ Fiscal Policy Institute, "2003 Annual Report," <http://www.fiscalpolicy.org>.

²¹ New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr., "State of the City's Economy," January 14, 2003, http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/speeches/state_of_city_conference_1-14-03.shtm.

According to the 2000 US Census, “college educated people experience shorter periods of unemployment in times of recession than do high school diploma, or equivalency recipients.”²²

As the governor scours the budget for places to cut, perhaps we should all be searching for places to grow. Occupationally secure college-educated New Yorkers are more likely to remain employed in times of economic hardship than those who had never attended college. The incomes they earn translate into tax revenues collected by the state. In many ways, an investment in public higher education today is like recession insurance for the rainy days ahead.

Last, college educated people are vital to the health of New York, and New York businesses, because they earn more, work more, spend more, and contribute more to the state in the form of taxes and consumer spending.

In 1995, when the governor increased the tuition at New York public universities by \$750, enrollment fell by 29,000 students the next academic year. This year, the governor has put on the table an increase nearly twice as high, simultaneously cutting as much as fifty percent from the budgets of financial assistance programs like TAP, SEEK, and EOP that benefit New York’s low-income families.

A crude calculation illustrates that, at minimum, if enrollment in SUNY and CUNY schools fell by nearly 30,000 as a result of the governor’s 1995 tuition hike, and each degree deferred represents a loss of \$20,000 in earned income, the impact of the governor’s 2003-2004 budget could be as much as \$600 million—which is as much as he is trying to save by cutting state aid and raising tuition!

This, however, assumes that the governor only raises tuition by half of what he has actually proposed this year. This year’s tuition hike is nearly double what it was in 1995 therefore the decline in freshman enrollment will be equally dramatic.

Ultimately, the burden of answering to New York residents and business leaders for this year’s irresponsible SUNY and CUNY tuition increase will not rest on the shoulders of the current governor. It would take several years for the full impact of lost revenues generated by the higher incomes of college educated New Yorkers to become a salient issue in future state executive budgets. By then it will be too late; the damage would have already been done.

By shifting the state’s fiscal burden onto the state’s public university students, the governor only postpones the pain felt by New Yorkers today as a result of this year’s economic crisis. Furthermore it hurts, not helps, the New York state business community by robbing them of a trained work force and a secure consumer-base.

²² United States Census Bureau, ‘The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings’ July 2002.

By supporting New Yorkers' ability to transform themselves through public higher education, the New York business community can rely on the support of New York public university graduates' labor, disposable income, and tax-based investment back into the economic infrastructure of the State when they most need it. It's just good business.

New York Businesses Know Better Than Anyone... Public Universities Work

While the operating budgets of New York public universities have been incrementally plucked and pruned since the early 1990's, enrollment in New York public universities have steadily risen, reaching a high-water-mark last academic year. The ensuing strain put on faculty and administrators in New York's two university systems have fueled popular misconceptions about SUNY's and CUNY's standards, robbing public university students of a vocal ally against the governor's latest attack on public higher education among New York's business leadership.

The New York business community should care about the future of public higher education, and resist being swayed by the rhetoric of public higher education's lowered standards. They know from experience that public universities are more than capable of producing New York's future business, and political leadership. Why? Because they have done it before.

Of the 2.5 million SUNY alumni at large, thousands have gone on to successful careers in everything from the law, to finance, to elective office.

In 1990, before state aid to public universities was cut in half, Standard and Poors ranked CUNY first in the nation as a source of high-level executives, beating-out both Harvard and Yale, the governor's alma mater.²³

Tom Clarke, President of Nike, James Dolan, Chairman & CEO of Cablevision, Inc., Glenn Goldberg Sr. VP of McGraw Hill, and Russell Lewis, CEO & President of *The New York Times Co.*, are just a few present-day captains of industry and state legislators who received their educational foundation in one of the state's public universities and colleges.²⁴

Many more New York public university alumni have achieved comparable, if not as recognizable, heights as a result of earning a SUNY and CUNY degree.

To a large extent, the movement of working class New Yorkers from blue-collar to white-collar jobs has been guaranteed by the promise of the state's public universities to provide an affordable and accessible education to all New York high school graduates through policies like "open admission," instituted in the City University of New York in 1969.

²³ Ronald B. McGuire, "The Struggle at CUNY: Open Admissions and Civil Rights," (1992).

²⁴ SUNY alumni association, <http://www.suny.edu/Student/Common/Notablealumni.cfm>.

Whereas the tuition in New York State public universities and colleges was reasonably affordable for families earning anywhere from \$15,000, with the help of TAP, SEEK and EOP aid, to \$80,000 a year, today's increased cost of higher education will be virtually equalized regardless of social class.²⁵ A student from a family making \$15,000 a year will have to pay the same expected increase in tuition as a family earning over \$80,000: roughly \$1,200. Clearly the impact will be disparate, and the loss will be disastrous.

While enrollment in SUNY schools fell slightly for nearly all students in varied socio-economic groups last academic year, only enrollment of students from families earning \$80,000 a year or more increased.²⁶

The public institutions of higher learning, designed to be a springboard for New Yorkers out of a life of near-poverty and into high-paying jobs as a result of cuts in state aid and tuition hikes, can no longer perform that vital function.

While businesses typically benefit from the privatization of government services and the liberalization of government's responsibilities to its citizens, in this case the New York business community will suffer as higher education in New York is compromised by cuts and distanced from the communities it was designed to serve.

The business community of New York should recognize that the state's economic stability is intimately connected to the stability of the SUNY and CUNY systems in New York. They are a source of future laborers, and a future high-income consumer market. They make-up the state revenue base that pays for the services that make New York a desired location for American firms. The defense of public education should be the rallying point for all New York business interests.

Ultimately, building barriers between New Yorkers and the college experience is bad business for New York State. It won't help us now, and it won't help us in the years to come.

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²⁵ NYPIRG Higher Education Campaign, "What Governor Pataki's Higher Education Budget Means to New York State's Students," January 29, 2003, <http://www.nypirg.org/nohike/all.html>.

²⁶ Ali Zaidi, "Dismantling SUNY: Quality Education in Crisis," (1999).

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Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: *Lower Education*

The first year that people of color became the majority of CUNY students: **1976**

The first year that CUNY began charging tuition: **1976**

From 1980 to 1997, the percentage decrease in CUNY funding from New York City and State, respectively: **90%; 40%**

The number of full-time faculty teaching at CUNY in 1975 versus 2001: **11,268; 5,707**

Governor Pataki's proposed spending cuts to public universities in the 2003-04 budget: **at least \$310 million**

Percentage increase in tuition since 1995, the beginning of Pataki's term in office: **60%**

Percentage of CUNY students with gross family incomes under \$30,000: **60%**

Advocating an anti-remedial reform project at CUNY, the description used by Board of Trustees Chairman Benno Schmidt to describe the CUNY of old: **the Harvard of the poor**

Along with 75% of all colleges in the United States, schools that run remedial classes for students unprepared for Freshman year: **MIT, Cornell, the University of Chicago, Berkeley, UCLA, and Harvard**

The reason Dr. Schmidt cited to explain why Hispanic and African-Americans at CUNY have lower placement test scores than white students: **"Their schools are worse"**

Percentage cut in aid to city public schools in Governor Pataki's 2003-2004 budget: **9%**

Top ranked Bachelor-degree universities producing high-ranking corporate executives: **City University of New York; Yale; Harvard**

The state ranking second to last in spending on public higher education since 1990: **New York**

Tough on Crime or Smart on Crime: Jobs Not Jails Make our Streets Safer

BY CAROLINA CORDERO DYER / MARCH 2003

(For) felons who have paid their debt to society... we have to work hard to get them jobs so that they come back into society and become contributors to society, rather than being dependent on it.

Mayor Bloomberg, *New York Daily News*. August 12, 2002

Our first goal is clear: We must have an economy that grows fast enough to employ every man and woman who seeks a job.

President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address. January 28, 2003

The United States locks up two million people each year, with another 4.6 million are under criminal justice supervision (parole or probation). Most of those involved in our criminal justice system have been convicted of non-violent offenses; many for drug charges. A quarter of the entire world's prisoners are locked up in this country, although the United States represents only five per cent of the world's population. In fact, the United States has a higher rate of incarceration than any country in the world including Russia, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Indonesia.

Our philosophy of "locking people up and throwing away the key" has clearly not worked. Sentences in the United States are exceedingly long: five to six times those in Western Europe and Canada.²⁷ Yet, recidivism remains high. Nationally, 51% of people released from prison return within three years.²⁸ In New York, it's worse: two out of three will return within three years. And, studies demonstrate that a longer prison term doesn't make someone less likely to get arrested again.²⁹

In spite of all our tough-on-crime rhetoric in New York, most people that we lock up come home. Across the country, more than 600,000 inmates were released into society last year. New York State released 32,000, and 78% of them returned to New York City. In the same period, the New York State Division of Parole had more than 70,000 former prisoners under supervision, the vast majority of whom resided in New York City. In addition, more than 130,000 New Yorkers cycle through New York City's lock-ups and jails each year.

²⁷ Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, *The Oxford History of the Prison*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁸ Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002.

²⁹ P.A. Langan & D.J. Levin, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994." *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (2002).

All this doesn't come cheap. New York spends \$32,000 annually to lock someone up in a state facility; \$64,000 in a city jail. In New York City, we spend \$9,739 to educate a young person in a public high school each year,³⁰ but \$131,000 a year to detain a juvenile in a facility.³¹ In a public budget climate of looming deficits of a magnitude we have never seen, incarceration dollars squeeze City and State budgets, taking essential dollars away from health care, education, care for the elderly, and other hallmarks of a civilized society.

If the goal of our criminal justice system is to keep people safer and communities stronger, it is failing. Prisons are a very expensive revolving door. We imprison many, and spend a great amount of money doing it, and then welcome them right back in. They don't become productive citizens, and there are more victims of crime, not fewer. If we want to keep our streets safer, we need to pay as much attention to what keeps pushing people through that jail door, as we do to what happens when they get out.

Employment stops the revolving door

Marc La Cloche faced a classic "Catch-22" upon his return from a twelve-year bid in upstate prisons. He had obtained his GED in prison and was trained as a barber by the State of New York in its prison system. Yet, upon his release, he was denied certification as a barber's apprentice from the State of New York's licensing authorities.³² New York did not permit him to cut hair—the trade he learned inside New York's prison walls.

Mr. La Cloche's story is just one example of the challenges ex-prisoners face when they try to get free from the revolving door of incarceration. While there are many factors that contribute to whether someone returning to society is able to make it or not, employment is critical. People with jobs commit fewer crimes than people without jobs. According to the New York State Department of Labor, 83% of people who violate the terms of probation and parole are unemployed at the time of violation. In a Texas study, an unemployed ex-prisoner is three times more likely to return to prison than one who has a job.³³ According to the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, "Having a legitimate job lessens the chances of re-offending following release from prison."³⁴

Employing people with criminal records has tremendous benefits to society:

It saves money, a concern that is more important than ever before. For every 500 people with criminal records employed in lieu of receiving welfare, a minimum of \$4 million is saved annually. For every 500 people employed in lieu of returning to prison, \$15 million is saved.

³⁰ The Correction Association of New York, "Juvenile Justice Project Fact Sheet," http://www.corrassoc.org/juvenile_fact.html.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Clyde Haberman, "Ex-Inmate Denied Chair (And Clippers)," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2003.

³³ Eisenberg, M., *Project Rio: Twelve-Month Follow-up*, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Pardons and Parole Division.

³⁴ Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon and Michelle Waul, "From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry." Urban Institute Justice Policy Center. June 1, 2001.

Employed people are less likely to commit crimes and return to prison, thereby enhancing public safety.

Prisoners return to communities already plagued by high levels of unemployment, poor public schools, and families ripped apart by the impact of crime and incarceration. Providing jobs to returning ex-offenders helps build communities instead of putting even more pressure on fragile neighborhoods.

The challenges to ex-prisoner employment

Inmates released from a New York State facility typically receive \$40 and a bus ticket to the Port Authority. The lucky ones have families or friends who will take them in. Many others find their way to the City shelter system—unemployed and homeless. Finding a decent job that pays a living wage is very hard for someone with a prison record. The challenges come from both the set-up for failure that the prison experience *itself* creates as well as the roadblocks that government policies have created.

Imprisonment undermines an individual's future work prospects. While prisoners hold "jobs," these jobs do not prepare them for work in the real economy. Typically, prison jobs teach inmates to work "dumber" by splitting one job into several small jobs. Nor are there consequences for doing a prison job slowly or poorly. No reward is given for creativity or initiative, and certainly none for teamwork, a concept that makes corrections officers uneasy. An inmate who has adapted well to prison has not been primed for a job in the community. Behavior learned in prison to survive—toughness, "attitude", and isolation—is the exact opposite of what is needed to be successful on the outside.

The restrictions that prisons impose on an adult's independence, spontaneity, and self-confidence are internalized over time. After years in a crowded and confined environment, a prisoner reacts to the world's ordinary stresses with despair, hypersensitivity to disrespect, and alternating fearfulness and anger. The regimentation of prison life can erode a person's capacity to plan an orderly day, navigate the subways, make it to an appointment on time, or respond flexibly to the smallest of stumbling blocks. Because they lack usable work experience, many are pessimistic about their prospects for finding employment upon release. This pessimism expresses itself in many ways. Some ignore the future and refuse to make plans for employment. Others make plans that are unrealistic or require illegal behavior.

When released, the former prisoner enters the job market yards short of the starting line. Eight in ten have a history of substance abuse, and many are sober for the first time in their lives. Many have never been employed outside of prison. The majority of those returning to New York City do not have a high school diploma. Many have poor critical thinking skills and cannot read.

The recession and the September 11th attacks brought an immediate reduction in the low-skilled, entry-level jobs that former prisoners are qualified for—maintenance workers, clerks, messengers, food services workers. And the competition for these jobs in the New York City area—always great—has become greater than ever. Because the dismal state of the New York economy has led to layoffs, more highly skilled workers, who once would have rejected the jobs former prisoners seek, are now desperate for a job—any job.

Further, former prisoners carry an additional disadvantage that shows itself every time he encounters an employment application's unforgiving question: *Have you ever been convicted of a crime?* In addition to fears and prejudice on the part of employers, many are restricted from certain types of employment, including caring for the elderly, airline security, healthcare, plumbing and even as we've seen, cutting hair.

Improving the system

How do we change the system to increase the chances of ex-prisoners finding the jobs that can keep them from repeating their crimes?

One, prisons and jails should provide realistic job training programs to every inmate, giving them skills that are marketable when they get out. At a minimum, require all prisoners to get a GED while incarcerated and provide the capacity for them to do so.

Two, we should expand the use of community supervision, including work release and parole. It is ironic that politicians proclaim that ending parole or restricting work release enhances public safety. On the contrary, these programs serve as an important bridge between confinement and an independent, productive life on the outside. We should certainly not release inmates directly from maximum-security prisons and special housing units (SHUs or “prisons within prisons”). There is a radical difference between the amounts of independence and decision-making an inmate can exercise while incarcerated, and what he is expected to exercise upon release. Inmates released directly from SHU's and maximum-security facilities are simply unprepared for what is expected of them. We ought to be moving inmates into less restrictive environments as they come closer to release.³⁵

³⁵ Elizabeth Gaynes, “Transitional Services for Inmates: Practice Issues”, Offender Programs Report, Civic Research Institute, Inc. (May/June 2001).

Three, provide a continuity of pre- and post-release services. Corrections staff lack information about available community resources for those they are releasing. Workforce development agencies working with former prisoners cite missed opportunities and an inability to coordinate efforts with the pre-release transitional services performed by corrections departments. Basic documentation—birth certificates, Social Security cards, training and educational certificates for programs completed in prison—are not readily available.³⁶

Four, we must address the unintended consequences of welfare reform and the “work-first” model. By championing the work-first philosophy, society mandates an immediate income. But longer-term success in the labor market depends on the ability to develop skills and contacts—both of which former inmates are not likely to gain in the jobs that are immediately available to people leaving prison. New and expanded employment programs should combine work and job skills development to meet the immediate need for income and the longer-term need for skills and relationships. Federal and state funding should support these efforts. In the long-term, it’s cost effective.

Five, remove employment restrictions. At least six states bar ex-prisoners from public employment, and many state licensing agencies bar former prisoners from professions such as the law, real estate, medicine, nursing, teaching, physical therapy, and even, barbering. Not only must such licensure restrictions be reformed, but we must actively move to change public opinion on employing ex-offenders. A recent survey in five major United States cities revealed that 65 percent of all employers said they would not knowingly hire a former prisoner, regardless of the crime.³⁷

And, finally, we need to invest far greater government resources on transitional and employment services for people coming out of prisons and jails.

And, here is the surprising part: there is plenty of money available for this. The funds are available in state prison budgets but are being spent on ineffective strategies: locking too many people up, for far too long, based on far too arbitrary sentencing guidelines. Mandatory sentencing laws, such as the Rockefeller Drug Laws and Second Felony Offender laws in New York, should be repealed. Reform of the Rockefeller Drug Law, something the State of New York has been unable to do since 1973, could save \$610 million annually if we provided alternatives to incarceration to just 19,000 drug offenders. The price of building the prisons to house those drug offenders saves another two billion dollars in capital costs.³⁸

³⁶ Buck, Maria L., Getting Back to Work – Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders. New York: Public/Private Ventures (Fall 2000).

³⁷ What Employers Want: Job Prospects for Less-Educated Workers, Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.

³⁸ Gangi, Robert. “Drug Law Reform Can Help State Cash Woes,” Albany Times Union 14 February, 2003.

Politicians must stop pandering to the public's fears. *Tough on crime, the war on drugs, three strikes*—these are all empty sound bites that have led prosecutors to seek longer and longer sentences, legislatures to lengthen sentences in order to cure every societal ill, led to criminalizing more behavior, led to the incarceration of our young people, led to the demonization of prisoners and former prisoners, led to the devastation of families and communities, and led to barriers to employment for those who have served their time.

The irony of it all is that so much of what we have done to contribute to this mess has been done in the name of public safety. But to ignore the needs of the 600,000 returning to society does not make our streets safer. It is instead extraordinarily costly, increases the likelihood that new crimes will be committed, and puts further strain on fragile communities.

We can do better and we must do better. We must shift our thinking about crime and punishment and turn our focus to crime prevention; addressing the root causes of crime such as lack of employment; and devoting our resources to community building, education, and workforce development that provides jobs at a living wage. The future of our communities and our society depends upon it.

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MARCH 2003

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Criminal Injustice

Governor George E. Pataki's critique of his predecessor, Mario Cuomo, in a September campaign speech: **"The strongest economic growth policy upstate was the building of prisons."**

Number of corrections officers employed by New York State for every manufacturing job lost upstate last year: approximately: **4**

The ratio of the net increases in spending on prisons versus higher education since Governor Pataki took office: **10:1**

The principal "victims" of the expansion of the New York criminal justice system, according to the Governor in the same 2002 speech: **"youthful, lower-income minorities and non-violent offenders."**

Percentage of New York inmates that come from one of seven New York City neighborhoods with the highest levels of unemployment in the state: **75**

The average education level of an inmate released from an American prison: **11th grade**

Since 1990, juveniles are known to have been executed (BY WHOM?) in only the following seven countries: **Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.**

Sentence received by Cherie Gallipoli for possession of 4 _ oz. of cocaine under the New York State Rockefeller Drug laws: **15 years to life**

Provisions given to a Rikers Island inmate upon release: **\$3 metrocard**

Unemployment Insurance: Keeps Jobs, Creates More

BY JONATHAN ROSEN / DECEMBER 2002

New York City's Unemployment Crisis

New York City's economy is stuck in a recession. Personal bankruptcy in Manhattan and the Bronx rose 10.7% in 2002, compared to a nationwide increase of 7.7%.³⁹ Food stamp rolls have begun to increase as well—climbing 5% in the first ten months of 2002.⁴⁰ Over 250,000 adult New Yorkers are out of work, tens of thousands more people seeking full time work are forced to make due with part-time low-wage work. In November, New York City's official unemployment rate jumped to 8.0%. At the same time the Fiscal Policy Institute estimated the city's actual unemployment rate to be above 9%, as 50,000 New York City workers had abandoned their job search in the past six months and were going uncounted in the survey. As the official unemployment rate begins to tick down, even the Department of Labor estimates that most of the decline is a result of people dropping out of the labor market rather than any influx of people to New York's workforce.

New Yorkers are usually eligible for 26 weeks of regular unemployment insurance benefits. In March, 2002 workers who lost their jobs on September 11th and its immediate aftermath began to exhaust these regular benefits. As a result, Congress and President Bush reluctantly enacted the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation program (TEUC) to extend benefits by 13 weeks for workers across the country.

Through October, 329,558 New Yorkers have collected these federal extended benefits. They are now running out. New York City's job market remains anemic and nearly 40% of people collecting extended benefits are unable to find work. By the end of the year, 182,000 New Yorkers will have exhausted all of their state and federal extended benefits and remain jobless. On December 28, the federal extended benefits program will end. On that day, 62,000 New Yorkers in the midst of collecting extended benefits will be cutoff—three days after Christmas.

For unemployed workers, an additional extension of benefits is a way to survive. Could extending benefits also help rebuild New York's broken economy?

³⁹ Dillon, Nancy, "Bankruptcies in Record Climb: Job Losses, Debt Woes Take Toll", New York Daily News, p. 51, November 26, 2002.

⁴⁰ New York City Coalition Against Hunger

Well-worn ideological prescriptions

Policy makers from City Hall to the White House have trotted out well worn ideological prescriptions to address the national and local recession: tax cuts, interest rate cuts, and government spending.

Tax Cuts

Republicans want more tax cuts. So do many Democrats. Republican stimulus plans currently being debated the House cut taxes mostly for wealthy Americans. Some Democrats want to cut the first \$5,000 in federal payroll taxes, a big part of the money withheld in worker's weekly paychecks, in order to put more money in the hands of middle and low-income people. According to Jared Bernstein, of the Economic Policy Institute: "in general, tax cuts are too leaky relative to spending programs; they can be saved (especially if tilted towards the rich) or spent on imports."⁴¹ And then there's the obvious: if you're unemployed—you don't benefit from tax cuts at all.

Interest Rates

Conventional wisdom has the Federal Reserve as the central actor in priming the pump of New York—and America's—economy by making capital more cheaply and readily available. That's why at the beginning of most economic downturns, the media and Wall Street pays laser-like attention to any indication that the Fed may reduce interest rates—thereby making cheaper capital more available on the market. But most progressive economists believe the Fed has done just about all it can do this go round to stimulate employment. Jared Bernstein again: "The Fed should push interest rates down further now, though it probably wouldn't help much. What's holding back the current economy is not the price of capital; our industrial capacity is not constrained, and there are certainly plenty of underutilized workers. Thus, the Fed finds itself in the uncharacteristic position of not being able to do much to stimulate growth."⁴²

Direct Fiscal Stimulus

So forget tax cuts or Alan Greenspan to the rescue. You can also forget direct stimulus in the form of government spending. In Albany and City Hall, the fiscal crisis coupled with balanced budget requirements have created a stimulus strait-jacket. Facing multi-billion dollar deficits, neither the City nor the State have the resources to stimulate consumer spending in the outer-boroughs or to target any tax relief anywhere. In fact, with a subway fare hike looming and rumors of potential public sector lay-offs in the coming year, the City and the State are having a negative effect on any effort to rebuilding the economy of working New York.

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Jared Bernstein, "It's Full Employment Stupid," *The American Prospect* vol. 13 no. 20, November 4, 2002.

Economic Development

The economists and the planners are now saying, wait—what about economic development? In the long term, serious structural change needs to be made to right the ship of New York’s economy.

Economic development policy that builds our capacity to attract employers that provide good jobs (so-called “highroad economic development) by building modern transit hubs, making our ports more competitive, rezoning to encourage the retention of industry, maintaining and expanding affordable housing and improving public schools would be a good laundry list to start towards a long term economic development strategy for New York. But taken separately or together—these are all years in the making.

Extending Benefits: New York City’s Single most Powerful Economic Stimulus

In the short term, extending and expanding unemployment insurance benefits is the single most powerful economic stimulus for New York City in the current recession.

Unemployment insurance benefits provide an enormous and immediate targeted jolt to neighborhood economies, rapidly pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into working and middle class communities to be spent on milk, diapers, rent, household products, sneakers and sandwiches. It is a demand-side solution to an ongoing recession.

In December, 182,000 New Yorkers will have exhausted all of their state and federal extended benefits. Sixty percent of them, about 110,000 are in New York City. Assuming an average weekly benefit of \$270 and an average duration of eight weeks (on a 13 week extension), \$23.5 million in consumer cash would flow every week to the Pathmark in East Harlem, the bodega in Mott Haven, the laundry in Corona, and the hardware store in Sunset Park. Over the course of the first round of the extension (13 weeks), \$306.6 million would flow into the hands of consumers in communities in New York City badly in need of economic stimulus. Applying the multiplier effect, the federal government found in its study of the extended benefits program of the early 1990’s found that every \$1 in unemployment benefits generated \$2.15 in stimulus.⁴³ The total immediate direct impact of an extension in New York City would be \$660 million dollars over a three month period.

Extending benefits prevents economic hardship and reduces poverty. A recent study prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor by Mathematica estimated that in the recession of the early 1990’s, the extended benefits program lowered the poverty rate among unemployed workers and their families by 46%. Without access to extended benefits, the study estimated that more than 70% of these families would have been in poverty.

In the last recession (1990-1993) when Congress extended unemployment insurance benefits five times, New Yorkers who exhausted their benefits had a very difficult time finding work and replacing the lost

⁴³ Unemployment Insurance as an Automatic Stabilizer: Evidence of Effectiveness Over Three Decades. Lawrence Chimerine, July 19, 1999. Commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor.

benefit income, according to a New York State Department of Labor study. Over half reported that they had difficulty meeting health care costs, 39% difficulty meeting food costs, 47% difficulty meeting housing costs. Over one-fourth of the people who had exhausted benefits reported that they were receiving public assistance.

Unlike infrastructure spending or other demand side stimulus policies, unemployment benefits can move quickly from government to intended recipients. If Governor Pataki signed an extension on a Monday, the administration of the system is in place so that the first installment on the \$1.05 billion in stimulus could be in New Yorker's mailboxes the following Monday. For an economy in need of shock therapy, any policy that can eliminate the lag-time needed to wind its way into the economy is an added bonus. This is probably why other states around the nation have acted. New Jersey, Hawaii, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont and Wisconsin have enacted extensions of their own financed by their state's unemployment insurance trust fund. These states which have varying degrees of trust fund solvency, have all recognized that workers and their state's economy cannot afford to wait for unlikely federal action. This year state legislatures in California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts and Oklahoma are also considering state funded extensions.

Extending Benefits in New York

In June, the New York State Assembly passed an across-the-board 13 week extension for New Yorkers exhausting their federal extended unemployment insurance benefits. The legislation died in the Senate under Governor Pataki's strenuous opposition.

At the same time the Governor was blocking a state extension in order to preserve New York's extremely low payroll tax-rates, he announced his support for an additional extension on a federal level. Pataki wrote to President Bush and members of Congress urging them to extend benefits. "We must not forget those individuals who need our assistance during this most difficult time," Pataki wrote.⁴⁴

On November 22, Congress adjourned without taking any action to continue the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation program despite strenuous efforts by Senator Hillary Clinton, Rep. Rangel and a bipartisan group from the New York delegation led by Rep. Jack Quinn (R-Buffalo) to both continue and extend again these benefits.

In early December the nation's unemployment rate hit a nine-year high of 6% while the unemployment rate in New York City rose to 8%. These statistics, coupled with ongoing advocacy and action from community based organizations and labor unions have forced Congress and the White House to revisit the issue.

⁴⁴ Olivo, Tony, "New Yorkers Are Losing Unemployment Aid as Extension Expires," Bloomberg News Wire, June 24, 2002.

On December 14, President Bush broke his silence, using his weekly radio address to call for immediate Congressional action to extend benefits when they return in January. Like most things, the devil is in the details. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle are rushing to address the issue, either substantively or symbolically, in an attempt to take the issue off the political hot-burner. Many of the proposals advanced by the Republican majority in Congress would not actually address the needs of most unemployed New Yorkers. Competing legislation from Republican rank-and-file in the House as well as Democratic legislation from Senators Clinton and Daschle in the Senate and Pelosi and Rangel in the House would provide a full extension to all impacted New Yorkers. It is unclear what, if any, legislation will eventually be enacted by Congress and the President.

Federal inaction on unemployment is, to be sure, a problem of national import. But it is of particular concern for New York. According to the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, among all the states, New York has the highest number of long-term unemployed who have exhausted benefits in the nation as well as the highest proportion of the workforce that consists of long-term unemployed who have exhausted their benefits.⁴⁵

So Why Not?

In 1998, Governor Pataki slashed payroll tax rates paid by employers into the state's unemployment insurance trust fund to finance unemployment insurance benefits by \$420 million following up on an \$85 million tax cut the year before. In 1998, New York's unemployment insurance trust fund was the least solvent of any state in the nation. At the time, New York's trust fund had only enough reserves to pay benefits for less than four months during a peak recession, even after an extended period of favorable economic growth when UI reserves would normally build up in preparation for the next recession. These tax cuts in good times, combined with increased spending in other areas, left the state ill prepared for bad times. In 1994, the average payroll tax paid by an employer into the state's unemployment insurance trust fund amounted to 1.10% of total wages. Now they pay less than half of that. New York's employers pay less in UI payroll taxes than most of the neighboring states, and the rate has fallen significantly in the past decade—costing the state's trust fund billions of dollars in lost revenue. New York employers pay only half of one-percent (0.5%) of total wages in UI payroll taxes, compared with 0.9% in Pennsylvania and Connecticut. New York employers pay UI taxes on only the first \$8,500 in wages for each employee, which is far less than the \$23,500 taxable wage base in New Jersey and the \$15,000 in Connecticut.

If employers had continued paying at the 1994 average tax rate through to the year 2000, New York's unemployment insurance trust fund would have accumulated an estimated \$5 billion in additional revenue. For example, in 2000, New York collected about \$1.9 billion in unemployment insurance payroll taxes at the average tax rate of 0.72%. If the state had been collecting taxes at the 1994 rate of 1.10%, the fund would have accumulated about \$3.3 billion in reserves in 2000 alone.

⁴⁵ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "The Exhaustee Situation in New York", October 29, 2002. Available on line at www.cbpp.org.

On June 13, the Business Council of New York State wrote Governor Pataki urging him to oppose legislation to extend unemployment benefits. The council's letterhead reads as a who's who of New York's corporate elite: HSBC, Keyspan, Pfizer, Verizon, Philip Morris, Northrop, MetLife etc. Business Council President Dan Walsh asked the governor for help to repel what the council called, "Albany's Attack on Jobs." The Business Council followed up the letter with a radio advertising blitz across upstate New York claiming that extending benefits would result in "new costs on employers would almost certainly result in the loss of thousands of jobs."⁴⁶

The Pataki administration took the Business Council line: the system is insolvent and the state can't afford it. They got the first part right - New York's unemployment insurance trust fund is heading towards insolvency in the upcoming quarter regardless of any decision to extend benefits.

Extending benefits will require restoration of revenues to the state's unemployment trust fund. This is a basic public needs versus public goods question that progressives should not shy away from. Progressives should be outspoken in calling the payroll tax cuts what they are: fiscally irresponsible give-aways to business that left unemployed families holding the bag.

The Business Council and the right see this as a tax fight—and so should we. Employers have the resources to pay a fair payroll tax and ensure that unemployment insurance works for families that need it. Unemployment insurance in a recession is a basic question of public goods versus public costs. Progressives have left the field free to the Manhattan Institute and their progeny on tax issues. It's time to retake the field. Restoring revenues to pay unemployment benefits is a winning message that progressives should embrace.

Paul Krugman and Jeff Madrick, two highly regarded economists, have been using their real estate in the pages of *The New York Times* to push unemployment as stimulus since at least January. Larry Mischel and Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute have been beating this drum in the op-ed pages of national periodicals and in the halls of Congress since the recession began.

Unfortunately, economists' nostrums have little impact on economic policy. Politicians do. So far, business organizations big and small have lined up to lobby those politicians to oppose the extension due to its impact on unemployment insurance payroll taxes. Their campaign contributions far outstrip those of the long-term unemployed, and it comes as no surprise that so far their message is carrying the day.

⁴⁶ Business Council of New York, News Release: "Business Council to Governor Pataki: Help! Council's Letter asks Governor to help repel 'Albany's Attack on Jobs'", June 14, 2002. Available at <http://www.bcnys.org/whatsnew/2002/0614jobs.htm>.

Conclusion

It was another wealthy New Yorker turned politician who invented unemployment insurance and used demand-side stimulus to pull America out of the Great Depression. Perhaps Mayor Bloomberg should take a page from FDR's playbook and start using his bully pulpit to push for this unoriginal and extremely effective idea.

Right now, Mayor Bloomberg is heading to Albany with a big wish list to right the city's budget woes: restoration of the commuter tax, Medicaid relief and a bunch of other budget fixes. Unfortunately, Albany's budget is almost as grim as the city's and so a bailout from the north appears increasingly unlikely. Unemployment insurance does not come out of the general fund and isn't impacted by the Albany budget crisis. As Mayor Bloomberg steps to the microphone with an agenda for Albany – he should loudly demand this quick and easy \$1.05 billion for New York City's economy and unemployed. Fighting to extend benefits is also winning politics for progressive elected officials and their allies looking for a way back to majority status. Extending unemployment insurance is an issue with great appeal to middle class, unaffiliated voters as well as blue collar workers upstate, it is also a great point of entry to start redefining the terms of the debate about tax fairness in New York.

Extending benefits is good politics and good economics. It's also the only thing standing between tens of thousands of working families and poverty this holiday season.

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FEBRUARY 2003

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Family Values

According to the Iroquois nation, all decisions must be considered in light of their impact on the following number of future generations: **seven**

Year the Social Security system is projected to be no longer solvent: **2076**⁴⁷

Percentage of those polled by CBS News who prefer preserving Social Security versus cutting taxes: **85% versus 12%, respectively**⁴⁸

Amount of federal deficit President Bush promised in 2001 to retire over the next four years, projected five-year deficit his current budget will create: **\$1 trillion, \$1 trillion**^{49 50}

The most bothersome change in the American polity over the past fifteen to twenty years according to a NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll: **“The lack of respect for authority and elders”**⁵¹

Elderly who live in poverty today: **One in ten**⁵²

Average benefit 40% of elderly tax filers will receive from President Bush’s economic stimulus package: **less than \$100**⁵³

Benefit of Bush’s tax cut plan to nearly 11 million married families with children who earn \$20,000 a year: **Zero**⁵⁴

Poverty rate for people living in the suburbs: in 2001: **8.2%**⁵⁵

Middle-class Americans who feel Bush economic plan will be good for them: **37%**⁵⁶

⁴⁷ <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/TR/TR02/tr02.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/23/opinion/polls/main537718.shtml>

⁴⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/usbudget/blueprint/budi.html>

⁵⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/04/politics/04BUDG.html>

⁵¹ <http://www.pollingreport.com/values.htm>

⁵² <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p60-219.pdf>

⁵³ <http://www.cbpp.org/1-7-03tax.htm>

⁵⁴ <http://www.cbpp.org/1-13-03tax.html>

⁵⁵ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p60-219.pdf>

⁵⁶ http://www.democracycorps.com/reports/analyses/A_Very_New_Year.pdf

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Family Values continued

Percentage of adults surveyed who believe social and moral values in the United States are higher today than when they were growing up: **67%**⁵⁷

Ranking of United States in wealth compared to other countries, according to GDP: **1**⁵⁸

Families living in poverty in America today: **6.8 million**⁵⁹

Percentage of children living in poverty in America today: **16**⁶⁰

⁵⁷ <http://www.pollingreport.com/values.htm>

⁵⁸ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/us.html>

⁵⁹ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p60-219.pdf>

⁶⁰ <http://www.nccp.org/yepf.html>

Thinking Big: Housing Lessons from the Past

BY JOE WEISBORD AND BRAD LANDER/ NOVEMBER 2002

“Make no little plans. They have no magic to strike man’s blood and probably will themselves not be realized.”

Daniel Hudson Burnham

A hundred years ago, the “father of the skyscraper” and the co-author of the first comprehensive city planning document, *The Chicago Plan*, exhorted us to think big. But in the intervening years, large-scale visionary planning has gotten a justifiable bad rap. Too many ill-conceived, large-scale, urban redevelopment projects ignored the needs of the communities and people they were ostensibly designed to serve.

Today, the lessons learned from those mistakes have informed a new generation of successful neighborhood development strategies. In New York City, these efforts have revitalized communities to the benefit of local residents and to New York City as a whole. But these successes will not meet the needs of a growing city if they cannot be harnessed to a larger, comprehensive vision for the city’s future development. Once again, it is time for New York City to think big.

Nowhere is this more critical than in housing.. Evidence of a severe housing crisis—in New York City and around the country—abounds. But with this crisis comes a new and growing resolve to meaningfully address the housing crisis, both at the grassroots and among a broad array of public and private institutions and community leaders. Politicians have begun to take notice, and many have publicly decried the need for more housing. But most are content to leave it at that and call on others to take action.

While the public believes that affordable housing is a critical issue, there is a longstanding sense that government action on housing cannot make a real difference. Elected officials take advantage of this belief by talking loud but failing to commit the resources necessary. They have come to expect that the public will be satisfied with their sympathy, instead of action.

But large-scale public action, informed by the lessons of the past, *is* precisely what the crisis demands. Only with the active participation of government is it possible to create enough new housing to make a difference in places like New York City. What’s more, much has been learned about how to do this in ways that strengthen neighborhoods, rather than harm them. New York has historically led the way for the nation on housing policy and community development. It is now time to do so again.

What is a Crisis?

Ironically, the very pervasiveness of the housing crisis has made it come to seem like business-as-usual. The struggle to pay ever-increasing rents or home prices has come to feel like a "chronic condition," common to literally millions of New Yorkers, middle-income and poor alike. Moreover, conventional wisdom has it that New York always has a housing problem. This sense of inevitability allows policy-makers to keep expectations low.

But the unique severity of the present crisis is undeniable. New York City is experiencing its most acute housing supply and affordability problems in at least 50 years. Record-high homelessness is just the starting point. On an average night in early October, there were 36,000 people in New York City shelters—including more than 15,000 children (Data from NYC Department of Homeless Services); the cost of this emergency care has risen to over half a billion dollars each year (NYC Independent Budget Office). More than 150,000 families are doubled-up in over-crowded or substandard apartments (NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey 1999), and the wait for an apartment in public housing is now eight long years.

Not just poor people, but hundreds of thousands of middle-income families have trouble meeting their housing needs. Currently more than 500,000 New York City families pay more than half their income for rent: that's an extraordinary one in four renter households (NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey 1999). The weakening economy has eased rents for the most expensive apartments, but this has led to even fiercer competition for the remaining ones. The vacancy rate was last measured in 1999 at 3.19% (NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey 1999), lower than in more than a decade and far below the 5% that economists consider the minimum for a fair, healthy market. In the 1990s New York City welcomed 456,000 new residents, but produced only 82,000 new units. (2000 Census, NYC Rent Guidelines Board).

The housing crisis does more than harm families. It has ripple effects throughout the city. As Mayor Bloomberg has observed, one of the key challenges for companies considering whether to stay in New York is the difficulty housing poses for their employees. Teachers, police officers, and firefighters – not to mention child care workers, dishwashers, and retail clerks – can't afford to live here. Forty-five percent of all New Yorkers have seriously considered moving out of the city because of high housing costs, according to the 2001 "Survey of Resident Satisfaction with City Services" conducted by Baruch College. Substandard housing conditions have been documented to contribute to chronic health problems (especially childhood asthma) and poor school performance. (See for example James Krieger, MD and Donna L. Higgins, "Housing and Health: Time Again for Public Health Action," [American Journal of Public Health](#), May 2002, and Frank Braconi, "Housing and Schooling," [The Urban Prospect](#), April 2001.)

While New York's crisis is among the worst, the problem is prevalent throughout the U.S. The subtitle of the National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2002 survey of affordable rental housing puts it clearly: "Further Out of Reach than Ever:"

America's rental housing crisis for poor families is not new. What is striking in this year's *Out of Reach*, however, is that the gap between wages and rents has continued to broaden and deepen. This gap has continued to grow through times of economic expansion as well as recession, in rural areas as well as metropolitan counties, and in all regions of the nation. The desperate plight of low-income renters in America is fast becoming one of the sole constants in our society and economy.

Fiddling While the Romans Double Up and Move Out

Despite daily evidence of growing need, the political response is tepid. In New York, Mayor Giuliani cut public investment in housing steadily over his two terms, to less than half of what it was in 1990. He invested no political capital in reducing the cost of construction and allowed corruption to run rampant in the Department of Buildings and in real estate tax collections.

During his campaign, Mayor Bloomberg said that housing was one of the "four legs of the stool" of his platform, and that he would work to create 100,000 new units. This summer, he indicated that he hoped to see housing (at a range of income levels) built at the World Trade Center site. However, he has rarely mentioned housing in his first year in office, and he has issued no plan for producing those units.

More, housing took a deep cut in City funding as part of his efforts to close the budget gap, and New York's federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds continue to leak out of housing each year. In October, while the mayors of Boston, Los Angeles, and other major American cities were calling on Washington for new housing funds, and announcing their own local commitments, Mayor Bloomberg was in Europe working to land the Olympics for 2012. Surely a problem as critical as housing merits a comparably Olympian effort.

Even in the Mayor's response to the recent homelessness crisis, he has spoken little of producing new housing. His carrot-and-stick proposals—providing more vouchers for homeless families, and throwing them onto the street if the City doesn't feel they are looking for housing aggressively enough—ignore the reality that there is simply far too little affordable housing to be found. And while the Mayor recently settled the community gardens lawsuit with a compromise that allows both housing and open space, his administration continues to auction off vacant City-owned land—a precious resource that could potentially be used for affordable housing.

The news from Washington is just as disappointing. Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Mel Martinez, rather than advocating new production initiatives, has described affordable housing as strictly a "local problem." This summer, the congressionally chartered Millennial Housing Commission released its report (www.mhc.gov). Despite high expectations, the commission fell short of articulating a large-scale vision for meeting the nation's housing needs.

The opening section of the report on "Why Housing Matters" provides a compelling case for how critical housing is to Americans, and how difficult it is to find. But the report sets no significant goals, and fails

to commit the public sector to a significantly increased effort. The report also failed to call on Congress to support any major new federal production initiatives. Despite broad bipartisan support in Congress and at the grassroots, the report ignores legislation proposing to create a permanent housing “trust fund,” which would help produce 1.5 million units of affordable rental housing over 10 years.

The problem is not that Americans don’t recognize the housing crisis ...they do. But they have lost faith that government can do anything about it. This helps to explain contradictory poll data. In New York City, more than two-thirds of respondents say that there is a housing crisis, which affects them personally, yet housing rarely polls high as an issue in political campaigns.

This cynicism and complacency is dangerous, because it masks the very real impact changing government spending and policies have had on the housing market. In 2002, federal, state and municipal subsidies of housing will exceed \$150 billion. Most of these subsidies, however, will go to high-income households: for example, over 62% of all tax benefits available to homeowners will go to households with incomes above \$100,000. The rise in the use of such tax expenditures by high-income households has been accompanied by a steady reduction in direct federal subsidies to low-income housing, from \$50 billion in 1980 (\$104.5 billion in today’s dollars) to only \$21.2 billion in 2000. Under Secretary Andrew Cuomo, HUD released report after report describing the escalating crisis, but never proposed action on the same scale. As a result, voters have given up any hope that government can solve the housing crisis.

Government Action Can Make a Difference ... Especially in New York

New York City’s history teaches otherwise. For more than 100 years, New York has led the nation in ambitious, innovative housing policy. At the turn of the century, as the city grew out of control, New York adopted model development laws to regulate light and air to tenements. What were initially seen as the vain hopes of reformers became law, first in New York City and gradually throughout the country.

A long succession of New York Mayors went to Albany and Washington and fought for resources to expand the city's supply of affordable housing. The first public housing in the country (First Houses) was built on the Lower East Side in 1934-35. Over the next 35 years, the New York City Housing Authority—considered today to be the best large-scale public housing authority in the country—created over 180,000 units of public housing. The number of people living in NYCHA developments exceeds the population of Atlanta, Minneapolis, or Miami.

Stuyvesant Town, often hailed as the last hold out of the middle-class in the heart of Manhattan would have been impossible without the active partnership of New York City. The City went to Albany to change the laws regulating real estate investments by insurance companies, acquired and cleared the 72-acre site, recruited MetLife as the developer, conveyed the land at no cost, and provided a 25 year tax waiver to make rents affordable. Over 25,000 people live there today.

From 1955 through the 1970s, the “Mitchell-Lama” program used a creative mix of city and state funding, land, and tax expenditures to leverage private capital for affordable housing. Mitchell-Lama produced nearly 125,000 units affordable to moderate and middle-income residents, helping to ensure that New York’s neighborhoods stayed healthy and economically diverse.

Most recently, Mayor Koch’s Housing New York “Ten Year Plan” (1986–1996) accounted for 150,000 housing units, and about 40 percent of New York City’s total net increase of housing units during that time. Even better, housing produced in this era—especially by not-for-profit community development groups—finally recognized the critical importance of neighborhoods.

Today, both not-for-profit and for-profit developers produce attractive housing on a scale appropriate for local communities. The new housing anchors retail development, incorporates attractive open space and continues to spur private development in the areas surrounding it. This redevelopment has made neighborhoods more attractive, more vibrant and safer places to live. For example, the six Bronx neighborhoods that received the most new housing units under the “Housing New York” plan experienced a 17.5% drop in violent crime, versus only a 6.3% drop in similar neighborhoods that did not receive a comparable level of investment. (Alex Schwartz, “New York City and Subsidized Housing: Impacts and Lessons of the City’s \$5 Billion Capital Budget Housing Plan,” [Housing Policy Debate](#), 1999.) More, a recent study significant fiscal returns from investments in housing. The areas surrounding major housing development sites developed through Housing New York experienced significant boosts to the property tax base. (Michael Schill, et. al., “Building Homes, Reviving Neighborhoods: Spillovers from Subsidized Construction of Owner-Occupied Housing in New York City,” New York University Law School, 2002.)

Building the Political Will?

Despite politicians’ sense that housing is off the national radar screen, grassroots groups around the country are organizing ... and often winning. This past January, after a three-year campaign, Housing L.A.—a coalition of not-for-profit housing groups, labor unions, community organizations, tenants, religious leaders, and allies—won a \$100 million housing trust fund from Mayor Hahn, despite a large budget deficit. A similar coalition, HousingMinnesota, convened the first Minnesota Housing Convention last year. The campaign for the National Housing Trust Fund involved grassroots mobilization, housing takeovers, and direct action from Maryland to San Francisco. And just last month, voters in Seattle passed an \$86 million real estate tax levy dedicated to affordable housing development!

Still, these efforts are isolated. More than 3,000 organizations have signed onto the National Housing Trust Fund campaign, but the pressure has not been felt inside the beltway. Although housing is “further out of reach than ever” in almost every part of the country, few elected officials on the national stage mention it at all.

Affordable housing “as we know it” has already been reinvented. However, the very decentralization that has made affordable housing work to strengthen low-income communities has weakened the national

effort and allowed a massive loss of resources. If housing is to become a national issue, its advocates must overcome this fragmentation.

In New York City, the homelessness crisis has hit the newspapers, but the ripples have not yet spread to the policy arena, despite the efforts of advocacy groups like Housing First!, a coalition of community, business, civic, labor and religious organizations. As *City Limits* magazine recently editorialized:

Naturally, it took an ugly outright crisis before the people who could do anything about it could be bothered.... And so far, the “what to do” has been distressingly narrow.... When is Speaker Gifford Miller going to take a stand? When is Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff, who oversees the city’s housing development agencies, going to draft and deliver a development plan that actually makes it happen?

But then, none of us should be surprised that elected officials aren’t making specific commitments... So far, the public debate has been driven almost entirely by the McCain vs. Giuliani lawsuit filed by Legal Aid. Now advocates for new development need to play hardball, too. Throw some bricks—sooner or later, they’ll land the way you want them to [“Throwing Bricks,” *City Limits* editorial, November 2002]

Getting Back to Big

New York once again faces a daunting housing crisis. With a record high population, stagnant housing production, energies focused on recovery from a massive and stunning disaster and now in the throes of a serious recession to boot, what can be done? If elected officials and policy makers can be made to think big, New York City can preserve the monumental accomplishments of the past and start to think big again. This will not be cheap, nor easy. But it is only by committing resources and energy on three fronts that New York can make the investment necessary to address the housing problem on a meaningful scale.

Preservation:

The stock of affordable housing is dwindling as a result of insufficient investment in replenishing the capital stock and short-sighted policies. The solutions to the problem won't be cost-free, but they aren't just about money. The City needs to take the leadership to bring HUD and DHCR together to develop a comprehensive strategy to preserve the hundreds of thousands of units of subsidized housing in the city that are at-risk of being lost to ever-rising market prices as their subsidy periods expire. There must be a concerted effort to find ways to hold onto these units for low, moderate, and middle-income families, while addressing the contractual rights of building owners.

As a start, the City, State and Federal authorities should commit to save every unit below 14th Street. The best way to preserve economic diversity in lower Manhattan – even better than building new affordable housing at Ground Zero – would be to preserve the thousands of affordable units that will otherwise be priced out of reach of their current residents within a few years.

Production:

At the same time, it is critical that the city get busy building new housing to expand the supply. Estimates of the housing shortage range from 250,000 to 500,000 units. A city commitment to producing 100,000 new units in the next decade would be a good start. While substantial, this is an investment the city can afford. Indeed, *not* making this investment places the city's economic future in greater jeopardy.

There are a number of viable proposals for how to finance such an effort, including better use of Federal block grant funds, dedicating revenues from the mortgage recording tax, and finally fulfilling the affordable housing promise of Battery Park City. Once begun, public investment in housing leverages private investment spurs neighborhood development, and creates good jobs. A large-scale housing production program will position New York for a new period of growth in the same way the City's commitment to housing in the 1980s paved the way for the 1990s' remarkable economic expansion. It will attract new businesses—large and small—that will renew the economy and strengthen the city.

Land Use Planning and Administrative Reform:

While it is impossible to make a real dent in the problem without money, money alone will not solve the problem. The city no longer has major tracts of vacant land or neighborhoods that can be bulldozed with impunity. Indeed, the mistakes of the past are very present in the minds of most communities targeted for potential large-scale development, and opposition can often be fierce. What vacant land is available must be used judiciously to meet a range of community needs, with a special focus on housing. Further, it is sometimes zoned for obsolete uses, or is tainted with environmental contamination. These issues must be addressed comprehensively to advance development wherever possible. Implementation of new tools, like “performance-based zoning” could lead to the development of mixed-use areas in the outer-boroughs, nurturing 24-hour live/work communities without displacing vital economic activities and jobs.

Planners and architects can go on endlessly about the absurdity of the New York City zoning resolution. Among its many out-dated features are requirements that tend to encourage development of housing, especially in areas zoned for moderate to low densities, below the allowable densities and without preserving the street front so important to neighborhood security and vitality. It is time to take on the task of rewriting New York City's outdated zoning and building codes. Not only can bureaucratic barriers that increase the cost, time, and risk of building housing be removed; but revamped regulations can more fully utilize creative strategies like inclusionary zoning to help keep New York a mixed-income city.

One More Big Idea: End Homelessness

Just as it led the way 100 years ago in the effort to regulate the tenements, New York City could take the lead again on one of the crises of our day. With aggressive public action, the City of New York could end homelessness, set a model for the rest of the nation, and change the way people think about what is possible for government in American cities. While people have come to take homelessness as a given, it could be effectively eliminated in 10 years. The Supportive Housing Network of New York's Blueprint

to End Homelessness outlines what it would take – about 16,000 new units of supportive housing, along with more effective planning and coordination of production and prevention efforts. So far, the Bloomberg Administration has opted for a far narrower, crisis management approach. But if the mayor wants a legacy beyond mayoral control of schools, how about becoming the mayor who initiated the end of homelessness?

Getting Started

The pitfalls of thinking big are, well, big. It could take a decade to build 100,000 units, or to revise the New York City zoning resolution. But much has been learned in the last hundred years. “Towers in the Park” that stand in defiance and isolation from the rest of the city don't work. Development that promotes racial discrimination and segregation sap the vibrancy and opportunity that characterize New York. Planning and design processes that hide from the public eye foster resentment and opposition. Projects that excessively enrich private interests inexcusably waste scarce public dollars. And “destroying the village in order to save it,” as was done in so many neighborhoods in the heyday of urban renewal, is a policy for which New Yorkers continue to pay the price in devastated lives and livelihoods across the city.

With these lessons in mind, it is time to get started. In 1949, Congress set the National Housing Goal of “a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family.” A half-century later, this is still an important goal. It is also eminently achievable. Indeed, the extraordinary efforts underway across the country to establish housing trust funds, end homelessness and ensure economically diverse neighborhoods show that Americans care more about this goal than ever before. The time is ripe to translate this broad public consensus and support into action. New York City can lead the way.

Joe Weisbord is the staff director of Housing First! (<http://www.housingfirst.net>), a campaign to elevate the issue of affordable housing for all New Yorkers to the top of the civic agenda and advance a 10-year plan to develop and preserve 185,000 units of affordable housing in New York City.

Brad Lander is the executive director of the Fifth Avenue Committee (<http://www.fifthave.org>), a not-for-profit community development organization that advances social and economic justice in South Brooklyn.

NOVEMBER 2002

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Shelter

Maximum income for a family of 4 to be considered poor by the 2002 Federal Poverty Guidelines: **\$18,100**

Average income for a single individual to be self-sufficient in NYC, as calculated by the Women's Center for Career and Educational Advancement: **\$19,938**

Number of times the words "unity," "united," or "unified," were used in the 2002 State of the State address: **21**

Number of times the words "equity," "equal," or "equitable" were used in the same speech: **1**

The ratio of increase in average real wages between the richest 1/5th of New Yorkers and the poorest 1/5th of New Yorkers, between 1992 and 1999: **11:1**

Number of New Yorkers earning \$25,000 or less according to 2000 US Census statistics: **1 in 3**

Number 3 reason given by NYC & Company to choose New York City as the venue for a corporate junket: **"We Are Number One" in business, safety, arts, and sports.**

New York City's ranking in housing affordability according to the National Association of Home Builders, in a survey of 57 major metropolitan areas: **50**

Ratio of the number of supplemental housing units planned to be built for athletes participating in the 2012 Olympics to the number of additional vouchers provided by the City this year to house New Yorkers: **1.3:1**

Number of New Yorkers who spend 50% or more of their monthly income on rent: **1 in 4**

Ratio of New York City Section 8 applicants on a waiting list to receive assistance to the number of New York City residents actually receiving Section 8 rent subsidies: **2:1**

Ratio of the cost of housing an inmate in a New York City jail for a year to the cost of providing a Section 8 housing subsidy to a New York City family for a year: **11.5:1**

Percentage of businesses that blamed their lack of growth on housing shortages in New York City according to a 2001 State Comptroller's office report: **78.6%**

Projected cost proposed by the Bloomberg administration to build a full-scale Olympic village for the 2012 New York City summer games: **\$1.6 billion**

Non-Citizen Voting: Pipe Dream or Possibility?

BY RONALD HAYDUK / OCTOBER 2002

Introduction

The acquisition of political rights—including voting rights—has been a vital tool for every disempowered group in American’s history to achieve economic, social and civil rights and equality (Williamson, 1960; Porter, 1971). Because legislative bodies confer rights and make public policy, it is critical to possess the capacity to influence and/or select representatives. Legal barriers to political participation, however, have hampered the attainment of such rights by distinct classes of citizens, including African-Americans, women, and youth.

Previously excluded groups have gained access to the franchise principally through political struggle. They fought their way into the polity through political agitation, sometimes using the courts as a tool. Ultimately they needed the support of other sectors in society to win political rights. The agitation of the property-less encouraged sectors of the propertied to extend the franchise; the abolitionist movement and civil rights movements led whites to enfranchise blacks; the suffragettes compelled men to include women among the voting citizenry; and younger adults, whose participation in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, were granted voting rights by older adults.

Why not for immigrants too?

Although noncitizen immigrants behave in much the same ways as citizens, they possess fewer rights and benefits.⁶¹ Immigrants are subject to all laws and pay taxes, work in and/or own businesses, send their children to schools, serve in the military and can be drafted, and participate in all aspects of daily social life. Nevertheless, noncitizen immigrants are precluded from selecting those who fashion public policy and represent them at every level of governance. As Salvador Hernandez, a 40 year old immigrant from El Salvador who works for an organization called Centro Presente that promotes and supports immigrant civic activism, argued, “My children attend the public schools, so I should have a say in choosing those people who oversee how the [sic] school system is run. Similarly, I have the responsibility to pay taxes, so why can’t I have the privilege of contributing to how those taxes are spent?” (McNaught, 1999.) Increasingly, we hear countless similar voices across the country.

⁶¹ Unless otherwise noted all data on the foreign born are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In this paper, the terms “immigrants,” “foreign born” and “aliens” refer to the same persons and are used interchangeably. There are, however, several distinct categories of immigrants, the main distinction being “legal” versus “illegal” or undocumented immigrants (who comprise less than 15% of all immigrants). Legal permanent residents are those who obtain immigrant visas or “green cards” because they are either: (1) related to a U.S. citizen or permanent resident; (2) because they possess a needed or desirable job skill or ability; or (3) are spouses or children of green card holders. Other categories of legal immigrants include asylees, refugees, and “nonimmigrant” foreigners (such as students, tourists, diplomats, temporary workers, and the like).

It is undeniable that immigrants have re-emerged as pivotal players in American politics. The last three decades of mass migration have produced the largest immigrant population in the United States since the turn of the century. One in ten individuals is foreign born, the highest level since 1910 when over 14% were foreign-born. Moreover, most of the new arrivals have come from Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean, changing the ethnic and racial composition of the U.S. population. Since 1965, the number of immigrants living in the U.S. has tripled. Nearly one in ten families in the U.S. currently is a “mixed” family, having one or more parent that is a non-citizen and one or more child that is a citizen (Fix and Zimmerman, 1999). The U.S. Census reports that several states and locales now have a majority minority population, led by Hispanics who have surpassed African Americans as the single largest “minority” group in the U.S.

These demographic changes hold significant political implications, especially in the states and metropolitan areas where immigrants are concentrated. Six states are home for the overwhelming majority of new immigrants—California, New York, Florida, Texas, Illinois and New Jersey (in that order)—and within these states they are concentrated in eight metropolitan regions: Los Angeles, New York City, Miami, Anaheim, Chicago, Washington D.C. Houston and San Francisco. These immigrant-receiving states play an important role in choosing representatives for Congress—affecting the apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives—and hold critical electoral votes for the presidency. At the state and local level, where they make up a larger proportion of the potential electorate, immigrants can have an even greater impact.

Yet, of the nearly thirty million foreign-born people that currently live in the U.S., there are over twelve million legal permanent residents who remain noncitizens and are barred from voting, over one third! In the 1996 elections, for example, 15.5% of the people who did not vote said they were noncitizens (The U.S. Bureau of the Census, Of those individuals, 53% were Hispanic; 13.5% were white; 9% were black (there was no category for Asians). Despite the recent increase in the number of immigrants who naturalize—largely due to a host of anti-immigrant legislation—the average time it takes to obtain citizenship is nearly ten years. Moreover, many legal immigrants never become U.S. citizens—not wanting to lose ties to their home country—but remain full time U.S. residents.

Available evidence reveals immigrant political participation lags behind their numerical strength, especially compared to native born citizens. Consider voting. Studies show that immigrants register and vote at slightly lower rates than native born citizens, though wide variation exists among different immigrant groups (Mollenkopf, Olsen and Ross, forthcoming; Minnite, Holdaway and Hayduk, 2001; DeSipio, 2001). Variations exist, for example, among Latino immigrants who tend to take longer to naturalize than Asian immigrants, but who register and vote at higher rates than Asians. Foreign-born whites and Asians voted at lower rates than their native stock counterparts in the 1996 presidential elections, but foreign-born naturalized black and Latino citizens voted at higher rates than native-born counterparts (Mollenkopf, Olsen, and Ross, forthcoming; DeSipio, 2001). In the 2000 elections in New York City, nearly 40% of all the 2.2 million votes cast were by immigrants who have naturalized and are now citizens.

Drawing upon the work of other scholars and immigrant rights advocates,⁶² this article argues for the reinstatement of noncitizen voting rights. Given the significant anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S., the notion of allowing noncitizens to vote might appear outlandish upon initial exploration. But once examined, a compelling case can be made for noncitizen voting.

It's legal. The Constitution does not preclude it and the courts have upheld voting by noncitizens. In fact, noncitizens enjoyed voting rights for most of our country's history—from the founding until the 1920s—in much of the country.

It's rational. There are good reasons for the enfranchisement of immigrants—both moral and practical—including notions of equal rights and treatment (as articulated in the American Revolution, the abolitionist movement, the suffrage movement, and the civil rights tradition).

It's feasible. Recently, noncitizen voting has been re-established in several municipalities in the U.S. New York and Chicago permit noncitizen voting in school board elections; several municipalities in Maryland and Massachusetts have extended the right to vote for local offices to noncitizens; and a nearly another dozen other jurisdictions have recently considered or are currently moving to establish noncitizen voting rights.⁶³

The Appearance and Disappearance of Noncitizen Voting Rights

Even though federal law does not preclude voting by noncitizens, its elimination from American political practice has eviscerated national memory. “Aliens” voted in local, state and even national elections in twenty-two states and federal territories from the founding until the 1920s and noncitizen immigrants held public offices, such as alderman, coroner and school board member (Raskin, 1993).

⁶² Several legal scholars have made a compelling case, including, Raskin, 1993; Rosberg, 1977; Shimmelman, 1992; Gordon, 1999; Harper-Ho, 2000; Brozovich, 2002. There are numerous advocates in several states and locales across the country that have and/or are working on passing legislation in those jurisdictions, and who have developed a compelling case for the re-institution of noncitizen voting. (There is no central location where information exists about all such campaigns and organizations, but there are several notable individuals and campaigns that deserve mention here, including Jamin Raskin in Takoma Park MD; Natalie Smith and the Cambridge Voting Rights Campaign and Vladimir Morales in Amherst Mass; and Mabel Teng in San Francisco.)

⁶³ Amherst and Cambridge Massachusetts passed legislation that would allow noncitizens to vote in local elections in the late 1990s, and similar campaigns are underway in Somerville, Chelsea, and Everett. If the state of Massachusetts passes enabling legislation, these jurisdictions would join the five municipalities in Maryland which already allow noncitizens to vote in local elections: Takoma Park, Barnesville, Martin's Additions, Somerset and Chevy Chase. In Los Angeles, a candidate for mayor proposed a similar measure (Siegal, 1997), as well as a city council representative; local activists continue to work for its passage there and elsewhere in California. An “Immigrant Voting Rights Initiative” was launched in San Francisco in 1996, spearheaded by Mabel Tang, City Supervisor. In Washington D.C., following riots in Latino neighborhoods (primarily in Adams Morgan) in the 1990s, a noncitizen voting rights initiative was similarly proposed (Raskin, 1993). In New York State, legislation to re-establish noncitizen voting was introduced in the New York State Assembly in the early 1990's (Shimmelman, 1992). State Assemblymen Vito Lopez continued to introduce similar legislation. Legislation was also introduced into the New York City Council to extend noncitizen voting (from only school board elections) to include all municipal elections in New York City by city councilwoman Una Clarke. Several current city council people have said they are open to considering such legislation.

Early in our country's history, emerging republicanism and liberalism embodied in slogans such as "no taxation with out representation" made noncitizen voting a logical democratic practice tied to notions of "inhabitants" and difficult to challenge. Voting rights were predominantly tied to race and property.⁶⁴ In fact, alien suffrage was compatible with exclusion of other categories of residents (women, men without property, and blacks/slaves), and actually buttressed the privileging of propertied white male Christians (Raskin, 1993:1401, citing Collier, 1992).

During the antebellum period and westward expansion, however, the issue increasingly became more contentious. Although the War of 1812 slowed and even reversed the spread of alien suffrage—in part by raising the specter of foreign "enemies"—Northern states generally held that alien suffrage fell in line with basic rights of the Republic while Southern states saw immigrants as a threat because of the newcomers' general hostility to slavery. Alien suffrage was a major issue in the Civil War (Raskin, 1993). Alien suffrage, nevertheless, spread in the South and West with the growing need for new labor, particularly after the Civil War and during Reconstruction. Many new states and territories used alien suffrage as an incentive to attract settlers and as a pathway to citizenship (though not as a substitute). The general practice was to require residency from six months to one year before voting rights were granted. At least thirteen new states adopted alien suffrage. Noncitizen voting was practiced to its greatest extent by about 1875. By the close of the nineteenth century, nearly one-half of all the states and territories had some experience with voting by aliens, most of them lasting for more than half a century (Alysworth, 1931).

But with the massive increase of darker Mediterranean and politically suspect immigrants at the turn of the century, however, anti-alien passions flourished that halted and reversed these practices. The loss of noncitizen voting rights during the first decades of this century—coupled with the malapportionment of cities—came at the same time when the population of urban America rivaled the populations in much of the rural and suburban parts of the country (Hayduk, 2000). In fact, by 1920, 51% of the population in the U.S. resided in cities (Judd and Swanstrom, 2002). Moreover, 70% of total government spending was done at the state and local levels before 1929 (Ethington, 1993:307).

Interestingly, the timing of immigrant disenfranchisement—and other poor and minority groups through means such as literacy tests, poll taxes, restrictive voter registration procedures and the like—may not have been coincidental. Such disenfranchising measures were promoted and enacted by powerful economic and political elites just when the electoral potential for working class constituencies and powerful third party movements was growing (Keyssar, 2000; Piven and Cloward, 2000; Burnham, 1970; Schattschneider, 1960; and Hayduk, 2002.) Additional legislation drastically reduced the flow of immigrants into the U.S., and limited the proportion of non-Western European immigrants.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Raskin (1993) notes that several aliens signed the Declaration of Independence. Tolerance of alien suffrage was compatible with exclusion of other categories of residents (women, men without property, and blacks/slaves), showing that alien voting rights actually buttressed the privileging of propertied white male Christians (Raskin, 1993:1401). See also Porter, 1968; Harper-Ho, 2000.

⁶⁵ The National Origins Act of 1924 imposed quantitative restrictions on immigrants, placing a ceiling of 150,000 per year on European immigration while completely barring Japanese immigration. It provided for the admission of immigrants based on the proportion of national

Arguments For Noncitizen Voting

Aside from legal arguments mentioned above, there are moral and political claims that immigrant rights organizations utilize to advocate for non-citizen voting rights in state and local elections. Generally, advocates employ many of the same arguments used in past struggles to expand the franchise to previously excluded groups, including blacks, women, and youth. There are three primary arguments (Raskin, 1993; Shimmelman, 1992; Gordon, 1999; Harper-Ho, 2000; Brozovich, 2002.)

First, a basic tenet of democratic theory is found in the notion of the social contract. The legitimacy of government rests on the consent of the governed. Members of legitimate democratic communities are rightfully obliged to obey the laws they are subject to if they possess a means to participate in governance, such as by voting. Citizens consent to be governed by possessing power to select their representatives and hold them accountable. The founding fathers enshrined this notion in the phrase “no taxation without representation,” which provided a rallying cry for the American Revolution. This argument emphasizes the rights of immigrants themselves as members of democratic communities. In fact, federal, state and local governments already treat noncitizens—both legal permanent residents and undocumented people—like other community members. The most obvious example is that all residents must pay income taxes regardless of their immigration status. In fact, the overwhelming proportion of immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits, and more than the average American (except refugees), while contributing positively to the nation’s economy on the whole (Fix and Passel, 1994; Foner, et. als, 2001.)

The argument is that noncitizens have the same stake and interest in a community’s political decisions as that of any citizen. Like other citizens, immigrants tend to become involved and invested in their communities and the nation when given a voice and means of participating in social and political processes. Indeed, voting is an important means of becoming incorporated and engaged in a polity, not merely the outcome of becoming assimilated. According to this line of reasoning, the proper measure of membership in democratic communities is residency, not nationality per se. The main point—one that runs through all three arguments—is fairness. Vladimir Morales, a member of the local governing body in Amherst, Massachusetts and who led the campaign for noncitizen voting rights there, argued that “Resident aliens own houses and businesses in Amherst, pay property taxes and send their children to school, but they cannot participate in the democratic process.⁶⁶ We have a lot of citizens who pay taxes who make decisions for other people who pay taxes... It’s about expanding democracy.”⁶⁷ Similar arguments made in Cambridge Massachusetts led its City Council to extend voting rights to resident

origin groups that were present in the United States according to the census of 1890. Because this census preceded the large-scale immigrations from southern and eastern Europe, this provision represented an explicit effort to ensure that future immigration flows would be largely composed of immigrants from northern and Western Europe.

⁶⁶ Cheryl B. Wilson. “Amherst Town Meeting Says Yes to Allowing Resident Aliens to Vote.” *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, October 27, 1998.

⁶⁷ Jeff Donn. “Massachusetts Town Considers Granting Vote to Non-citizens.” Associated Press, October 21, 1998.

aliens in 2000 for School Committee Elections. These same kinds of issues are currently being articulated in other jurisdictions in Massachusetts and elsewhere, which are considering following suit.

A second argument refers to issues of discrimination and bias. Noncitizens are at risk of bias in majoritarian electoral systems because they lack voting rights and politicians can ignore their interests. Discriminatory districting schemes as well as a broad range of legislation and practices (in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and criminal justice) are inevitable by-products of their political exclusion, not to mention xenophobic political campaigning and racial profiling. Again, advocates of immigrant enfranchisement marshal standard democratic and civil rights principles. Noncitizens have legitimate interests in a community's political processes and need protections within it. As Jamin Raskin, a law professor at American University who led the successful campaign for noncitizen voting rights in Tacoma Park, Maryland stated, "If you can't vote, you tend to be disregarded politically. It [noncitizen voting rights] has extended real visibility to a formerly invisible population" (Donn, 1998).

A third argument stresses the benefits that would accrue to other community members who have common interests. Working class individuals and people of color—particularly in metropolitan regions—face many of the same problems that immigrants do, including discrimination in employment, housing, education and the like. Common interests can forge common ground, reduce competition and strife, and enhance mutual understanding and cooperation. On the other hand, the struggle for scarce economic resources, cultural differences and prejudice can breed inter-group conflict. Universal voting rights can provide a buffer against strife, segmented assimilation, or incorporation/assimilation on basis of race, education level, income, and ideology (i.e. skewed/biased incorporation). Alliances among competing minority groups in struggles for fair employment practices, living wage campaigns, access to affordable housing and education and so on, have formed the basis of such effective coalitions. Noncitizen political participation could help strengthen potential alliances in electoral contests and public policy formation. Indeed, an enlarged electorate might have changed the outcome of close elections.⁶⁸

Arguments Against Noncitizen Voting and Counter Arguments

Opponents to this line of reasoning raise several objections (Geyer, 1998). Some argue that immigrants already have a means of obtaining voting rights: by becoming citizens. Another counter argument is that since noncitizens have not sworn a loyalty oath to the U.S., they cannot be trusted to vote in the best interests of this country, as opposed to their own interests or those of their country of origin. Yet,

⁶⁸ In New York, for example, George Pataki (R) defeated Mario Cuomo (D) in the 1994 gubernatorial election by a mere 173,798 votes out of more than five million votes cast; Alphonse D'Amato sank Bob Abrams by only 124,838 votes in 1992; and in New York City, Rudolph Giuliani defeated David Dinkins by approximately 50,000 votes out of nearly two million cast in 1993, with over five million voting age adults residing in the city. The 1%-2% margins of victories could quickly vanish if noncitizens were more than potential voters. Today, nearly one million New Yorkers are noncitizens, or approximately 15%. Close races in other states with large immigrant populations (California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and Massachusetts—in that order) and metropolitan regions (Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Anaheim, Chicago, Washington D.C., Houston, San Francisco and Boston) could change if noncitizens were enfranchised.

proponents of this argument, critics contend, ignore the fact that people born in the United States are not required to swear allegiance to the Constitution (Gordon, 1999). Ostensible proof of noncitizen commitment and loyalty to the U.S. would be their naturalization. Not only is it flawed to assume that native born residents are “loyal,” but it is equally untrue that noncitizens are not “loyal.” In addition, this argument overlooks that immigrants are, in fact, already community members. A measure of noncitizen commitment and loyalty is evident in their choice of coming to the United States, and perhaps more tellingly, in their continued presence here. Noncitizens demonstrate their commitment and loyalty daily, such as in participating in voluntary organizations or opening a small business. In fact, during earlier periods of American history, it was widely believed that noncitizen immigrants who declared their intent to naturalize should be allowed voting rights because it would encourage acquisition of knowledge about the U.S. and hasten integration and assimilation. To make their right to participate in the management of public affairs dependent upon renouncing citizenship to their home country—which might preclude their right to return or to hold property in their country of origin—amounts to denial of the latter rights. Given the magnitude of such consequences, including not seeing family and loved ones, many immigrants don’t naturalize yet live in the U.S. for decades.

Another counter argument is that noncitizens lack sufficient knowledge of and feeling for American political institutions and issues to make informed voting decisions. Immigrant rights advocates note that specific knowledge is not a prerequisite for political participation. If it were, many native born citizens would fail tests of even basic political knowledge, as survey research has consistently shown. Moreover, such notions come dangerously close to those previously used to impose literacy tests, or to exclude or expel people on the basis of ideological beliefs. In addition, most “education” on campaign issues often occurs in the few weeks and months before an election, not years prior, and is all too often done by the media and candidates anyway. Even conceding that political education has long-term components it is not safe to assume that large differences would exist between the two populations. In fact, because noncitizens have chosen this country rather than being born into it, and are in the process of learning about its language and culture, they often pay more attention to the events around them than many disaffected citizens do. Foreign-language television, radio, and newspapers in many immigrant communities keep people up to date on politics here as well as abroad. If it is the politics of immigrants that opponents dislike or fear, that issue must be exposed as such and publicly debated.

Opponents of noncitizen voting also argue that noncitizens would tip the political balance in a state or community by voting in their own interest. For example, noncitizens could vote to grant state public assistance to undocumented people, or permit bilingual instruction in the public schools.

While it may be true that many noncitizen immigrants might vote for such policies, native born citizens also vote their own interests. Both groups, however, are not homogeneous. It is not exactly clear how noncitizens would actually vote and what impacts they would actually have on the political balance of power. Indeed, this is an area that requires more research. There is some evidence that what little is known about the voting patterns of newly naturalized U.S. citizens—as well as noncitizen voting in Europe—suggests only modest shifts, if any, would occur (DeSipio, 2001; Minnite, Holdaway, Hayduk, 2001). Newly naturalized immigrants do tend to be more sympathetic toward other noncitizen immigrants

than native born citizens (Minnite, Holdaway, Hayduk, 2001). Moreover, the enfranchisement of immigrant voters could invigorate electoral dynamics and produce a general increase in democratic participation of all classes of voters. Indeed, social and political conflicts might be able to be worked out at the ballot box instead of the streets.⁶⁹

Another counter argument is that allowing noncitizen voting would increase electoral fraud. Unethical immigrants or dishonest politicians might use corrupt voting practices to compromise the integrity of the ballot. But logically immigrants are no more likely to be bought or sold than citizens. There is little hard evidence of voter fraud, both historically and contemporarily, contrary to some popular misconceptions (Hayduk, 2002). Furthermore, strong anti-fraud measures are already in place that can detect and deter fraud. To be sure, there are practical problems of managing the simultaneous voting of different classes of electors while preventing potential double voting and the like, which need to be solved. Decisions will need to be made about whether, for example, to restrict voting to legally admitted noncitizens who have been residing in a jurisdiction for a certain period of time (i.e. how many months or years?), and whether to require voters to prove this at poll sites or during the registration process with appropriate identification papers. In order to reduce potential for erecting other cumbersome barriers as well as costs and confusion, the fewer the distinctions between classes of voters and procedures that are required, the better. Finally, existing systems that allow noncitizens to vote illustrate the viability of such reform. Maryland's board of elections, for example, keeps two separate lists of citizens and noncitizen voters for local elections and for state and national elections.

Conclusion: Expand the Franchise

Emerging patterns of immigration are challenging current political alignments and creating new fault lines with the potential to alter the balance of social and political power. Immigration is changing the political arithmetic, propelling parties and politicians who jockey for advantage to adjust campaign strategies to reflect evolving electoral conditions. Some interest groups and politicians actively court immigrant allegiance and forge new political alliances, while others attack or distance themselves from immigrant groups. The case of California—particularly evident in the passage of Proposition 187, and the shifting fortunes of Democrats and Republicans in electoral contests for key offices—and the recent “anti-terrorist” legislation are perhaps the most dramatic but not unique examples. Controversy swirls about the impacts immigrants have on labor markets and public spending to the merits of bi-lingual education and how we define what it means to be an “American.” We see proposals that restrict immigration, hear

⁶⁹ This was one of the arguments used in the campaign for noncitizen voting rights in Washington D.C. following riots in a majority Latino neighborhood (Adams Morgan), according to Jamin Raskin, 1993.

debates about where the lines should be drawn between aliens and citizens in social policies, and witness explosive tensions among immigrants and the native born.⁷⁰

These developments, among others, have shown signs of a growing immigrant consciousness. Even while anti-immigrant sentiments have reigned in public discourse and policy, a mobilization among immigrant groups and their political allies is evident. Immigrant rights organizations have proliferated and engage in a broad range of activism and advocacy. Immigrants walk picket lines and lobby legislatures with greater frequency and force. Such activity reveals a growing sense among new immigrants that they possess legitimate claims on the American polity, and they are commanding greater attention. These issues cut to the heart of democratic participation and citizenship.

A growing number of immigrant rights advocates, politicians and candidates, and scholars argue for the reinstatement of noncitizen voting rights in the aforementioned locales in the United States. Europe also provides a compelling case for noncitizen voting rights. The Maastricht Treaty granted all Europeans the right to vote in European countries other than their own, expanding what has been practiced for years in Sweden (1975), Ireland (1975), the Netherlands (1975), Denmark (1977), and Norway (1978); several Swiss cantons (Neuchâtel and Jura) permit noncitizen voting and Finland and Iceland allow Nordic citizens voting rights; and Estonia allows noncitizen voting at the local level.⁷¹

A campaign based upon democratic and moral claims can mobilize noncitizens and likely allies. Such a campaign could provide immigrants with an important means to defend against nativist attacks, and also give other minority groups greater means to forge winning voting blocks that can advance their mutual interests. Immigrant's taxation without representation not only challenges the legitimacy of America's mantle of democratic governance, it also provides a rationale and opportunity for organizing a progressive political majority. Historically, immigrant votes often accounted for the difference between the winners and the losers in elections.⁷² Noncitizen political participation could help strengthen potential progressive alliances in electoral contests and public policy formation.

Just as the civil rights movement sought to extend the franchise to African-Americans and others who had been barred from voting to attain equitable representation, a renewed movement for human rights would further extend the franchise to new Americans.⁷³ The dominant political parties and candidates are increasingly turning their attention towards immigrants. It would be wise for today's progressives to lead the way.

⁷⁰ Several landmark pieces of legislation concerning immigrants have been enacted at the national and state levels, including the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (ICRA); the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA); the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996; and recent anti-terrorism legislation, to name just a few examples.

⁷¹ Rath, 1990; Raskin, 1993; Harper-Ho, 2000

⁷² Erie, 1988; Shefter, 1994.

⁷³ Of course, other electoral reforms are crucial to rectify the bias of the electorate and the nature of the political parties, such as Election Day voter registration, effective campaign finance reform, ballot access reform, and the inauguration of alternative representational schemes (such as proportional representation or instant run-off voting), if more democratic electoral politics and outcomes are to be achieved (Hayduk and Mattson, 2002).

***Ron Hayduk** teaches political science at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY). Hayduk has written about political participation, elections, social movements, immigration, race, and regional planning, including as co-editor and contributing author of *Democracy's Moment: Reforming the American Political System in the Twenty First Century* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); and co-editor and contributing author of *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization* (Verso, 2002). Hayduk has also contributed essays in: *Teamsters and Turtles?: Leftist Movements in the 20th Century*, edited by John Berg, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); *In Defense of the Alien*, edited by Lydio Tomasi, (Center for Migration Studies, 2000); for the Aspen Roundtable website (<www.aspenroundtable.org>, 2000); in *Mobilization: The International Journal of Research and Theory about Social Movements, Protest, and Collective Behavior* (1998), and in public affairs magazines. Hayduk is currently finishing a book, *Gatekeepers to the Franchise: Election Administration and Voter Participation*.*

*Formerly a social worker, Hayduk has worked in New York government as the Coordinator of the NYC Voter Assistance Commission, and has consulted to several policy organizations, including The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Race and Community Revitalization (<www.aspenroundtable.org>); *Demos: A Network of Ideas and Action* (<<http://www.demos-usa.org>>); *The Century Foundation* (<<http://www.tcf.org>>). Hayduk is an expert witness for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense and Education Fund in their litigation, *NAACP v. Harris*, regarding the impact of election practices during the Florida 2000 elections.*

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OCTOBER 2002

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Democracy

Ratio of the amount spent per vote by Independent Tom Golisano in the New York State Gubernatorial primary to the amount spent per voter by the New York State Board of Elections to ensure that those voters receive a free and fair election: **100:1**

Ratio of parking meters to voting machines in New York City: **10:1**

Average age of New York City mechanical voting machines: **40 years old**

Percentage of districts, in November 2001, that satisfied a state constitutional law requiring that at least two voting machines per 800,000 voters minimum be available in New York electoral districts: **56%**

Ratio of ballot machine error in lower-income districts of New York City comparable to higher income neighborhoods: **4:1**

Residual vote rate (uncounted, unmarked or spoiled ballots) in Miami Dade Country, Florida during the 2000 presidential election: **4.4%**

Residual vote rate (uncounted, unmarked or spoiled ballots) in Brooklyn, New York the same year: **4.0%**

Daily stipend for a New York State election monitor working a 16 hour day: **\$130**

Percentage of New York's voting-age population that did not vote during the 2000 presidential election: **51%**

Percentage of registered voters who participated in the 1996 presidential election in the United States: **65.97%**

Percentage of registered voters who participated in the 1994 presidential election in Tajikistan: **89%**

Number of Americans who cast a vote via telephone on the final night of the Fox Television airing of "American Idol": **15.5 million**

Number of Americans who have permanently lost the right to vote due to a felony conviction: **3.9 million**

Ratio of black men who have permanently lost the right to vote due to a felony conviction to the number of black men who hold a college degree: **1.166:1**

JANUARY 2003

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: The 108th Congress

Percentage of United States Senators with assets in the millions of dollars: **40**

Percentage of United States families with assets in the millions of dollars: **4**

Number of days between Senator Trent Lott's (R-MS) resignation as senate majority leader and the re-nomination of radically conservative Charles Pickering as a federal court judge by President Bush: **18**

Grade received by newly sworn-in Senate majority leader Bill Frist (R-TN) in 2002 on civil rights and "reproductive rights" issues according to the National Association of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America: **F**

Number of non-white Senators in the United States Senate: **3 out of 100**

Number of non-white students in the average American majority-white school: **2 out of 10**

Number of American adults surveyed in a November 2002 Newsweek poll who felt that a newly elected Republican majority in congress would make "no difference" in terms of the kind of legislation passed into law: **approximately 1 in 3**

Percentage of Democrat Senators who supported President Bush's tax cut bill in 2001: **24**

Number of days between the swearing-in of the majority Republican 108th congress and the official unveiling of President Bush's 2003 economic stimulus plan (which will provide \$300 billion of tax relief to corporations and shareholders over the next 10 years): **2**

Percentage of President Bush's stimulus plan geared towards providing tax relief to people earning \$1 million a year or more: **25**

Annual savings in taxes enjoyed by an American earning \$35,000 a year under the terms of the President's 2003 stimulus plan: **\$27**

Year the average American tax-payer, earning the US median income (\$42,228/year), can expect to see returns from the newly proposed Bush stimulus plan: **2004**

Year of the next presidential election: **2004**

SEPTEMBER 2002

Drum Major Institute Injustice Index: Choices

Approximate ratio of immediate cuts to the New York City Education Department's budget, as part of a larger \$379 million cut, to cost of renovating the historic Tweed Courthouse for use as Board of Education headquarters: **1:1**

Monthly housing allowance provided to former schools Chancellor Harold Levy by the New York City Board of Education: **\$10,000**

Monthly rent allowance provided by New York State to a family of three on welfare: **\$342**

Ratio of the income of the City's top fifth residents to the income of the lowest fifth: **33:1**

New York's national ranking in per capita spending on higher education: **48**

New York's national ranking in per capita spending on prisons: **2**

Level at which the state has fulfilled its responsibility to provide a "basic sound education" to public school children in accordance with the appellate court decision CFE v. New York State: **8th grade**

Level of education required to be a part-time package handler for Fed-Ex in East Boston, Massachusetts: **High school diploma or GED**

Minimum educational requirement for service as a corrections officer in New York State: **60 credits of post-secondary education**

Number of Rikers Island inmates with a reading level below the 5th grade: **1 in 3**



OUR MISSION

The Drum Major Institute for Public Policy is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to challenging the tired orthodoxies that impede the achievement of social and economic justice. Originally called The Drum Major Foundation, DMI was founded by Harry Wachtel, lawyer and advisor to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the turbulent years of the civil rights movement.

DMI was relaunched in 1999 by New York attorney Bill Wachtel, Harry's son, and Martin Luther King III. Today, energized by the nationally recognized leadership of Fernando Ferrer, DMI is committed to adding a rigorous progressive voice to compete in the marketplace of ideas.

DMI's approach is unwavering: We do not issue reports to see our name in print or hold forums for the sake of mere talk. We seek to change policy by conducting research into overlooked social and economic issues, by leveraging our strategic relationships, by engaging policy makers and opinion leaders in our work, and by offering platforms to amplify the ideas of those who are working for social and economic justice.

Over the last year we have influenced public policy through our work on making schools accountable to parents and communities; launched "If you don't vote, you don't count," a national public service campaign reaching 23 million households; turned our web-site into a network of ideas and argument; initiated new research into those most impacted by economic hard times; and launched a Speaker Series to provide a platform to progressives who have put their values into practice with success.



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