Callsers Flood ‘Citizenship Now!’ Hotline

T he torrent of phone calls to “Citizenship Now!”—the immigration hotline set up jointly by the City University of New York and the Daily News—began a full half-hour before the five-day program officially began on April 26.

Before that Monday morning was over, the volume of calls had overwhelmed the Daily News phone system, causing it to crash briefly. By Friday evening, the 80 volunteer experts assembled to provide help and advice to almost 6,000 callers—a rate of about 120 per hour, two per minute.

“It just goes to show you the lack of information out there,” said Hostos Community College Professor Allan Wernick, who coordinated the hotline initiative. Wernick, an attorney, is chairman of the CUNY Citizenship and Immigration Project, and also writes a column on immigration for the Daily News.

“We knew there was a demand for a service like this,” said Martin Dunn, deputy publisher and editorial director of the News. “But even we have been surprised by the overwhelming response.”

Citizenship Now! added phone lines and additional CUNY volunteers for the second and succeeding days to meet the demand.

“The response to the call-in proves once and for all that immigrant New Yorkers want desperately to become citizens,” Wernick said. “But the process isn’t easy. Complicated rules, the inefficiency of the government’s immigration offices and the lack of information keep many from getting naturalized.”

Vice Chancellor and board secretary Jay Hershenson proposed the citizenship call-in to Dunn, who enthusiastically embraced the idea. Volunteers included staff, faculty and students from the Law School. They were joined by lawyers and paralegals who specialize in immigration and naturalization matters for the Legal Aid Society, the city and county bar associations, and several nonprofit legal service providers.

Telephones were staffed from 9 am to 7 pm daily from April 26 through April 30.

“CUNY has historically welcomed many generations of immigrants who have looked to higher education opportunity as their ladder to upward social and economic mobility,” Chancellor Matthew Goldstein wrote, inviting colleges to lend their experts and expertise to the program. “Every day, your college helps immigrants realize their dreams in numerous ways. I believe we can build on our longstanding record of contributions through this special outreach program.”

Last November, CUNY initiated a series of special seminars in immigration law for staff from district offices of state, city and federal officials; more than 50 staffers signed up for the first series.

According to Hershenson, the intent is to develop a series of seminars to equip local staff to give precise, current answers to immigration questions.

The need for such services in a city where about 40 percent of the residents are immigrants is nowhere more clear than at Hostos Community College’s Immigration Clinic.

“My day I see more than 25 people,” Myriam Rodriguez, the clinic’s assistant director said, on a recent afternoon. “Every day I see more people than the day before, and now they’re coming from different countries. It’s not just Hispanic people, it’s people from Pakistan, Trinidad, Morocco, Russia — everywhere.”

Most of the people Rodriguez sees have already been to a lawyer, paid their money, and received nothing in return. “Not the pro bono lawyers,” she stresses, not the ones who offer their expertise without charge. “The only problem with the pro bono lawyers is that they sometimes have too many cases to help anyone else.”

Rodriguez said most people who contact the Hostos clinic want to become citizens, or to secure admission for a relative, or to get green cards. The volume of visitors has been up recently because “right now the INS is being a little bit tougher, and people are more aware. They’re looking for more information.”

Those worries don’t affect Rodriguez, who was born in Puerto Rico, but, as she said after a recent full day of work, “I like to help people with these problems. I believe everyone has the right to come here and live, for what we call the American Dream.”

Wernick urged immigrants to not become discouraged in their quest for citizenship. “The benefits are too great, the rights too precious,” he said.
Reflections on the Season of Caps and Gowns

By Chancellor Matthew Goldstein

CUNY carries with it not only excitement but also trepidation. What will become of our graduates? What new academic degree are they embarking upon? For insight, I turn to previous graduating classes and their experiences.

According to one survey of past graduates, 80 percent of associate's degree recipients and more than 90 percent of bachelor's degree recipients from CUNY were employed within a year and a half of graduating. Of those employed graduates, 90 percent of associate degree holders and 80 percent of bachelor's degree holders are working right here in New York City. Further, CUNY degree holders working in New York City are likely to be working in jobs that they specifically trained for at CUNY. Even in today's economy, half of four-year graduates are earning $35,000 or more a year and a half after graduation.

And what are those students doing? We know that through initiatives like the CUNY Big Apple Job Fair alone, our graduates are earning $35,000 or more a year. Considering that most of our graduates not only to its own excellence, but for the thousands of students who attend CUNY, which have truly "made their beginning" and determined their future.

Twenty years from now, many CUNY grads won't necessarily find themselves in the place they imagined on this Commencement Day. But they will find themselves in a good place nonetheless, with the skills, talent, and imagination they take to press even further forward. In the lifelong pursuit that is education, I wish all of our upcoming graduates the best of luck on a fantastic new start.
Report Cites High-Rent Homes of City Nonprofits

Nonprofit services in New York City are marked by "service gaps in rapidly changing, low-income communities and outlying residential neighborhoods, and an overall concentration of facilities in downtown commercial sites," according to the New York City Nonprofits Project’s second report. Data revealed gross imbalances between "affluent/upper-income" neighborhoods and those characterized as "concentrated poverty/low-income." The Nonprofit Project, which has been collecting and analyzing data since 1999, is based at CUNY’s Graduate Center. Its directors are John E. Seely, professor of geography and urban planning at Queens College and the Graduate Center, and Julian Worpel of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton.

Nonprofits located in high-end neighborhoods, it was found, account for almost 62 percent of the $50 billion annual expenditures by nonprofits in the city, although only 11 percent of the city’s population resides in those neighborhoods. Low-end neighborhoods hold 36 percent of the population, but nonprofits there account for only 23 percent of expenditures.

By any measure, nonprofits are an important sector of the metropolitan economy. They employ more than 528,000 workers, which is more than double the number of jobs in manufacturing, slightly more than all employed in finance, insurance and real estate combined, and just 5 percent below the number working for all levels of government. Over the past decade, employment in nonprofits rose by about 25 percent, compared with about 4 percent overall employment growth. The sector is also an important employer of women: 68 percent of its workers are women, who make up 53 percent of the city population. Blacks, who make up a quarter of the population, account for 35 percent of the nonprofit workforce. Hispanics, however, were found to be under-represented, with 17 percent of the workers and 27 percent of the population.

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Think Big but Plan Small, CBS Pro Tells Students at Media Conference

Think big. Plan small.
That, in its briefest form, was the advice CBS correspondent Byron Pitts offered to more than 650 attendees at CUNY’s Fourth Annual Student Media Conference, held in February at the Graduate Center. Pitts—who has covered major stories as the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Elian Gonzalez case and Florida’s presidential recount—spoke with feeling about his rise from poverty to media prominence.

“I was born and raised in East Baltimore,” Pitts told the audience. “I’m the youngest child of a single parent. My mother had her first child at 16. She had me before she finished high school. I am proud of where I come from, I am proud of who I am… I am a witness that all things are possible.”

Possible, that is, with hard work and a lot of planning. Pitts recommended that his student listeners immediately decide where they wanted to be in their careers at age 30, age 40, age 50. “Write it on a piece of paper,” he said. “Plan your life six months, a year, two years, five years, ten years, up to that target.”

He also urged future members of the Chair has supported a writers’ workshop for elder African Americans who shop and is currently supporting a workship for African American women. Pitts began studying at Ohio Wesleyan University, where he earned a B.A. He nonetheless thought big and aimed high—for a national correspondent’s job, Pitts recommended that his student listeners immediately decide where they wanted to be in their careers at age 30, age 40, age 50. “Write it on a piece of paper,” he said. “Plan your life six months, a year, two years, five years, ten years, up to that target.”

That conference also marked the moment when Percy Sutton conceived of the John Oliver Killens Chair. Since then, the Chair has supported a writers’ workshop and is currently supporting a workshop for African American women. Pitts began studying at Ohio Wesleyan University, where he earned a B.A. He nonetheless thought big and aimed high—for a national correspondent’s job, Pitts recommended that his student listeners immediately decide where they wanted to be in their careers at age 30, age 40, age 50. “Write it on a piece of paper,” he said. “Plan your life six months, a year, two years, five years, ten years, up to that target.”

He also encouraged students who might have suffered from the same misfortunes that had beset him. “These things toughen,” he said. “I’m of the belief that you have a tremendous advantage over anyone you’ll face in undergraduate school. anyone you will face in your professional life, because there is a level of mental toughness that you have to have to survive those kinds of life experiences.”

He also urged future members of the Fourth Estate not to get discouraged when the job does not go well. “Say, ‘Today was indeed a bad day, but I’ve had good days along the way. I’m not where I want to be, but I’ve come a long way from where I started.’”

Summing up his own career and the hopes of his listeners, Pitts said, “You can be successful if you are focused, if you are disciplined, if you are willing to invest the time.” Then he concluded, “I’m grateful for my professional experience, and let me be a witness that if Byron Pitts of East Baltimore can make it, anyone—every- one—in this room can make it.”

7th Black Writers Conference Honors John Oliver Killens

John Oliver Killens was a legendary novelist, playwright, essayist, teacher, mentor and activist, as well the founder of the Harlem Writers Guild where they wanted to be in their careers. Killens was a legendary list of authors including Poets of John Oliver Killens, Keith Gilardy, came to speak about why Killens has not been anthologized. The Center for Black Literature, established at Medgar Evers in 2003, on the strength of previous National Black Writers Conferences and was developed to increase the public’s knowledge and appreciation for Black literature. It convenes conferences, symposia, workshops, and seminars related to the study, teaching and discussion of Black literature. Upcoming events include a multicultural bookfair on June 19 at Medgar Evers, and the North Country Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color, from July 18 to 22 in upstate New York. The public is also encouraged to listen to the National Black Writers Radio Series, “Writers and Writing,” which airs Sundays, 7-7:30 p.m. on 91.5 FM in the studios of Medgar Evers College. For more information about Center events, contact its director, Professor Brenda M. Greene at 718-270-0776 or bgreen@mec.cuny.edu.

In preparation for the Conference, many Medgar Evers faculty used either Youngblood or The Cotillion (the only Killens novels now in print) as required novels in their English courses. Essays from Black Man’s Burden were used as part of the required readings for developmental exams. Two MEC faculty, Professors Carlyle V. Thompson and Steven Nardi, and one English major, Bianca Jacobs, presented papers at the Conference. A former Medgar Evers pro- fessor (now at Penn State) and author of Liberation Memories: the Rhetoric and Poetics of John Oliver Killens, Keith Gilardy, came to speak about why Killens has not been anthologized. The Center for Black Literature, established at Medgar Evers in 2003, on the strength of previous National Black Writers Conferences and was developed to increase the public’s knowledge and appreciation for Black literature. It convenes conferences, symposia, workshops, and seminars related to the study, teaching and discussion of Black literature. Upcoming events include a multicultural bookfair on June 19 at Medgar Evers, and the North Country Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color, from July 18 to 22 in upstate New York. The public is also encouraged to listen to the National Black Writers Radio Series, “Writers and Writing,” which airs Sundays, 7-7:30 p.m. on 91.5 FM in the studios of Medgar Evers College. For more information about Center events, contact its director, Professor Brenda M. Greene at 718-270-0776 or bgreen@mec.cuny.edu.

New CUNY School for the Fourth Estate

Approval of a new CUNY graduate school of journalism was expected at the May Board of Trustees meeting, and a search for its founding dean is already underway.

The National Black Writers Conference honored John Oliver Killens with a keynote speech on Killens by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, is expected to open in the summer of 2005 in Midtown Manhattan, accept 50 students in the inaugural class, and eventually serve 200 students.

Among the participants were a diverse roster of writers, poets, scholars and actors who had been friends, colleagues, mentees and disciples of Killens. Among them were Quincy Troupe, Tiny Medina, Woods, the legendary works of John Oliver Killens, and his role as writer and activist. He helped to organize Black and Caucasian workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the late 1940s.

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Two Major Alumni Gifts to Queens College

There was no money for education,” says Virginia Frese Palmer of her childhood, “so college wasn’t an option until Queens College came along.” She grabbed that option, earned a 1942 B.A. in media studies, then a Columbia M.A., and went on to a long career as a speech pathologist-therapist. Along the way she married Gordon Palmer Jr., co-founder of a company that produced precision-engineered electronic components. Now widowed, Frese Palmer says she is intent on making it “possible for other students to get the high-quality education I received.” She started with a $1 million gift in 2001 to her alma mater’s Speech and Hearing Center and Women and Work Program. Now, with another $2.5 million gift earmarked for the “B” Building (one of the campus’s original, Spanish-style structures), she sets a Queens College record for alumni giving.

At a festive dedication ceremony on April 16, the building—which once housed the New York Parental School for Boys and now is home to the Dean of Students and many student services—officially became Virginia Frese Hall.

The day before, April 15, ceremonies were held to mark the naming of a plaza adjacent to Rosenthal Library in honor of Edwin M. and Judith Cooperman (both Class of ’64), who have donated $1 million to the College. Welcoming these major gifts, Queens President James M. Nykamp said of Frese Palmer and the Coopermans, “Their gifts build a bridge between the past and the future of the College and reinforce the impact of this unique institution.”

Brainy City Tech Student Wins Poster Competition

City Tech junior Manpreet Singh, seen here with his mentor Professor Laina Karthikeyan, recently won a national neuroscience research poster competition at a conference in San Diego. Singh has been exploring a neurological disorder called dystonia, which causes sufferers to make involuntary abnormal muscle contractions that cause twisting and repetitive movements. “A mutation has been found in a gene of most people diagnosed with dystonia in childhood,” says Singh, who came to the U.S. at age ten from the Indian state of Punjab.

He came to City Tech with computer science in mind, but in his first semester was lured to biology awards by a class of Karthikeyan’s focused on cell biology. “The focus of her research is the molecular basis of inherited diseases.” “What I like about doing research is that you can work by yourself, which is relaxing. I hope to make a real contribution in the future to cancer or AIDS research,” says Singh.

Karthikeyan and Singh recently established the Biology Seminar Club on campus, which they hope will expose students to the work of health-related researchers and facilitate the presentation of their work to their peers.

City Tech offers qualified students opportunities to assist faculty members in research. Two NIH-funded programs in which Singh participated—Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement and Dual Bridges to the Baccalaureate—are designed to increase under-represented minorities in biomedical research.

“Quite recently I turned down a very nice job offer from a leading biotech company in California,” says Karthikeyan. “Teaching is instant gratification. With research, it can be years before you know the results. I feel lucky to have made a career doing both.”

CUNY Team Honored for Cloud Research in Colorado Rockies

Storm Peak Laboratory expedition leader Edward Hindman helps his student colleagues close the Explorers Club flag.

The venerable Explorers Club of New York recently presented its Flag Award to a CCNY-BCC team of faculty and students for their study of clouds at the 10,525-foot-high Storm Peak Laboratory in northern Colorado last January.

For 14 years the eminent weather expert Edward Hindman, a professor of earth and atmospheric science at City College and the Graduate Center, has been leading teams of CUNY students and colleagues on expeditions to the Laboratory to study winter-time atmospheric phenomena and cloud pollution.

This year’s expedition included his CCNY colleagues Teresa Bandoz (chemistry) and Beth Witt (civil engineering), as well as his former student and CCNY alumnus Neal Philipp, who is a professor of chemistry and Bronx Community College. Four BCC students and five from CCNY rounded out the team, which was on Storm Peak for two weeks.

Why go to Colorado? “If you want to study clouds and whether they are dirty,” says Philipp, “it helps to be able to “step outside the lab and be in a cloud. If we wanted to do this kind of work in New York, we would have to use an aircraft, which would be very expensive.”

This kind of research environment would leave anyone with a taste for skiing on, well, cloud nine. During the first three days of the team’s stay, students were provided with ski equipment and taught basic techniques so they could ski down from the lab to their base camp at 6,000 feet.

“The field experience enhances self-reliance,” says Hindman, “since the around-the-clock measurements require on-time shift work, because the mountain-top and valley measurement sites require them to learn to ski, and because their observation skills can be severely tested by the sometimes hostile weather.”

On their return, the students and teachers worked on preparing reports on their finds for delivery at scientific conferences.

Banner Year for CUNY Guggenheim Fellows

The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation’s announcement of new fellows in April gave the City University more than the usual reason to celebrate. Seven of its teachers—ranging from adjunct to emeritus—were given 2004 fellowships, among the most prestigious, and highly competitive, in the nation.

Susan Choi, an adjunct assistant professor of English at Brooklyn College, was appointed for work in fiction. Born in Indiana and raised in Texas, Choi has been a staff writer for The New Yorker. Her debut novel, The Foreign Student (1998), was widely acclaimed.

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature Antony S.J. Fletcher, who taught at the Graduate Center, will be using his fellowship to study temporal representations in poems of the environment.

Ernesto Mestre, who is an assistant professor of fiction at Brooklyn College, was born in Guantánamo, Cuba, and was raised mainly in Miami. The author of The Lazarus Rumbas, his latest novel, The Second Death of Unica Areyano, has just appeared. He will continue writing fiction on his Guggenheim.

The multi-media artist Sol Sax, a lecturer in art at Medgar Evers College, is well known for his complex and richly symbolic sculptural installations that join contemporary African-American culture and Yoruban traditions of West Africa.

Distinguished Professor of English Grace Schulman, of Baruch College, is a well-known figure among the poets of Gotham and will use her fellowship to add to her already considerable oeuvre.

Leo Treitler emigrated to the U.S. in 1938 and became an eminence in music history, teaching at several top-ranking institutions, Chicago, Berkeley, and Brandeis among them. At the Graduate Center he rose to Distinguished Professor of Music. The topic of his Guggenheim proposal is not narrow: “A Study of Discourse about Music.”

The seventh Guggenheim, the choreographer Yin Mei of Queens College, is featured on page 12.

New Radio Studio Opens at Brooklyn College

Thanks to the generosity of an old grad, Himan Brown (‘34), and a young one, Al Tanger (‘01), Brooklyn College was able to inaugurate a brand-new state-of-the-art radio studio on April 14.

Brooklyn College Radio (BCR, 1090 AM), which has been broadcasting to the campus for 35 years, is now ensconced in Whitehead Hall in three fully sound-proofed studios, each sporting industry-standard Wheatstone Radio Arts B-90 mixing consoles.

Brown produced and directed some of the most famous radio dramas in history (Dick Tracy, Grand Central Station, Inner Sanctum Mysteries, and others), and Tanger is chairman of Marlin Broadcasting. Their gifts, said Brooklyn College’s President Christopher Kimmich, will allow students to “gain real-world experience using the best equipment...I look forward to hearing the results.”

“Brooklyn College now has one of the nicest college radio stations in the New York City metro area, a facility that rivals some of the professional radio stations I’ve worked in,” said Assistant Professor Martin Spinelli of the Department of Television and Radio, where he heads radio studies. BCR’s programming can also be heard on the World Wide Web. Visit the station’s Web site at www.brooklyncollegelradio.org.

Student on air in the new studio at Brooklyn College.

CUNY Matters — June 2004
By Pedro Pedraza, Centro Researcher & Exchange Programs Director

After a visit to Cuba in 1986, arranged by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, City University’s then Chancellor Joe Murphy asked Dr. Frank Bonilla, the founding director of the Centro, to begin an exchange program with the University of Havana and other cultural, academic and research institutions in Cuba. The program was expanded in the early nineties to include other parts of the Caribbean, and three years ago it was combined with our exchange program in Puerto Rico, Interbrand.

Up until two years ago this exchange was between faculty and graduate students undertaking research projects or some type of collaboration. On occasion the exchange was among writers, painters, film directors, musicians or other intellectuals. Fortunately, about four years ago travel regulations to Cuba were expanded to allow academic exchanges by undergraduates. As a result, two years ago the Centro joined with Hunter College’s Education Abroad Program to create a January intersession open course to students at CUNY.

This course was created in collaboration with Cuba’s premier cultural institution, La Casa de las Americas, in Havana, and offered an intense three-weeks of immersion in Cuban cultural, social and political history in January 2003. The principal writing assignment was to focus on a particular aspect of Cuban life and culture, and the essays that resulted explored a wide range of topics—from baseball, classic car culture, prostitution, culinary history, and the commercialization of Ernest Hemingway to the music of timba and salsa, the post-revolutionary educational system, and the Jews and the Chinese of Cuban descent.

The students, who represented the tremendous cultural and human diversity that is the City University, learned as much from each other, living together at La Casa, as they did from Cuba itself. A get-together on their return led to the idea of sharing their experiences on a web site. With grants from the Centro and the Puffin Foundation, adjunct professor Maria Finn, who taught part of the intersession course, produced the site, titled “The Crocodile, Letters from Cuba” with the assistance of one of the students, Scott Larson. Visit it at www.centropr.org/exchange/cuba. The essays generated by the 2003 trip can be read in full on the site. [CUNY Matters has drawn from these colorful, probing and perceptive letters from Cuba in the feature presented here. — Ed.]

This past January the course was again conducted with La Casa, but on the Hunter side a new partner has joined the collaboration, with the Latin American/Caribbean Studies Program providing the academic credit. It is our hope, and that of Program director Dr. Michael Turner, that these courses become a fixture at CUNY, for it puts our students up close from U.C. Berkeley, Johns Hopkins and NYU, who are currently also participating in Casa courses.

We are now organizing a summer course there on Cuban music; the deadline for applications/matriculation has been extended to June 11th. For further information, or questions, contact Rachell Artega at rartega@hunter.cuny.edu

For “Letters from Cuba” on the Jews of Cuba, the Martha Stewart of Cuban Cuisine, Black Market Birthday Cakes, and Cuban Baseball, visit www.cuny.edu/news.

CUNY’s student delegation is gathered in La Casa’s Haydee Santamaria Art Gallery. In front, from left: Amena Black, Elizabeth Lee, middle row: Dawn Everline, Ericka Arroyave, Nga Lee, Scott Larson, Nadira Narine; back row: Michael Diaz, Casa professor Yey Villallvilla, Alaina Weston, Jesus Fernandez-Garcia, Centro Exchange Programs Director Pedro Pedraza, Kate Mikulak, Brooke Greene, Rachell Artega, Casa employee “Chino,” and Hunter resident director Mary Bittner.

The Flashy, Vulgar Timba

Bring from a typical Colombian family, Erricka Arroyave says “music has been a huge part of my life.” She remembers her mother singing and dancing salsa as she cooked sancocho in the kitchen and the constant sounds of Eddie Palmieri, Ruben Blades, and Williel Colon. A junior at Queens College, Arroyave’s love of salsa encouraged her travel to Cuba. She was, in particular, “eager to learn more about timba, a new style of Afro-Cuban music that is a cross between Cuban son and salsa.” Luckily, the very first day she met a musicologist at La Casa, Yey Diaz de Villallvilla, who was more than happy to direct her to those in the ways of timba. In Cuba, where it was on full display.

“Timba is a mixture of son, rumba, rap, jazz and rock,” Arroyave says, “and it first gained popularity in the 1970s. Many of the Hispanics in New York were creating salsa. Los Van Van and Irakere were the pioneers, and it is the leader of Irakere, Chucho Valdes, coined the term in the late 1980s.” Erricka also learned about timba star Jose Luis Cortes, aka “El Tosco,” whose coarse lyrics

Model Student enjoys Classic Models

Kate Mikulak’s postcards north began, “I’m not in Cuba, I’m in Heaven.” It wasn’t the lively club life of Havana, resounding with salsa, timba, and son, of surf resounding off the sea-walls of the Malecón, or its atmospheric historic architecture that left her in bliss. It was the cars.

Mikulak, a Hunter College student who just returned from a modeling stint in Paris, adores classic American cars, a passion first sparked by an affair with an older man, then deepened by a stint working in an automotive restoration garage in her native Philadelphia. She even turned down a fashion modeling job in Japan one summer to work on old cars. “Chipping rust and plunging parts in tubs of kerosene might not be glamorous, but I loved it,” she says.

Mikulak explains that she was in white walls-and-chrome heaven because, thanks to a four-decades-old economic embargo imposed by the U.S., $50,000 to 60,000 classic cars are kept roaming the island by a resourceful population. With her fine eye for details on and under the hood, she soon learned what geniuses at max-and-match Cuban repairmen have become.

“A car from a ’57 Chevy, for instance, runs about $107,” Mikulak says, “while one from a Polish Lada is $15-$20.”

The remarkable Cuban ethnic mix of Hispanic, African, and Caribbean Mikulak found reflected in the island’s automotive life, producing not a few visual enigmas. “I never saw a Packard,” she recalls, but “I noticed its signature swan hood ornaments attached to almost every type of car.” Mainly, she was astounded by the sheer numbers, variety and condition of “these incredible ‘maquinas’: ’57 Chevy Bel Airs, the classic American car…” ’50-’54 Chevys with their great windshield visors and cute tire skirts… magnificent old Buicks sporting huge engines and distinctive ‘ventipots.’

Two things saddened Mikulak, though. “I noticed that no women are involved” in the car culture. “Cars in Cuba are passed down from fathers to sons.” And her weak Spanish made it hard to get into profound car talk with proud owners. Still, Mikulak, who counts her intersession trip “the best school-travel experience” she’s ever had, says it “re-energized my love of cars.”

Just thinking of the conversations I could have had makes me want to jump a flight to Havana with a Spanish language book, some brand new vintage spark plugs and a gallon of car wax.

Probing a Heroine’s Suicide

Dawn Everline’s letter, titled “Women of the Revolution,” was sparked during a visit to the Museum of the Revolution led by La Casa Professor Gerardo Hernandez. “I began to focus on a picture of Haydee Santamaria,” Everline recalls. “There she stood with blank look, almost emotionless. I wondered what she was feeling.”

When Everline, a Lehman College Latin American-Caribbean studies major, heard Hernandez remark, “She committed suicide in 1980, around the anniversary of the Moncada invasion,” she was bowed over. “What? My soul screamed… Then I began to wonder if her life was any different from that of Maria, our cook, or my own. I knew that I must change my [paper] topic to Womanhood and the Revolutionary Spirit.”

Soon Everline was immersed in the Casa archives, getting to know more about Haydee’s place as one of the heroines of the anti-Batista revolution. Santamaria was praised by Castro in his famous “History Will Absolve Me” for her courage after she was captured and tortured during the ill-fated attack on police barracks at Moncada on July 27, 1959. Also at Moncada, both her brother Abel and her fiancé were killed.

Everline’s first informant was the director of La Casa’s Women’s Studies department. “Why did she commit suicide?” she asked, and Luisa Campuzano cited a divorce, a severely handicapped son, and the memories of the murder of that reason enough…” But no one knows for sure why.

Seeking possible answers in the changing “place” of women in Cuban society, Everline focused on interviews with two older women, a librarian and her cook, and, for a different generational perspective, the cook’s grand-daughter.

Concluding her letter, Everline writes, “Everyday life is a revolution… It has been women who have traditionally been the foundation for Cuban culture. They were and are the ones who are primarily concerned with family issues. Now these concerns have expanded outside their homes, into the streets of Havana, into the classrooms, onto the driver’s seats of forklifts.” Haydee Santamaria’s life, Everline adds, helped her grasp that “womanhood and its struggles are universal. This bond is being empowered by the women of the revolution.”

Of Timba, Classic Bel Airs & “Papa’s” Finca

A junior at Queens College, Arroyave’s love of music has been a huge part of my life.” She remembers her mother singing and dancing salsa as she cooked sancocho in the kitchen and the constant sounds of Eddie Palmieri, Ruben Blades, and Williel Colon. A junior at Queens College, Arroyave’s love of salsa encouraged her travel to Cuba. She was, in particular, “eager to learn more about timba, a new style of Afro-Cuban music that is a cross between Cuban son and salsa.” Luckily, the very first day she met a musicologist at La Casa, Yey Diaz de Villallvilla, who was more than happy to direct her to those in the ways of timba. In Cuba, where it was on full display.

“Timba is a mixture of son, rumba, rap, jazz and rock,” Arroyave says, “and it first gained popularity in the 1970s. Many of the Hispanics in New York were creating salsa. Los Van Van and Irakere were the pioneers, and it is the leader of Irakere, Chucho Valdes, coined the term in the late 1980s.” Erricka also learned about timba star Jose Luis Cortes, aka “El Tosco,” whose coarse lyrics
Hunter Centro Students’ “Letters from Cuba”

“tósco” means coarse in Spanish — about Cuban social problems, Arroyave says, “brought tinba to a new level.”

Arroyave interviewed a musicologist at Cuba’s Center for Investigation and Development of Cuban Music, Nera Gonzalez, whose letter “described tinba as flashy, complex, sophisticated and vulgar all at the same time.” Gonzales laughed when “I asked if race, social class or gender were problems when dancing to tinba.” Nera replied, “Cubans don’t care if you are poor or rich, male or female, black or white; they only care if you know how to dance.” No surprise, then, that when Arroyave walked into her first tinba club, the Tropical, the first words of “a really cute Cuban” were “Quieres bailar?”

Instantly she felt she was among friends.

The music, she recalls, “was intensely rhythmic, very aggressive and boisterous. It was as if all the instruments were challenging each other on which could play the loudest.” She says “tinba plays a huge role in Cuban society,” and she’s convinced “it is more than a mere new style that in time will be forgotten.” This not least because tinba’s lyrics contain “subtle references to the problems of Cuban society…[Tinba] is serious, and offers food for thought.”

Hemingway’s Legacy
(For a Price)

Cuba’s charm is hard to resist,” says Andrew Coverdale, whose letter focuses on how one of the most famous U.S. authors, Ernest Hemingway, fell under its spell. Coverdale, a May 2003 Hunter grad in media studies, tells of Hemingway first stopping in Havana in 1928 with his pregnant wife en route to Key West, then of his frequent trips back to the island known to many as The Pearl of the Antilles.” It emerged from the son, a base folkloric music whose beat is maintained by the clavé, two sticks tapping together, and the rumba, an African-based music for such dances as the bacaguo, yamb and guaguanco. “Guanganuco is a dance where the whole body moves; it is the predecessor of the popular salsa dance.”

Hernández explains that modern salsa is in fact the result of a very complex fusion of styles that began when Cuban music came to the U.S. in the 1940s with a wave of immigrants. “Salsa is the commercial name given to this music as it developed in the barrios of New York City in the mid-1960s. It is a fusion of Cuban son and rumba, American jazz and Puerto Rican bomba, plena and música jíbara.”

A major wave of immigrants in the barrios of New York City was the result of a very complex fusion of styles that began when Cuban music came to the U.S. in the 1940s with a wave of immigrants. “Salsa is the commercial name given to this music as it developed in the barrios of New York City in the mid-1960s. It is a fusion of Cuban son and rumba, American jazz and Puerto Rican bomba, plena and música jíbara.”

Searching for the Roots of Salsa

The letter from Jesús Hernández-García should be accompanied by a CD. For the Hunter College honors program student, who also plays percussion for salsa bands in the city, headed south to answer the questions, “What is salsa? Where did it come from?” And he also wanted to plunge into the old debate: is salsa Puerto Rican or is it Cuban?

“Spending three weeks in La Habana was an edifying and fantastic experience,” he says. The history of salsa, he concludes, does begin “here, in the island known to many as The Pearl of the Antilles.” It emerged from the son, a base folkloric music whose beat is maintained by the clavé, two sticks tapping together, and the rumba, an African-based music for such dances as the bacaguo, yamb and guaguanco. “Guanganuco is a dance where the whole body moves; it is the predecessor of the popular salsa dance.”

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be lucky and catch a bacacua ceremony on the Plaza. Even walking down the Malecón, you will bump into two or three guys chilling on the seawall playing son. Cuba is a musician’s paradise. “Cubans love music,” Hernández says. He interviews a street musician named Justo (seen at left), who explained: “When a child is born, we dance; after church, we dance; after dinner, we dance, at weddings and even at funerals, we dance; salsa goes everywhere a Cuban does.”

Tropic Escape—Family Discovery

Hunter College geography major Nga Lee admits her foremost desire in heading for Cuba was “to be in a tropical island in January and to see the beauty and culture of an island forbidden to us by our government.” But when she arrived, a melancholy fact in her family history began to nag in the back of her mind: her grandfather had long ago abandoned his wife and son, Nga’s dad, and emigrated from China to Cuba. Could Lee, who was raised in New York’s Chinatown, find any traces of his existence on the island?

Research led her to learn about two major waves of immigration from China, one in the 19th century to work in the sugar fields after the abolition of slavery, then another in the early 20th century to work in the glitzy, Las Vegas-style post-colonial period, when Cuba was a tourist playground for Americans.

Pedro Pedraza, the center’s director of exchange programs, put Lee in touch with Alphonso Lam, Cuba’s Picasso, whose family tree is part Chinese. Also a member of one of the old Chinese Associations, Lam took her on a surprising tour: “I was flabbergasted at the sight of ‘El Barrio Chino’ in Havana,” she recalls.

Soon she was conversing with a Cuban-born but pure Chinese in Cantonese with Chinese in a Chinese mausoleum turned up nothing, but then success came as documents about her grandfather, Chung Lap Lee, were found under the false identity he had purchased. Manuel Fong. Such subterfuge was necessary because Chinese immigrants did not have legal status.

On her return home with copies of the documents, Lee was a little disappointed that her own huge emotions over the discoveries were not shared by her dad. “His reaction was calm, with a smile on his face.” For her, though, the escape from winter may have turned into something more: “An immense history about the Chinese in Cuba has yet to be told and perhaps some day I will return and complete what I feel is my duty.”

Billboards with political messages are a common sight in Cuba. Hunter student Nadira Marina poses in front of one that says, “Imperialism, we have absolutely no fear!”

Tough field work on the subject in Havana included a rumba session in Plaza de Armas. “It was an amazing experience… I still have the rhythm stuck in my head,” she says. “You may even find…”

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City Tech Unveils Career Manual for Students with Disabilities

To every CUNY student the moment comes, sooner or later, finally deciding what career path to follow. For students with disabilities—a rapidly growing student community—the decision can be affected by many additional factors—knowing which modes of technology for serving particular disabilities are available on a given campus or in prospective work sites, for example, or which professions and good corporate citizens have a history of hiring the disabled.

City Tech has just produced a career-selection manual, 
Identifying Options that can now be accessed on the CUNY website.

This manual highlights every CUNY associate and baccalaureate program. Each program is identified on a separate page and includes its curriculum, the colleges that offer the major, prerequisite skills and abilities, potential jobs awaiting its graduates and other information. Other sections in Identifying Options offer students with disabilities valuable information on campus accommodations and resources (listed by type of disability) and lists of preferred locations with a history of hiring individuals with disabilities.

Identifying Options will be periodically revised to reflect the most current data. “The manual will soon be available in alternate formats such as tape and Braille,” says Director of Student Support Services Faith Fogelman, who supervised the compilation of the manual. “It will be a valuable resource for all students, potential students, career/guidance counselors and parents.” In the near future the site will be compatible with voice activated software, like JAWS (Job Access With Speech).

The need for an all-CUNY compilation was recognized when a similar manual devoted solely to City Tech degree programs (compiled by Soudabeh Shayesteh and Charlotte Rubin and including information aimed at students with disabilities) was well received by College students, faculty, and counselors. Shayesteh and Rubin also researched and designed Identifying Options.

One of the parties who applauded the original City Tech manual was the distinguished educator Dr. Sylvia Walker, who began her college studies at City Tech. Long legally blind and for several years completely blind without sight, Walker went on to earn degrees from Hunter and Queens Colleges, then a doctorate from Columbia University.

Now the director of the Center for Disability and Socioeconomic Policy Studies in Howard University’s School of Education in Washington, D.C., Walker is a renowned authority in the field of disability rights. She encouraged City Tech to enlarge the reach of its campus manual, and through funds at her disposal she offered to partially support the new and expanded Identifying Options.

“Students should have a portable tool to assess where they fit in when selecting a career,” Walker said. “Students with disabilities need to be aware of all the possibilities, but simultaneously they need to be aware of all their options.”

To access Identifying Options go to www.citytech.cuny.edu, click on Students, then on Student Support. Access from the CUNY website (www.cuny.edu) is by clicking on Current Students. For further information about Identifying Options, contact Faith Fogelman at 718-260-5143 or ffogelman@citytech.cuny.edu.

John Jay Report to Bishops on Abuse

More than two-thirds of the 4,392 Catholic priests accused of sexually abusing minors between 1950 and 2002 were pastors or assistant pastors, according to a national study recently conducted by faculty at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The study, commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, came from surveys in 195 dioceses (representing more than 97% of the nation’s diocesan priests) and 142 religious communities with about 83% of all priests in religious orders.

Based on estimates of the number of active priests, the study concluded that about 4% of priests had been accused. In all, 10,867 individuals—88% of whom were male—allged that they had been abused by priests. More than a quarter of all complaints, involving almost 3,000 victims, were lodged against just 149 priests.

John Jay was selected to conduct the study by a review board created in 2002 by the Bishops’ Conference. The mandate was to examine the number and nature of sexual abuse allegations against priests from 1950 to 2002, to collect information about the alleged abusers and their victims and to assess the financial impact on the Church.

The entire study is available online at the John Jay College website: www.jjay.cuny.edu/churchstudy.

Highlights from CUNY Disabilities-Awareness Month

A strong commitment to enabling students, faculty, and staff with disabilities to excel in their studies, research, and work was displayed on all college campuses, following Chancellor Matthew Goldstein’s announcement that April would be CUNY Disabilities Awareness Month.

Many events highlighted some of the University’s talented students, faculty and staff with disabilities, as well as those whose area of research is in the disability field. Notable among these gatherings was a Disabilities Awareness celebration at Baruch College led by its Computer Center for Visually Impaired People. The Center’s director, Dr. Karen Gourgey, joined with Douglas Suzman, Deputy Director for Government and Community Relations for the Metropolitan Transit Authority, to unveil a new advertising campaign, for the Metropolitan Transit Authority, schools, research, and work was displayed on technology for serving particular disabilities.

Assistive Technology Services (CATS) Information was also given on CUNY services for those with disabilities since the act became law. Spoke of real-life experiences of those with disabilities. Narratives on the Americans with Disabilities Act

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**Women’s Place in Society — Two New Historical Retrospects**

**Idiot Custom v. Sweet Reason in Jacobean England**

It was 1620, and King James was furi-ous about a serious social problem. He leaned on the Bishop of London to make his preachers thump the pulpit of the city’s many anglican churches on the subject. The outrage? — all these women who were going about dressed like men. After all, did not his estimable “Version” of the Bible specifically state: “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man”? (As to what Deuteronomy 22.5 says next — “neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment” — James was apparently not exercised. But then, his intimacies with prominent young male courtesans were by 1620 a notorious subject of court gossip.)

In due course, to please the King a pamphlet titled Hic Mulier vs. Haec Vir was published. The main argument is that women are superior to men because they are more virtuous, even though they are “the weaker vessels” and their bodies are “an Asia, full of delights.” Along the way, however, the author, O’Malley, does make the forward-thinking observation that women’s “want of employment corrupts the bravest spirits.” In other words, O’Malley writes, “women would be fit rulers if only they were permitted to rule.”

The other pamphlet included is the similarly titled An Apology for Women, which appeared in 1609 to argue against it still is. It took considerable courage for a woman back then to choose simply to be peripatetic. When Walt Whitman began his Song of the Open Road with “I left my heart and light-hearted I take to the open road./Healthy, free, the world before me,” you definitely sense it was a guy thing.

Borough of Manhattan Community College Professor of English Susan Gushee O’Malley is the time-honored question posed by these two pamphlets, which appear in her new edition, “Custome Is an Idiot.” Jacobean Pamphlet Literature on Women (University of Illinois Press). We are considerably more relaxed than King James was about cross-dressing, but the Hic Mulier v. Haec Vir contest between custom and reason on the cross-dressing issue, Hic Mulier asserts that “Custome is an Idiot; and whosoever dependeth wholely upon him, without the discourse of Reason, will… become a slave indeed to contempt and censure.”

“When is custom warranted and when does it obscure reason?” That, writes Kingsborough Community College Professor of English Cheryl J. Fish, has just published a study of three 19th-century women who boldly trespassed on the world beyond the kitchen dooryard: Black and White Women’s Travel Narratives. Fish particularly emphasizes Fuller’s “analytic” of the hardships faced by frontier women and a concern for the Native Americans who had already been driven away. In a closing coda, titled (with a bow to Huck Finn) “Lighting Out For Other Territories,” Fish writes that “through their mobile subjectivity and activism all three women offered significant revisions in the arenas of education, religion, medicine, citizenship, and human and women’s rights.” She closes by asking the reader to picture Prince, Seacole, and Fuller on board ships: “Ships conveyed each of them to live and work productively in territories far from home, and in the case of Fuller, a shipwreck on her return from Italy to New York in 1850 brought her to her final resting place at sea.”

Fish, by the way, wryly chooses as the epigraph for her coda the vow of Huck Finn’s which exhausted authors often make and, not infrequently, later break: “There ain’t nothing more to write about, and I’m rotten glad of it, because if I’d a knewed what trouble it was to make a book, I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t a-goin to no more.”

**Now, Voyager: Three 19th-century Women Travelers**

Prior to the 20th century, domesticity was in countless ways a women’s prison. In many parts of the world it still is. It took considerable courage for a woman back then to choose simply to be peripatetic. When Walt Whitman began his Song of the Open Road with “I left my heart and light-hearted I take to the open road./Healthy, free, the world before me,” you definitely sense it was a guy thing.

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‘Global New York: The Lower East Side’: Museum Exhibit

By Jack Salzman
Professor of History, Hunter College

Last April, 150 people crowded into the ballroom in Gracie Mansion to hear Mayor Michael Bloomberg proclaim “Immigrant History Week.” Among those present were Commissioner Sayu Bhojwani of the city’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Kathryn Benson, Curator of Community Projects for the Museum of the City of New York, and several representatives of Hunter College, including President Jennifer Raab, Dean Judith Friedlander, History Chair Barbara Welter and myself.

Mayor Bloomberg also drew attention to “Global New York: The Lower East Side,” an exhibition just about to open at the Museum of the City of New York. Thirty-five of its 37 images and captions were created by CUNY Honors College students—21 in the Hunter Honors College, 14 from those at the other senior colleges.

Three months earlier, the six of us present at Gracie Mansion, joined by Susan Henshaw Jones, President and Director of the Museum of the City of New York, had met to discuss what Hunter College, indeed all of CUNY, might do for “Immigrant History Week.” By the time the meeting was over, we had agreed to put together an exhibition that would open in April at the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY).

As we left the meeting, I recall mumbling to Barbara Welter something like, “I must be out of my mind! How am I going to get this done?” She responded with a wry smile that said all that needed to be said: “You asked for it, you got it, now do it.” But what was “it”? I wasn’t even sure. The only thing I knew for sure was that I had about three months to organize an exhibit that would be appropriate for “Immigrant History Week.” Although all of us were interested in looking at the neighborhoods of the newest New Yorkers, it was obvious that there was no single neighborhood that might represent all the others. For April 2004, we decided, we would focus on the Lower East Side.

It was a story worth thinking about and trying to tell on MCNY’s walls. Moreover, the Museum was the right place to tell this story: its renowned holdings of photographs by Jacob Riis and the Byron Company, taken at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, would provide an essential opening to the story. All we needed, of course, were contemporary counterparts to those of Rias and the Byrons to bring the story up to 2004.

Fortunately, the Hunter History Department had been engaged in discussions about ways to better engage our students’ interest in the study of history. Here was an opportunity to have them not only think about what history is, but to actively engage in a consideration of the past—to become historians themselves.

The question became: which students and how many? Then I got lucky. I had been asked to teach an Honors College seminar, “The Peopling of New York,” for a colleague on leave. I thus had access not only to students in my Hunter seminar, but to Honors College students in its Cross Campus Project. Joined by a student in my 300-level course and a Hunter MFA student, these students became my own Riases and Byrons.

About half the students began one overcast Sunday afternoon with a tour led by a dynamic young professional guide, Michelle Nieves. We started on the corner of Essex and Delancey Streets and slowly made our way from street to street—past the Essex Market and the new P.S. 20, with the statue of Lenin atop the apartments known as Red Square in the background; down Orchard and Hester Streets; past Guss’s Pickles, Seward Park High School, and a quick stop for a bialy at Kossar’s; then, finally, standing on Straus Square, looking at the shrouded Jewish Daily Forward building and Wing Shoon Restaurant, once The Garden Cafeteria. The following Sunday I took a different group around the Lower East Side.

In the ensuing weeks, I returned several times with groups of three or four students; more often they headed for the Lower East Side on their own. Some students brought digital cameras or point-and-shoot cameras; others were provided disposable cameras. Initially, the intention was to have each student select an image from MCNY’s collection and to recreate that image.

But that did not prove to be the best way to have them learn about the Lower East Side. So each student was assigned a street and a particular site, and each was asked to both read about and photograph the site. They also were asked to photograph what most interested them. As the students were creating their Lower East Side images, they were also writing about their experiences doing so. Alex Neustein provides a view shared by many of his fellow students: “My first impression of the Lower East Side was that the historical artifacts—the Forward Building, Seward Park High School, the Eldridge Street Synagogue and Guss’s

Public Privacy

A distinct minority of objects radiate a sharp emptiness of presence. Glasses lost or broken vibrate with micro-melodrama—they’re singularly tailored, perfect individuals usability making the accidental tragedy of their estrangement and subsequent downfall all the more heartbreaking. Abandoned makeshift beds convey a stab at scraping together a momentary claim to a few square feet of public privacy for what matches of time can be had. I always feel invasive in their presence, some kind of patronizing observer who can’t help but clumsily re-objectify the disengaged personalities caught in the remains.

—Lisa Deutsch, Hunter College

Blumenthal’s Judaica Shop

At one point, Zelig Blumenthal’s store, 13 Essex Street, was one of many Judaica shops that lined Essex Street between Grand Street and East Broadway. Today it is one of the few stores of this kind. It maintains a collection of dusty, but artfully displayed, prayer shawls (talitot), prayer books (siddorim), and religious texts (sefarim) in the front window. Because of the many changes in the types of businesses that now line Essex Street, such as the Chinese noodle and dumpling shop presently next door to Blumenthal’s, the remaining Judaica shops are often referenced as relics from a past when the Lower East Side was a flourishing and vibrant Jewish neighborhood....—Bracha Feit, Queens College

Williamsburg Bridge

This view of the Williamsburg Bridge was taken from the corner of Delancey and Essex Streets. The magnificently structured was opened on December 19, 1903, and immediately had a profound effect on the demographics of the Lower East Side, enabling the Jews of the area to migrate to Brooklyn. The couple seen here highlights how the ethnic composition of the neighborhood has changed. During the last quarter of the 20th century, the number of Asian immigrants swelled. As a result, the borders of Chinatown expanded. The contrast with the past is vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side has definitely changed. —Yan Kuznetsov, Baruch College

Graffiti on Doorway, Suffolk Street

Graffiti artists are the urban shamans of our day. Like cave walls of ancient times, the street walls are where the spiritual murals, politics, love, curses and verses, you can find it all; just read the writing on the wall. —Gad Zehavi, Hunter College

Young Woman on East Broadway

This young woman interested me because of her style. I had been able to discern a particular style among the younger people in the crowds I was walking through, and she perfectly exemplified this look. The brightly colored furs on the leather coat stood out. She allowed me to take her picture, but would not give any further information, such as her name or what she was doing. She was very shy about the whole process.

—Rosa Squillacote, Hunter College

Privacy

The aura of the Lower East Side was vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side was vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side was vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side was vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side was vivid. The aura of the Lower East Side was viv...
Punjabi Grocery Deli & Cold Drinks

Punjabi Grocery is located on East 1st Street, across the street from the well-known Katz’s Delicatessen. This tiny deli is particularly interesting because it has been built into a former tenement. When one enters it, one feels immediately limited by the size of the establishment, but also overwhelmed, and perhaps tempted, by the aroma of the curry that one never thinks about. The exhibits here have been adapted from those in the exhibit. The full captions and several more photos with captions can be accessed at www.cuny.edu/news.

Brooklyn College

The exhibit will remain at MCNY until Labor Day (the Museum is at 1030 5th Avenue and open Wed.-Sun. 10-5). Captions here have been adapted from those in the exhibit. The full captions and several more photos with captions can be accessed at www.cuny.edu/news.

Wing Shoon Restaurant

New York City neighborhood change, in the words of Joan Didion, “with the deceptive ease of a film dissolve.” On the Lower East Side, buildings are torn down, constructed, and revamped at a dizzying rate, often in conjunction with each new wave of immigration. The Garden Cafeteria, at 165 East Broadway, on the same block as the renowned Jewish newspaper, The Forward, served kosher dairy meals to Jewish intellectuals from 1911 to 1983. It was the setting for the story, “The Calabash of East Broadway,” by Nobel Laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer, a frequent patron (as was Forward editor Abraham Cahan). Today, the Wing Shoon restaurant occupies this site. The nearby Forward Building still stands and is even getting a facelift. — Shannyn Morse, City College

Manhattan, closer to the people who come and go.
Sometimes, on the historic journey of a poor immigrant moving upward, he remembers where he started: all the way downtown on the Lower East Side. And maybe being remembered, in whatever light, is enough.
It all started to come together. Kathleen Benson and I selected 17 vintage images from the MCNY collection, and we began to look at hundreds of images created by our 21st-century CUNY documentarians. We selected one image by each, plus four more we really did not want to leave out. We ran into some obstacles when the digital images were blown up to 16 x 20 inches, but these were overcome. The students composed their own captions, which were sent to the Museum. As Mayor Bloomberg was announcing “Immigrant History Week” at Gracie Mansion, the last of the photographs and captions was being installed.

Funds for Inner-City Math, Transport Among Grants to CUNY Researchers

A part of a $10 million grant from the National Science Foundation to a three-school consortium, the Graduate Center will conduct two unique projects aimed at improving mathematics education in inner city schools. One will organize parents and other community members in low-income neighborhoods to help reform math education in their schools. The other will identify aspects of mathematics of the “cultural capital” that low-income minority students bring to school.

The Graduate Center will also participate in the shared activities of “Metro Math: The Center for Mathematics in America’s Cities,” a five-year multi-disciplinary partnership with Pennsylvania and Rutgers Universities for urban districts in New York City, Philadelphia, and Newark. Taking part will be a diverse faculty of experts in mathematics, education, science, urban studies, and urban education.

Calling it “an investment in Americans’ ability to travel more safely and efficiently in the years to come,” U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta recently announced a $900,000 grant to the University Transportation Research Center (UTRC), based at City College. The grant is in support of advanced research for the planning and management of regional transportation systems.

Distinguished Professor of Civil Engineering Robert E. Paaswell, who directs UTRC, said the grant brings the amount of money received by the Center since its inception in 1988 to more than $20 million dollars. It’s also the latest funding by the DOT, which awards close to a million dollars annually in competitive grants to the UTRC, a leading resource for the transportation industry in the northeast region. Professor Paaswell has taught and headed transportation centers at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Illinois, and he was also formerly CEO of the Chicago Transit Authority, the second largest system in the U.S.

Following is a sampling of grants recorded at recent Board of Trustees meetings:

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

• NSF to P Wilkinson and M. Cohen: “Computer Science, Engineering and Math Scholarship Program.” ($396,000)

BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

• NYC Department of Human Resources to J. Ravennel: “History Department, for ‘Poiaced for Success.” ($756,826)
• U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development to J. Jacobson and M. Seliger: “Hispanic Serving Institutions Assisting Communities.” ($165,000)

BROOKLYN COLLEGE

• U.S. Dept. of Interior/National Parks Service to M. Schonberg: “Curried Bay Wetlands: A Status Report.” ($150,000)
• NIH to Z. Huang: “Se-Derivation of Functional RNAs for Structure Study.” ($229,500)

CITY COLLEGE

• NIH to J. Tarbell: “Wall Shear Stress in the Cardiovascular System.” ($270,473)
• NIH to E. Gresik: “Regulation of Branching Morphogenesis of Salivary Gland.” ($239,625)

THE GRADUATE CENTER

• Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency/Raytheon to R. Haralick: “Clutter Detection.” ($112,500)
• NIH to G. Herman: “Image Processing in Biological 3D Electron Microscopy.” ($312,500)

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

• U.S. Department of State/ONR/DOD: “Providing Instructional Support and Financial Incentives for Minority Students to Pursue Careers in International and Diplomatic Service.” ($798,712)

HUNTER COLLEGE

• NIH/NCI Division of Research Resources to J. Raab, President, and R. Dottin, Biological Sciences; “Research Center in Minority Institutions: Center for Gene Structure and Function/AIDS Infrastructure Grant.” ($1,752,967)

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by Honors Collegians

Pickles—were lonely and isolated testaments to a neighborhood that is deserted and disliked by most who lived in it. But, to me the neighborhood is beautiful and its history important.

For my seminar, the students were reading a substantial number of works, ranging from Jacob Riis’ How the Other Half Lives to Bella Spewack’s The Street and Michael Gold’s Jews Without Money to Hasia Diner’s Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America. The Lower East Side reminded them with an occasion to think about the past, and the nature of change: What are the boundaries of the Lower East Side? When did Chinatown begin to expand? What happened to the inhabitants of Little Italy? Just what is the Lower East Side of history, of memory, of myth, and of legend?

Another student, Lisa Tagliaferri, meditates on just such questions: “Amid the pedestrians of the Lower East Side I sometimes find myself in a vacuum. Another kind of city life. Barren streets, desolate of people, trash being tossed further downtown by the wind. If this is the Lower East Side, then maybe I’m not sure what people who romanticize it are talking about. Or maybe the Lower East Side lies somewhere closer to the heart of Manhattan, closer to the people who come and go.”

“With the deceptive ease of a film dissolve.” On the Lower East Side, buildings are torn down, constructed, and revamped at a dizzying rate, often in conjunction with each new wave of immigration. The Garden Cafeteria, at 165 East Broadway, on the same block as the renowned Jewish newspaper, The Forward, served kosher dairy meals to Jewish intellectuals from 1911 to 1983. It was the setting for the story, “The Calabash of East Broadway,” by Nobel Laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer, a frequent patron (as was Forward editor Abraham Cahan). Today, the Wing Shoon restaurant occupies this site. The nearby Forward Building still stands and is even getting a facelift. — Shannyn Morse, City College
Danette Sheppard knows two things very well. One is the Bronx Community College campus, from which she graduated with a pre-pharmacy major in 1995, and where her mother, Ellen Hoist, directs the Licensed Practical Nursing Program. Then, for several years after graduation, Sheppard worked part-time as a secretary in the BCC security office.

Sheppard also knows that she was born to be a singer on a stage—or in front of a chorus line of ten elephants. She’s known this at least since age 15, when she stunned the large audience at a Manhattan high school talent show with a clarion rendition of “And I Am” when she won a Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus audition. On the Circus’s recent New York visit, she made her March 18th debut as the first featured vocalist in its 134-year history, introducing acts with a mix of soul, jazz, and hip-hop beats. Among her moments in the spotlight is an up-tempo jazz number she sings for ten elephants, aptly named “The Elephant Club.”

Her big voice ranges from bass to first soprano, a dexterity picked up in her formative years in the choir of Memorial Baptist Church on West 155th Street. In her honor, the circus bused 30 members of the current choir, all robed up, to perform the National Anthem. Now totally immersed in circus routine, Sheppard rode an elephant through the snow and into the Queens-Midtown tunnel in the annual procession. Her week involves 12 shows, sometimes three a day, each one involving six costume changes, including one drop-dead, black-and-pink $10,000 number. After the last clown shuffles off, Sheppard heads for her spacious apartment on the 58-car Ringling train in Long Island City (it’s too long to park in Manhattan). “It’s wonderful work,” she says. “You have to be focused and be ready when you hear that next curtain call, ‘Show Time!’”

Another great leap for Yin Mei, who has taught at Queens since 1992, is the Guggenheim award in dance. The $38,000 (matched by the College), she says, will allow her to “go to China to do research into ancient Chinese sources of language and interpretive ritual.” She also plans to complete the third part of her Nomad trilogy, titled Oracle Bones, which concerns the earliest known Chinese texts that were inscribed on animal bones.

Pi Smith certainly can, though she will have to add quickly that she never had to open her mouth.

On March 15, Smith, who transferred to CCNY from communications study at Fordham to pursue her dream of an acting career, played a party guest and handmaiden to the really scary step-daughter of King Herod, in a new production of Richard Strauss’s Bible-based opera Salome. She aced the one audition because, thanks to her CCNY studies, “I was able to walk in prepared and with a great concept of what was expected of me.” After graduation, Smith hopes to pursue opportunities on stage, screen or television. She is not short on one sine qua non for an actress, conviction: “I have a very strong presence… I will do it all because I can.” One of her teachers, Prof. David Willinger, observed, “Pi, in her atypicilly as a student returning to college after a career in the business end of the entertainment industry—she was a segment producer for NBC’s local Weekend Today show—is in fact a typical City College Theatre Program student. All kinds of people are welcome to—and do—partake in the our rich classroom and performance offerings.”

The ‘Arts & Entertainment’ University: Debuts in Circus, Dance, Met Opera

Danette Sheppard performing at Madison Square Garden in her debut as Ringling Brothers’ first featured vocalist.