

"REPORTED FROM THE
IMAGINATIONS OF
NEW YORKERS"

New York 2044

In a bleak political moment, NY2044 is a platform for
progressive urbanist strategy, a defense of print as a
civic medium that calls us to organize together, and a
case for informal, humanistic optimism.

The
EDUCATION
Issue!

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SUNDAY MAY 1st, 2044

ISSUE #4
SECTION 2:
WHAT WE BUILT

DEMOCRACY

BUILDING THE DIY NETWORK THAT'S BEATING BIG TECH

INSIDE THE HUB TRAINING THE LOW POWER MESH COMMUNITY



Reported from the
imagination of
Ioana Literat
Written by
Noah Fischer

The day before New Yorkers voted on Initiative 7, the sky above Midtown filled with light bulbs.

They were six feet in diameter, drone-powered, drifting above the heads of pedestrians. Each bulb rotated slowly: "YES VOTE IS THE SMART VOTE." The whole production cost somewhere around sixty million dollars — pocket change for those pushing Initiative 7. But the next day, unexpectedly, it failed.

The initiative had proposed re-directing seventy percent of the city's municipal energy allocation to AI data infrastructure. This, at a time when the city runs entirely on electricity and the system is already stressed. Last summer, during an oppressive heat lasting eleven days, four hundred people died in apartments that couldn't afford to run their cooling systems. The fact that the electricity was needed for transit subsidies, cooling cost relief, and the hospital grid was not mentioned in any campaign materials. Amazon was confident the initiative would pass anyway.

Since the late 2020s, AI-driven misinformation campaigns — along with New York's relatively low literacy rates, have made ballot initiatives reliable terrain for corporate capture — technical enough to confuse voters, local enough to fly below national fact-checking infrastructure, binary enough that a well-funded information environment can make the wrong answer feel like common sense. Initiative after initiative has sailed through and Initiative 7 was supposed to be the same. It started polling at fifty-four percent in favor. Then a movement building behind the scenes for fifteen years became visible.

On a Wednesday morning two weeks after the vote, I take the 1 train to 116th Street and walk to Teachers College. The ground floor has been reconfigured into something that feels like a cross between a public library and an electronics repair shop. This is the Distributed Network Hub — one of eleven spaces TC now operates across the five boroughs under a partnership with the city, part of a post-Mamdani initiative that began with the public food markets and has extended the library system's logic into civic tech and network infrastructure. The Hub is free and open six days a week. On the day I visit, thirty-odd people are working here. Just a few are affiliated with

Story Continues on Page 7



Professor Literat at Teacher's College Public Network Hub
Pen and Ink Drawing: Noah Fischer. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

ECOLOGY

Big Barter Comes to the Bronx The Earth is the Critical Asset



Reported from the
imagination of
Daven Asafo-Agyei
Written by
Noah Fischer

A row of folding tables has appeared on Fordham Road in the Bronx, near a bodega whose wall still bears the watermark from the 2032 flood — a faint brown line about four feet up, like a bathtub ring. The tables are covered in jars of preserved vegetables, dried herb bundles, hand-sewn bags, repaired electronics, homemade soap. The vendors have small devices clipped to their jackets, glowing amber. The amber means they are available to trade.

Hand-lettered signs on the wall read: YOUR LABOR HAS VALUE. KEEP IT LOCAL. NO CARD/NO CASH/NO ALGORITHM REQUIRED. WHAT CAN YOU OFFER? (HINT: MORE THAN YOU THINK!)

Moving through the tables with a tablet, a teenager confers quietly with each trader. She is one of sixteen auditors — there to verify trades

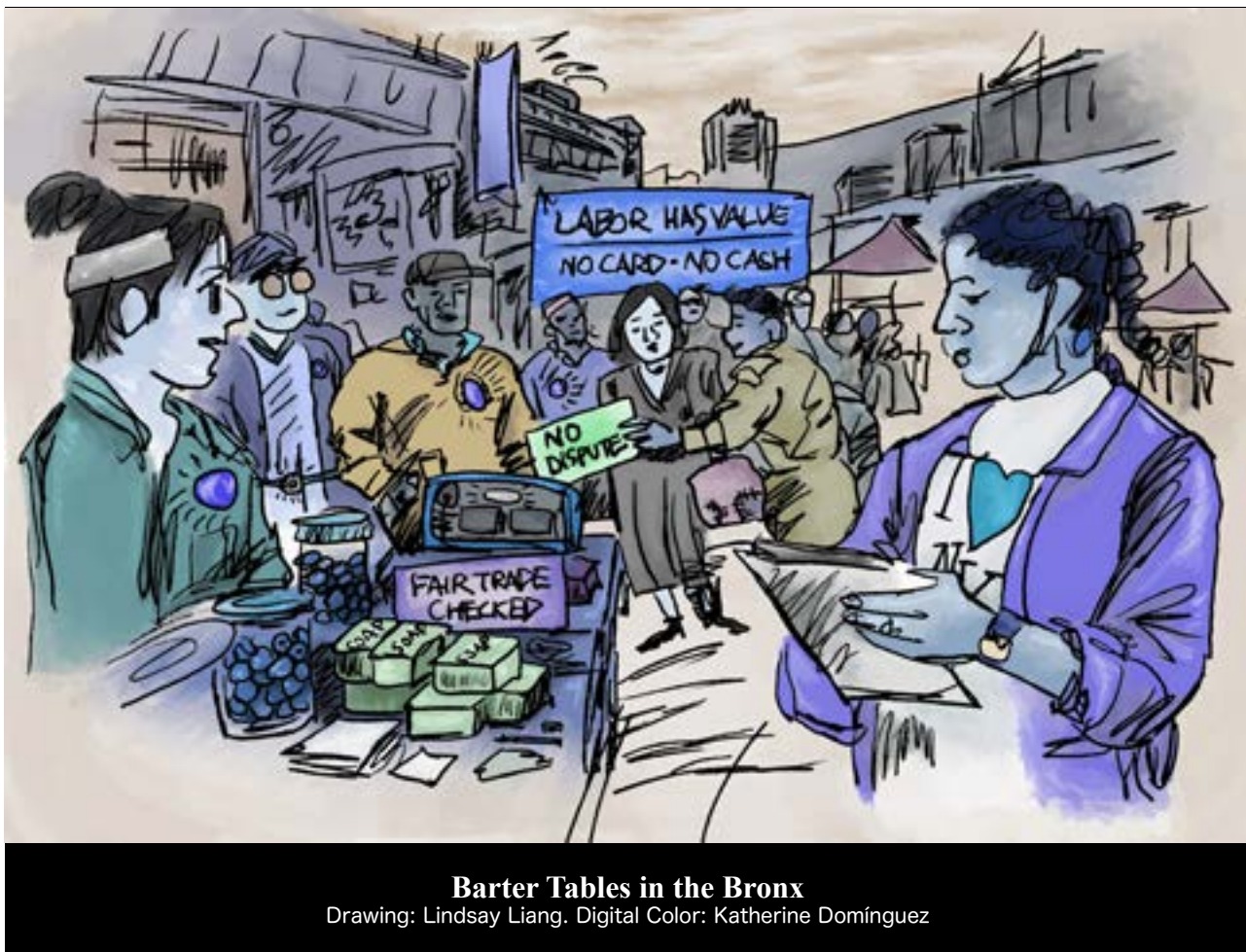
are fair, that the ledger is being maintained, that no one is being taken for a ride. She reports to Amara Thompson, 34, a community coordinator for A-Humane, the organization that designed and runs the barter network now operating across all five boroughs.

"People think barter is primitive," Thompson says. "It's just honest. The question is always: what is your labor worth? For twenty years this city has let the rich folks and their machines answer that question. We're answering it ourselves."

The person who mentored her in that point of view is Professor Daven Asafo-Agyei, 51, founder of A-Humane. His work for the city began with a call, received in a bunker.

A-Humane's compound

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Barter Tables in the Bronx
Drawing: Lindsay Liang. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

LABOR

INDEPENDENT WORKERS' PARTY BRINGS 20- HOUR WORK- WEEK TO BRINK OF SUCCESS



Reported from the
imagination of
Steve Lawton
Written by
Noah Fischer

By the time Land Stevens reached the podium in Foley Square on a gray Tuesday morning, some three hundred thousand blue-collar New Yorkers had gathered beneath a low ceiling of clouds. Construction workers in yellow vests stood alongside home health aides in scrubs. A cluster of Verizon technicians — the trade Stevens himself had worked for eighteen years before entering politics — stood near the front, their VR visors dangling like costume jewelry. Beside the circular CWA union logo, many had added the bold purple square of the IWP, Independent Workers' Party.

"I'd stand in a downpour to hear that guy," said Estes Wong, an unemployed bot technician. "He's a legend."

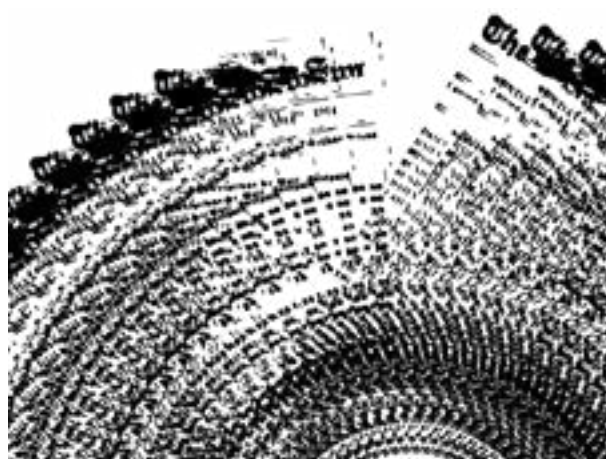
Stevens, 58, the newly elected IWP council member from Staten Island's North Shore, spoke in the unhurried cadence of someone accustomed to union halls. "We've all seen how the billionaires harness artificial intelligence," he told the crowd. "With AI in their arsenal, they grabbed the entire economy by the throat and sailed off into the sunset — yachts, luxury compounds, those new cities that you need a net worth card just to enter. Left us with a huge mess, but they haven't done a stitch of work for decades!" He paused. "If they can do it, so can we."

That mess he's referring to is, of course, the Great Crypto Crash.

By the early 2030s, the line between banking and crypto had effectively dissolved. Bitcoin was the backbone of the American financial system, with AI trading bots running both ends. By 2031, five thousand U.S. billionaires owned the equivalent of 25 trillion dollars — well over half the economy. Then a deepfake holographic video appeared, showing billionaire mayors and governors lounging in a gated city club-spa, laughing about a coin dip that made them a windfall while wiping out pensions for what they called the "obsoletes." Whether the holo was fabricated or partially real didn't matter. It pointed to something that was real.

Then, on April 1, 2036, Bitcoin cliff-dropped and the bank run began. Three thousand mid-size banks went belly up within seventy-two hours. Unemployment skyrocketed to twenty-five percent. The old two-party playbook, both of which had relied on a rising

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What a NYC Highschooler NeedsTo Graduate in an Election Year

We Spent a School Day with Alma Ibrahim



Reported from the imagination of
Amy Zimmer
Written by
Noah Fischer

7:25 AM



It's September in New York City. The parks are green and the air is crisp — crisp enough to make the off-shore wind turbines spin in steady arcs off the Rockaways. The impending presidential election is in the air too, a ritual that carries a new sense of urgency ever since the elections were restarted eight years ago. Campaign signs are popping up from the brick co-ops of Jackson Heights to the row houses of Bay Ridge.

But nowhere is civic energy stronger than among the Empire State's public high schoolers, and particularly, the new senior class.

It's been many years now that the Regents exams, once a prerequisite for the cap and the gown, were replaced by a non-test assessment called Portrait of a Graduate. Since then, the debate about fairness and adequate preparation has never ceased. But in this election year, the POG portfolios are taking on a new dimension, particularly when it comes to civic engagement.

Last week, we covered the critics calling for a return to the Regents. They point to math scores that continue to decline in international rankings as evidence that teenagers need the pressure of exams to compete successfully with China and South Korea — both of which have widened their lead over the past two decades. The supporters of POGs claim that students need to be assessed as activated citizens, not just hard-skilled job seekers. This is especially critical, they say, following the massive shift among colleges and universities including CUNY, which has largely displaced the humanities toward technical micro-credentialing. If the responsibilities and skills of an active citizen haven't been built by the end of high school, POG boosters say, they may now never be. And democracy, they point out, is has proven fragile in this country.

To better understand how POGs prepare students in 2044, we follow a Bay Ridge-based student, Alma Ibrahim, through her school day. Ibrahim attends Green Rising School in the massive Brooklyn Marine Terminal mixed-use complex in Red Hook. Green Rising is an unscreened K12 school specializing in sustainable food and media production, and it has just over 2,000 students. Alma is among its first class of students at the 3-year-old school.

So join us as we tag along with this eighteen-year-old who wears a light purple hijab, loves basketball, is obsessed with longform video and the Weru-seek game, and whose favorite author is Octavia Butler.

6:30 AM



he bells of Alma's analog alarm clock ring, and she rolls out of bed, soon heading to the kitchen to warm pita and labneh for her two younger brothers. Her parents have already left for work — her father works for the DOT in construction, her mother in elder care. By 7:15, she's walked her brothers to elementary school and jumped on the R, her super-light sidepack hanging at her hip.

"The train is my own time," Alma tells us. She slides on her silver glasses and watches the student-made DeepDive documentaries that circulate on the homespun networks. "I've been obsessed with these since I turned about fourteen, I guess," she says. "Before that it was mostly anime. But I feel like the DeepDives are pure brain magic. I can't wait to make my own."

Getting off at Smith-9th Street, Alma becomes part of the moving, flowing mass that pours out of the station and into the shuttles connecting to the BMT complex. Not everyone gets into the waiting shuttles, and there's some pushing and shouting among high schoolers. "There's a fight about once a week," says Alma. "It's ridiculous." With the rail extension still on hold, transit has been an issue since the BMT complex opened.

When the complex was conceived, it included 6,000 living units, parks, a hotel, and a redevelopment of the industrial waterfront. With the example of Atlantic Yards — which failed to deliver its promised housing for decades — looming over the plan, BMT overdelivered. Today there are nearly 9,000 housing units in the complex, and more than half are affordable.

The shuttle leaves Alma a block from the school. She's greeted by a group of friends, all of whom sport sleek ultralight sidepacks covered in patches, like Alma's.

8:00 AM
Period 1



Alma takes her place in class. The room is light and airy — long south-facing windows, poured concrete floors, and clusters of moveable wooden tables that can be pushed into a lecture configuration or broken into pods. A long whiteboard runs the full length of one wall, half of it currently covered in handwritten statistics about voter turnout. Through a gap between two twenty-story housing blocks, there's a silver view of the high-tech cranes on the water. There are 25 students in the class, and like most classrooms in the city, two teachers. The mass AI layoffs of the 2030s produced an unexpected side effect: a surge in the teaching workforce as careers redirected toward work that still required a human in the room.

"Today is the day many of you have been waiting for," announces Ms. Rexroth, the lead teacher. "I'm glad to see no absences. We'll jump into your Civics DeepDive videos, which, as you know, are one of your POG requirements. Your partner will be matched today, and half of you will travel to your partner's school, half of you will stay here. The traveling will begin in the period before lunch. In the afternoon, all three periods are combined — that's when you'll be meeting with your journalists leads."

The excitement in the room is palpable. Students lean over desks to whisper. Alma looks happy and focused.

"Without further ado," continues Ms. Rexroth, "let the matching begin. It's all been prepared through DOE Grow — you've been matched to someone from another neighborhood based on your interests and skills. You can put on your overlays now and meet your partner."

Before she's finished the sentence, silver, gold, black, and purple screened glasses are grabbed from sidepacks and slipped on. A whole room of students grows silent for a moment, then begins to speak all at once as they meet their counterparts. Two students, frustrated, walk to the front: "I got a glitch." Alma is chatting into her glasses when the bell rings.



Alma and Fellow Highschoolers Waiting for the Bus to Green Rising Highschool in Gowanus
Pen and Ink Drawing: Noah Fischer. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

Claudia. They talk about the piece running this week in the Red Hook Courier — a long investigation into the barter networks that have quietly replaced cash transactions in three Brooklyn neighborhoods.

By the second lunch period, partners begin to arrive from all over the city. They're allowed to wear their overlays for directions and walk straight to the cafeteria. A boy in a large white full-body hoodie walks up to Alma and they shake hands. Alma offers him a tomato. He accepts it with "Nice!" and seems a little embarrassed.

"How was your trip from Astoria?" "Smooth."

His name is Daniel. He goes to the West Queens Vision Academy and he's been making videos since he was ten. Within about ninety seconds of sitting down with their soup, they're divided responsibilities: he'll shoot, she'll lead the interviews. The matching seems to have worked.

12:48 PM
Period 7



Alma and Daniel head to the large event workshop — a double-height space with exposed timber beams, a row of north-facing skylights, and folding bleacher seating arranged in a rough semicircle. Journalists from The New York Times, Chalkbeat, and the Brooklyn Eagle, as well as the public library system have sent representatives to guide students through collecting interviews and making DeepDive documentaries.

"Good afternoon," their principal, Mx. Rin begins. "Let's start with an icebreaker. Everyone find your partner, and I want each pair to have a thirty-second argument — in the style of a campaign ad — about whether pizza or dumplings is the superior New York food. Go."

"The DeepDives are pure brain magic. I can't wait to make my own."

— Alma Ibrahim, Green Rising School senior

11:12
AM
Lunch

The cafeteria is emptier than normal. It's September, and trays of just-harvested vegetables from the garden — cherry tomatoes, ribbons of chard, wedges of roasted squash — and rice, are laid out on the produce table. Kitchen staff and student helpers serve soups and salads made from that morning's harvest. "They say you couldn't really grow rice around here 20 years ago," says Alma, speaking through a mouth of food.

The vibe is buoyant. Most of Alma's friends have been placed at partner schools across the city, so she eats with one friend,

The room erupts. The room is loose by the time Mx. Rin calls time.

"Now," says Mx. Rin, "I'd like to introduce Amy Zimmer from Chalkbeat. She's the lead journalist on this project, heading a team of twelve who will mentor you over the next month."

Amy Zimmer steps forward. She's been doing this long enough to know not to start with a speech.

"I'm sure you have tons of questions," she says. "Fire away."

"How are we going to find the interviewees?" one student asks.

"There are eleven million people here, and many of them love to talk," she answers. The students chuckle. "But seriously — that's part of the process we'll work through together. What I want you to understand first is that the interview is not the hard part. The hard part is figuring out what your story actually is after you have forty conversations that all seem to contradict each other. That's what we're here for."

1:36 PM
Period 8



After a longer presentation from the journalism team and a screening of two DeepDive videos made by last year's graduates — one on transit equity in the Bronx, one on a Staten Island neighborhood's response to the 2041 flood surge — the library partner, Mr. Bernstein, steps up.

"What is good information?" he asks. Hands shoot up.

"When you learn something and it just feels good," one student offers.

"Not necessarily," he says. "Anyone else?"

"Something that's true."

"Okay. But how do you figure that out?" He lets the question sit. A key part of the civic engagement quality for POGs is media literacy. We've developed a module that will help you make sure the information inside your DeepDive can actually hold up — not just feel right, but be right.

Story Continues on Next Page

BUSINESS

TACOS ARE FLYING THROUGH THE AIR

How CUNY Facilitated the Future of Street Food



Reported from the imagination of
Angelo Cabrera

Written by
Noah Fischer

It's one of those wondrous New York sunsets—rusty orange clouds toward the west. High above the city, dots glint the presence of drones. We zoom our glasses in and it's manga supertalls. Naruto is there, and so is Sakura, and so is Ponyo. They are flying through the New York skies with the precious cargo of tacos.

We watch them navigate over green roofs and the manicured sidewalks of Park Slope where they will descend into the private gardens of the rich. Across the city, more Narutos maneuver past clusters of supertalls toward low-income neighborhoods at the periphery. Lots of delivery drones fly these days, but this is the first manga fleet, and the city is buzzing about it. We decided to follow the Narutos back to their source.

"I'd jump into VR seminars and set timers to get off at the right stop. My brain was fried."

They lead you to one of twelve food trucks operated by entrepreneur Armando Chilaca—each painted in colorful manga imagery, fitted with a drone landing pad on the roof. The drones depart and lift off every few minutes like a wasp colony smelling of succulent grilled meats—if the wasps were anime.

"You only live once," Armando says with a smile. He makes them old school—greasy and delicious like his grandparents taught him. Lengua and nopales are his favorites. The secret: searing the filling at very high heat in oil with a special spice blend, paired with ultra-fresh cilantro, a squeeze of lemon, and, of course, Tajin.

At 23, Armando grew up running around the NYC restaurants where his parents cooked. He is a third-generation New Yorker—the first to launch his own business, and the first to go to college. He wouldn't have started Manga Tacos if not for the CUNY entrepreneurship camp. But he almost didn't make it.

"CUNY was low cost—but time was money. High rents were eating our family alive." Around graduation, his parents sold up and moved to Pennsylvania. Armando stayed for his girlfriend—now his wife—paying too much for a tiny room in Bay Ridge, working to cover his own costs and help his father, who has a physical disability and can't cook anymore.



Armando Chilaca in his Taco Truck
Pen and Ink Drawing: Katherine Dominguez. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez



Brooklyn Crowds Wait at Armando's Popular Manga Taco Truck
Pen and Ink Drawing: Katherine Dominguez. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

At CUNY, he encountered the Immigrant Student Center for Resources and Research at City College, which helped him redesign his life to make space for school. Financial aid waived the tuition.

"I was cooking, working as a trainee on the Upper West Side, and taking classes online during my commutes. I'd jump into VR seminars and set timers to get off at the right stop. My brain was fried!" But he thought about his grandparents and parents—the economy always taking from them, never giving. He needed an edge.

After a year of math, tech, and business strategy, he qualified for the bootcamp: twenty students in a converted Harlem warehouse, high energy, not enough sleep. "We had to launch a complete business in two weeks." He was paired with Ibrahim, now his silent business partner. The whole concept, marketing, and funding came together in that fortnight.

"The Manga thing came to me on the last day. My abuelitos used to watch Naruto with me when I was small—it was actually how they learned English." He chuckles to himself. "When I thought about what I wanted my brand to feel like, it just made sense."

Manga Tacos is built on three generations. His grandparents came to the US in the 1990s without enough money, working as dishwashers when Mexicans largely made up the city's underclass. They remember the days of "the Mexican Hunt" as they exited subway stations with their paychecks. They were mugged multiple times. Two of their children were DACA recipients. One—Armando's mom—was born in the US. His grandparents eventually moved back to Mexico. "They live

well down there. Sometimes I want to send a taco all the way down there. But they already have good ones."

The business almost didn't survive its first week—three tacos dropped from altitude, one nearly hitting a sunbather in Prospect Park, another splatting over a hole camera at a press event. The photographer tried to sue for millions. Armando called his local representative, who reached the governor—Mexican American, like many in New York's political class since the 2030s. "They had my back." The lawsuit flipped, the case vendor was found liable, and the settlement carried Manga Tacos through a bumpy first year.

"I wanted my customers to enjoy authentic delicious tacos like my grandparents make, delivered by my favorite manga characters," he says. "And we did it. We built that whole enterprise in two weeks at CUNY."

And with a smile, Armando Chilaca, New York entrepreneur, hands me my order.

New York 2044

Angelo Cabrera is the New York Bureau Chief of Chalkbeat, where he's reporting on the city's public schools — including an award-winning investigation into post-pandemic school refusal — has made her one of the sharpest observers of a system still finding its footing. She is also the author of Meet Miss Subways, a history of one of New York's first racially integrated beauty contests.

New York 2044

LITERACY

THE FUNDED ROCKETS. NOW THEY'RE FUNDING READERS

NY Literacy Leaps to Top of Rankings Following Donor Flood



Reported from the imagination of
Erica Marks
Written by
Noah Fischer

Just a few years ago, when national elections were sputtering back to life, the literacy crisis took center stage. Election officials realized that the reading challenges had grown so severe, and public opinion so easy to manipulate, that starting up the post-MAGA voting process might not be possible. Few places faced a crisis the size of New York state's, which had suffered one of the worst adult literacy levels in the nation for decades.

Last week, unexpectedly, data indicated that New York now tops the nation in literacy rates. A surge of unrestricted philanthropic gifts to SUNY and CUNY is being credited with this massive shift — the result of a years-long donor campaign that brought some of the wealthiest New Yorkers into direct collaboration with public university leadership. It represents a strong bet on an idea long out of fashion: funding public higher education to save democratic life. Their initiative is called BrightWords.

BrightWords focuses specifically on adult literacy — aimed at the estimated one in five New Yorkers who had aged out of the K-12 system without reaching functional reading levels.

"Honestly, I've watched a hundred of these partnerships dissolve before they produced anything," said SUNY Chancellor Adrienne Vassell. "What was different here was that the events of the last decade had scared people into a longer view. The donors had watched democracy stall. We had watched our students struggle to participate in it. For once, we were frightened by exactly the same thing."

Vassell was joined by James Okafor, a third-generation real estate developer whose early eight-figure commitment seeded the venture, and whose frustration with a decade of ineffective philanthropic detours made him willing to give without conditions. Maya Osei, 54, vice president for advancement at SUNY Hudson Valley, was the connector.

"People don't often walk into a room and say: 'I want to fund democracy,'" Osei said. "My role was to bring donors to the table to support the chancellor's vision. The heavy lift was helping them see why the large public colleges needed time to make this work. We decided to do it quietly for a few years."

The Crisis and the Case

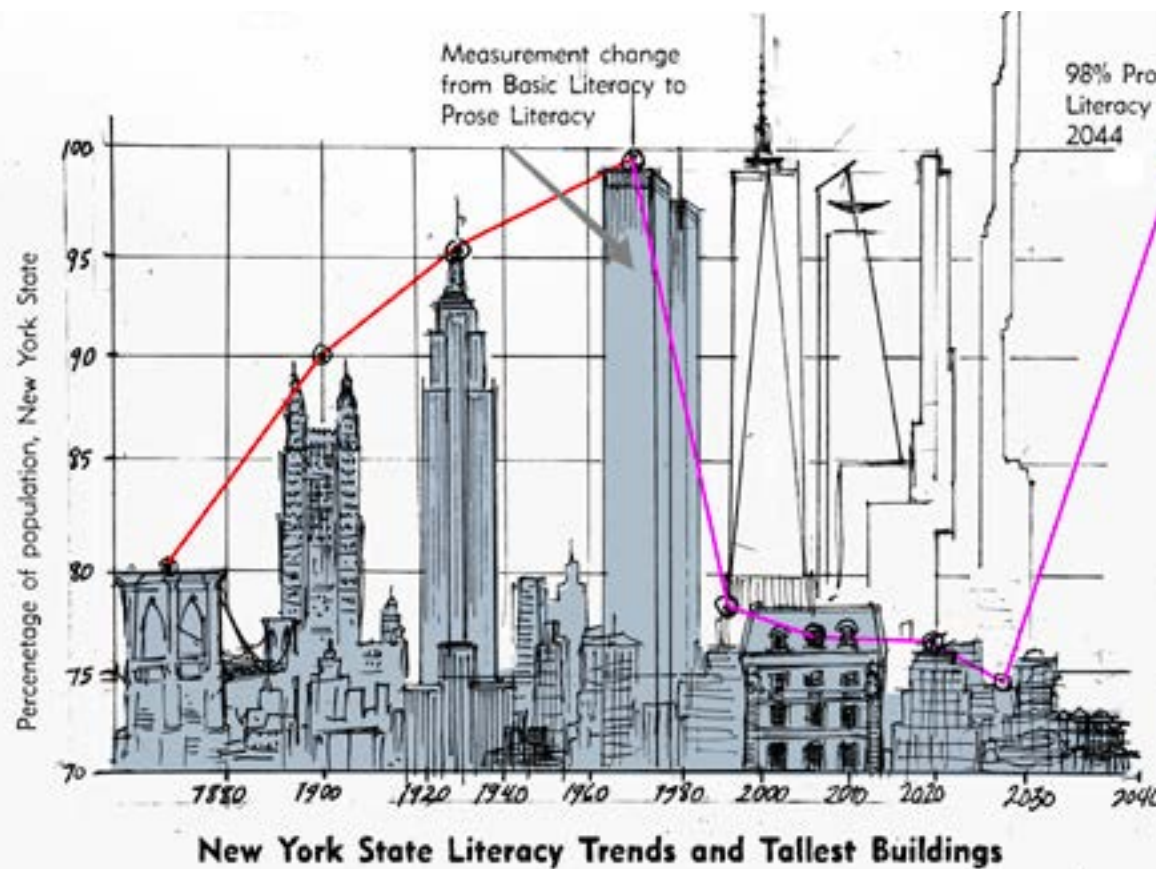
New York had ranked 49th out of 50 states in adult literacy, with over 20% of adults unable to read at a functional

level — a figure barely budged since 2026. That deficit made ballot manipulation a simple affair. In counties under Republican or oligarch control, ballots were redesigned with typefaces set to six points, candidate positions rendered in language lifted from administrative law — terms like notwithstanding the foregoing and provisional attestation of franchise exercise where plain instructions had once been.

The literacy funding campaign — which had to expand well beyond Okafor's founding \$12 million — unfolded over roughly three years of what Osei calls "kitchen table conversations": small dinners, site visits, one-on-one meetings. Osei worked with her mentor, veteran fundraiser Erika Marks, constantly refocusing back to CUNY and SUNY's vision.

Chancellor Vassell knew the first tool had to be data. The university system commissioned a statewide mapping project through the Rockefeller Institute, cross-referencing adult literacy rates with voter turnout, emergency room utilization, and eviction rates by zip code. "We stopped talking about literacy as an educational problem," Osei said. "We started talking about it as an infrastructure problem. A literacy gap is a tax on every other civic system."

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A DAY AT GREEN RISING

2:24 PM
Period 9



For the last period, the students head to the tech lab, where they are shown the holographic and AR cameras they'll be using for their DeepDives — small, matte-black devices that fit in one hand and can project an interview subject as a three-dimensional figure into any space.

"I've been waiting to get my hands on these for years," says Daniel.

As the bell rings, they walk out through the school's front gates together, flanked by a group of friends, Daniel's white hoodie bright against the afternoon light.

"Let me show you the best snacks around here," says Alma.

Amy Zimmer is the New York Bureau Chief of Chalkbeat, where she's reporting on the city's public schools — including an award-winning investigation into post-pandemic school refusal — has made her one of the sharpest observers of a system still finding its footing. She is also the author of Meet Miss Subways, a history of one of New York's first racially integrated beauty contests.

GRIEF

THE LONG GOODBYE

AI holograms have made it possible to keep the dead among us. One company is trying to make sure that's not a trap.



Reported from the imagination of Sarah Truelsch
Written by Noah Fischer

Verdant leaves fan out from an organic landscape built into the lobby wall—something between a terrarium and a living mural. On white couches near the entrance, the Vasquez family waits. The parents take turns soothing their tear-stained nine-year-old. Her teenage brother stares into the middle distance, his eyes doing the small rapid flickers that suggest he's gaming behind a private display.

A polished wood door opens. A woman approaches. The parents rise. "It's so nice to finally meet you, I'm Angela. Would you like some tea? We have boba for the kids."

Angela Rios is the co-founder of Death Out of the Shadows, a grief-technology firm headquartered in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. Her business, launched in 2019 with her partner Darlin Chu, offers what has become the standard in the grievance industry: AI-generated holographic likeness of a recently deceased loved one, lifelike enough in gesture, voice, and memory to hold a conversation, deliver a eulogy, and—for some clients, at an additional monthly fee—take up ongoing residence in a family home. What sets Death Out of the Shadows apart is how this technology is carefully facilitated into the lives of families like the Vasquez.

In the last five years, AI grief holograms have become one of the fastest-growing sectors in the American death-care industry, which already generates over \$30 billion annually. Funeral homes moved faster than regulatory frameworks.

In a back-room laboratory, a technician named Darlin Chu works beside a metallic cylindrical pedestal. An elderly woman rambles slowly above it—horrifying, smiling, occasionally raising an arm in greeting. She died eleven days ago. The woman is Mona Vasquez, 74,



Angela Rios and Darlin Chu at Death Out of the Shadows
Pen and Ink Drawing: Noah Fischer. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

trauma—a kind of dissociation from the reality of the loss, where the grieving person can no longer locate themselves in chronological time." König has also documented families cutting food budgets and taking on high-interest debt to maintain subscriptions.

"These decisions are made at the height of grief. That's a vulnerability that a lot of companies have not been shy about exploiting."

Death Out of the Shadows doesn't offer post-funeral subscriptions that incentivize indefinite use. It doesn't allow clients to activate holograms in private, unsupervised settings during the first ninety days of bereavement. "We lose people to providers who will say yes to everything,"

Angela told me. "But we take care of our clients."

König considers Death Out of the Shadows a proof of concept. "Their success shows you don't have to exploit grief to profit from it."

Angela studied under König, completing a philosophy degree at Hunter College then a graduate degree in grievance ethics. CUNY matched her with Darlin through a new entrepreneurial-pairing initiative. Darlin came through a different track entirely: the Highspeed TrainUp program, professional credentials in as little as a month. She holds twelve of them. She is, in the terminology of her field, a master practitioner rather than a theorist—and she is the reason the holograms work as well as they do.

Their pairing reflects a broader shift at CUNY, where only about 50% of students now complete traditional degrees. The split did not happen cleanly. At first, the credential tracks drew students disproportionately from lower-income families, while the bachelor's programs continued to enroll students from middle and higher-income families, who could afford to invest in a traditional college experience and delay entering the workforce. As the fields of white-collar jobs that require traditional bachelor's degrees have changed in the past two decades, these enrollment patterns have become less predictable, with more students from middle-class families bypassing traditional degrees in favor of stackable credentials. The greater challenge has been keeping paths to traditional degrees appealing to students from all backgrounds.

What neither Angela nor Darlin says, though it is legible in the arc of their story, is how much depended on having enough of the right kind of slack to make their choices at all. Angela's four-

year path required someone to absorb the opportunity cost of not earning sooner. Darlin's credential sprint required a different kind of faith: that twelve badges would add up to something, that the stack would hold. CUNY has always run on the tension between those two wagers.

Angela was one year old when her parents arrived from Venezuela. For several years during the Trump administration's second term, they lived in the basement of a friend's house in Corona, avoiding ICE sweeps. One of her earliest memories is of her grandmother's death, when Angela was five—no funeral, no flight back to Caracas. Her mother grieved quietly in the basement, a loss in hiding.

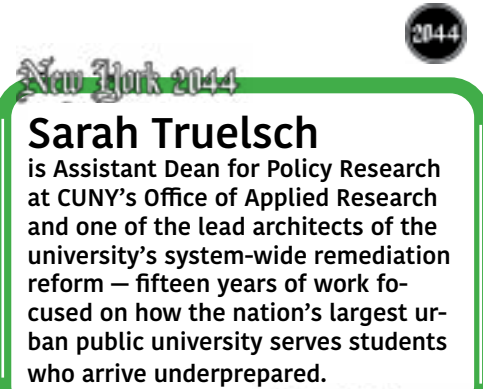
"It hollowed out my mother's heart,"

1 in 6 American families who have lost a loved one since 2040 have used some form of AI hologram grief service.

Angela told me. "Now, people can take their time to say goodbye. That would have meant everything to my mother. But we also make sure that the long goodbye doesn't create new forms of suffering."

Angela was never going to put her mother in the basement. And the road from that basement to this apartment ran, in no small part, through a university built on the promise that no one in this city should be permanently out of the game.

In 2044, we are still at a distance from fully realizing the fullness of that premise. And yet, hundreds of thousands of graduates are charting innovative pathways through college and into careers that answer timeless problems with new technologies and impressive amounts of energy and soul.



DEAR AUNTIE NYC



Dear Auntie NYC,

My son is seventeen and has been staying up until 3am making what he calls a DeepDive documentary about why people in our neighborhood voted the way they did in the last election. He interviews our neighbors without warning. Last Tuesday he knocked on the door of the man upstairs at 9pm with a holo-

graphic camera. I don't know whether to ground him or apply for a grant. — His Mother, Jackson Heights

Dear His Mother,

Apply for the grant. Ground him from the upstairs neighbor specifically, but apply for the grant. What your son is doing is exactly what the city's journalism partners are

trying to teach seniors at Green Rising School — and he figured it out himself at seventeen, in Jackson Heights, with a holographic camera. The 9pm door knock is a problem of manners, not of vocation. Teach him to call ahead. Do not teach him to stop. — Auntie NYC

Dear Auntie NYC,

I uploaded my entire archive into the CE system two years ago. Twenty-one years of work. Exhibitions, teaching records, studio visits, all of it. My account now reads Not Displayable. I have been thinking about what the ledger actually contains and whether I was asking to be included or documenting something

else entirely. I don't really have a question. I just wanted to tell someone. — R.B., Location Withheld

Dear R.B., Auntie heard you. That's enough for now. Keep showing up. — Auntie NYC

Dear Auntie NYC, I have been in the

BIG BARTER (CONTINUED)

occupies eleven acres outside Newburgh in the Hudson Valley — an old farm with hydroponic grow towers, a satellite relay, a shared library, and a series of excavated rooms that Asafo-Agyei built as a bunker in the early 2030s. He was in there when his phone rang on the morning of October 14, 2032, as the second surge of the Great Storm pushed water through the subway tunnels.

The newly formed Office of Community Resilience needed someone who understood what was about to happen to low-income New Yorkers when the transit system collapsed. The secretaries and janitors, caregivers and dog walkers and laborers who had been commuting ever-longer rides to reach jobs — they needed to understand how to support those who could not work from home, could not afford an air-uber, could not weather a week of disruption by ordering in. Asafo-Agyei had been studying that problem for more than a decade. When they called, he had a plan.

Asafo-Agyei grew up in the Bronx, attended Samuel Gompers High School, went through CUNY while working security, and founded A-Humane in 2020. The security career shaped his ecological work — particularly the concept of the critical asset: the thing whose protection everything else is organized around. He applied that framework to the city as a place on a spinning blue planet. Why does so little effort go toward protecting it?

"Race is resiliency," he says, sitting at a long table in the compound, sipping tea. What he means is that communities of color — that survived Moses's Cross Bronx, redlining, the crack epidemic, the flood — carry adaptive knowledge the mainstream resilience industry has consistently ignored.

When the seawall held in lower Manhattan in October 2032, the displaced water went north, Harlem, the Bronx, Queens absorbed the surge. The subway shut down for eleven days. The people who could work from home did. The people who could not lost wages, lost jobs, lost the city. Asafo-Agyei's answer, when the city called, was not what they expected: it was time to build Big Barter.

A-Humane had already spent years training barter leaders across the city in fair exchange, mutual aid, and cooperative economics — drawing on the economic theory of W.E.B. Du Bois, and on A-Humane's own system of sweat equity accounting: a framework for assigning value to labor that financial systems had never learned to price, or had intentionally undervalued.

Big Barter is not informal. Each trade is logged by trained auditors. The amber and green devices indicate verification status. To watch it play out in

the barter tents, you could easily miss the precision — the trades are warm, fluid, human, full of shouting and haggling. But the checks and balances are what allow it to scale. Asafo-Agyei understood from the beginning that any exchange system without accountability reproduces hierarchies.

Can it scale further? He thinks about it for a moment. "It doesn't have to scale the way a tech product scales," he says. "It has to spread roots."

At the compound this week, a group of eleven- and twelve-year-olds from a South Bronx juvenile detention center are here for ten days of hydroponic gardening, remote sensing basics, and what Asafo-Agyei calls ecological belonging: the slow work of getting young people from the city to stop flinching at the things that live outside it.

One of the first things he noticed working with urban youth in nature was that they killed spiders — not out of malice, but reflex. "I ask them: why?" he says. "They don't know. So we think about it together. The spider is part of a system. It's been doing this for four hundred million years. The question

"People think barter is primitive. It's just honest."

— Amara Thompson,

is: what does it mean that your instinct is to destroy something you don't understand?"

Spending time around Asafo, you begin to realize he's asking about the Cross Bronx Expressway, and the seawall, and the barter table on Fordham Road, and the kid pulled out of pre-engineering and put into music engineering because it was easier than figuring out how to actually teach him.

Outside, the eleven-year-olds are in the grow towers, arguing about something, laughing. One of them has found a spider in the corner of the frame and is looking at it — just looking.



his winter's issue is special—and the portal to Mara. Unfolded, it is a large risograph poster like always: recycled stock, acid ink, designed to go on walls. But tucked inside each copy distributed in Queens is an insert flier: seven different positions on the conversion proposal, written by seven people who live or work within six blocks of this building. They do not agree. The newspaper did not ask them to.

SERVICE

HOW MESH ARTISTS ORGANIZE

A NEWSPAPER and a FORMER ART SCHOOL



Reported from the imagination of Nato Thompson
Written by Nato Thompson and Noah Fischer

On the second Saturday of each month, before the heat builds in the converted dormitory corridors, Mara wheels the newspaper bundles down the service ramp and into the courtyard where the old bike racks still stand. The racks were installed sometime around 2012, when this building housed a private art college that closed during the debt crisis a decade later. She straps the bundles with canvas ties and checks the route list on paper, not her phone. The newspaper is soft and gray against her forearms, smelling faintly of starch and soy ink.

The college closed before she was old enough to apply. Her parents wanted her to go somewhere like this. In the late 2020s she took online programs that taught her to read philosophy, map colonial museum histories, write about images. She still sometimes feels there was a room she never entered, a conversation she missed — though she has spent nearly thirty years in cohorts that know her work more intimately than any faculty would have.

Now, she lives with her parents who are in their seventies. Their retirement accounts, like those of many New Yorkers, emptied during the market swings of the 2030s. No one in the household lives independently anymore. Everyone is helping everyone.

Mara's daughter Lila, twelve, sits cross-legged beside boxes of party flyers Mara has collected for years — hip hop showcases, basement DJ nights, queer ballroom events, memorial jams for rappers who died young. Lila is scanning them on a portable flatbed that connects to the cooperative archive cloud. She knows which venues closed after the flood years, which collectives dissolved when rents rose, which MCs later became teachers in mesh schools.

Mara's art practice began when she noticed how quickly these old fliers had vanished: plastered over, scraped off, washed into gutters. They carried things that never entered museums — neighborhood economies of sound, kinship networks, grief rituals, dance lineages. Over time she began tracing the trajectories of the artists named on them, mapping how scenes migrated across boroughs and platforms after the collapse of venues and feeds.

She belongs to three cohorts. The oldest has been with her since she was sixteen — now in their forties and fifties, spread across Lagos, Manila, São Paulo, Warsaw. The second formed when Lila was born: caregivers who refused the tempo of institutional art careers, sharing methods for working inside interrupted time, exchanging childcare during regional meetups. The third changes yearly; this year's cohorts are artists documenting disappearing street graphics across cities shaped by platform advertising.

This winter's issue is special—and the portal to Mara. Unfolded, it is a large risograph poster like always: recycled stock, acid ink, designed to go on walls. But tucked inside each copy distributed in Queens is an insert flier: seven different positions on the conversion proposal, written by seven people who live or work within six blocks of this building. They do not agree. The newspaper did not ask them to.

"We're not running an editorial line," said one of the regional coordinators. "We're running an open argument."

The proposal itself is not a hostile target for activists. That is what makes it complicated. It's a rezoning proposal for Mara's building—the former art school, whose outcome will impact Mara and Lila's lives one way or another.

When the rezoning proposal for the former Art College building into affordable housing landed in the community portal three weeks ago, city planners expected the usual: a comment period, some attended hearings, a vote. What they got instead was something harder to categorize. Within forty-eight hours, three continents were comparing notes about mixing life and creative livelihoods within the same space.

Selena Varga, a housing coordinator with the Queens Cultural Commons office who has worked with mesh communities for six years, has never seen a deliberation move like this one. "They don't argue the way community boards argue," she said. "They read each other differently. They slow down where other groups speed up. And they don't need a chair."

What the planners encountered has been growing in this neighborhood, and in dozens of networked neighborhoods like it, for nearly two decades: an education system without campus, accreditation, or graduation date. It has produced some of the most civically capable people in the city.

Under the city's Distributed Housing Stabilization Act — passed in 2041 after the second round of tower abandonments — buildings like this one are eligible for formal conversion into permanently affordable residential commons. Residents would receive legal tenure, and multigenerational households would be recognized and protected. For households like Mara's — her parents in their seventies, her daughter Lila at twelve, four people across two knocked-together student suites — that protection would mean everything.

But the conversion, many residents worry, doesn't speak to the building's other life. The dormitory corridors become print runs on the third weekend of the month. The ground-floor common room is also, on alternating Saturdays, a risograph workshop, a flyer archive sorting station, a mesh cohort session, a place where Lila learns to caption images of scenes that ended before she was born. Under the new framework these spaces would be protected as residential. The question is whether they can remain as part housing, part studio, part school, part archive, part open-ended space.

"It's not that we'd lose the space," said one longtime resident, a print ecologist who coordinates the building's regional node. "It's that the space would have a definition as housing. And we're concerned that once it has a fixed definition, it starts to become only that."

Lila rides beside Mara on a smaller bike, bundles swaying over the rear wheel. The first stop is a Bangladeshi grocery on 37th Avenue where the owner clears a corner of the counter for each issue. He once played tabla in a fusion group whose posters Mara keeps in a box labeled Jackson Heights 2031. Today he wants to talk about the proposal. He thinks the building should go for formal tenure. His nephew, who contributes comics to the paper, is not sure.

At the laundromat two blocks down, members of the local mesh cohort hang copies with clothespins along a line above the dryers. A caregiver Mara recognizes from her parenting cohort waves from the folding table, a toddler asleep in a sling. They have already read all seven positions in the insert. They disagree with two of them and want to write a response for next month.

"Can we?" they ask. "You can, but you have to put in your printing hours," Mara says. "That's how it works." When the 47-page impact assessment arrived, the cohorts read it carefully and returned 23 questions. Several assumed a planning horizon the assessment had no framework for. One asked what the conversion would mean for uses of the building that did not yet exist. Another asked how the formal structure would absorb people who arrived, as many had, without documentation, without a lease, without anything

same cohort for twenty-two years. We have never voted on anything. We don't have a chair. We don't have bylaws. Last month the city sent us a form asking us to register as a 'formal civic deliberation body' within thirty days or lose our eligibility to comment on the Queensborough rezoning proposal. We have twenty-three questions about this form. One of them is: what is a thirty-day

deadline for people who have been having the same conversation for two decades? — Temporally Misaligned, Jackson Heights

Dear Temporally Misaligned, Submit your twenty-three questions. All of them. The city planners will not know how to answer several of them and that is useful information for everyone.



Mara Displays The Position Sheet, Inserted into the Newspapers She is Delivering.
Pen and Ink Drawing: Noah Fischer. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

except a connection to someone already inside the network.

The city has not yet responded. The questions are genuinely hard to answer inside the vocabulary of municipal planning. They describe a kind of institution that the city's housing law is a bit too slow to comprehend.

Varga has been trying to build a bridge. "What they've made here is amazing, actually," she said. "The question is whether making it legible kills it. I don't know the answer. I don't think anyone does yet. She chuckles. "Sometimes I think it would be best to just look the other way — please don't print that, ok?"

By noon the bundles are gone. Back home, Mara's father has sorted the mail and her mother has cooked rice and lentils. Lila holds up the last flyer she scanned — neon ink still sharp at the edges, a memorial jam from 2029. They talk about whether the artist listed ever released another track. Mara checks the cohort archive. Someone in the long group remembers and adds a note.

In the afternoon she joins the coordination call for the global issue. Faces tile the screen, genders fluid, accents layered. They discuss layout and shipping, then move into critique. Mara shows a draft poster composed of Queens flyers overlaid with maps of venue closures. Someone in Manila suggests tracing sound migrations instead. Someone in Lagos recalls a parallel scene. The conversation folds across time zones.

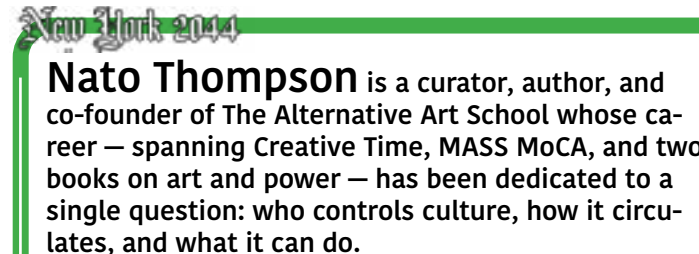
Evening comes. Lila tapes one of Mara's posters in the hallway outside their door. One can still catch the faint smell of turpentine from the building's school days. A neighbor pauses to look. They ask what the images are. Mara explains: parties, music, places that held people together. The neighbor nods and says they remember one of them.

The vote is in six days. The cohorts are still deliberating. They are reading slowly, dialoging with the city as they await its response, and trusting that the

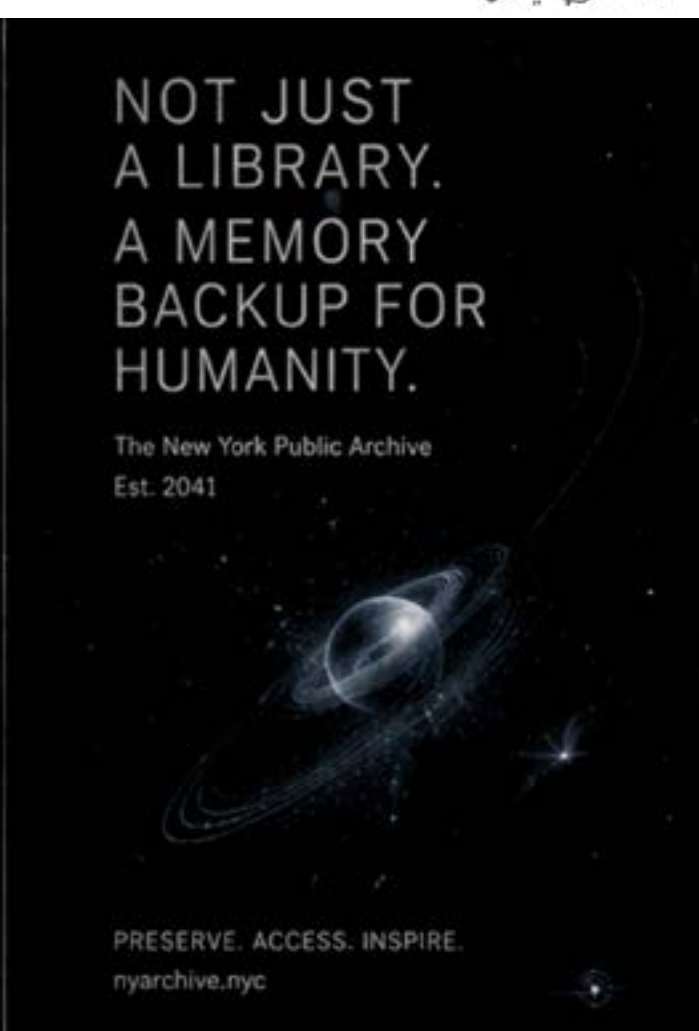
conversation is doing work even without resolving. Whether that process can produce a decision on a municipal meeting is, depending on who you ask, either the whole problem or precisely the point.

Later, when the apartment quiets, Mara thinks about the college that once occupied this building, about the art students alone in their studios. Her education has always been elsewhere: in cohorts that lasted decades, in kitchens and laundromats, in newspapers carried by hand.

The mesh holds. In the morning, someone in another city will strap bundles to a cart and pedal through their city, stopping to debate along the way.



Nato Thompson is a curator, author, and co-founder of The Alternative Art School whose career — spanning Creative Time, MASS MoCA, and two books on art and power — has been dedicated to a single question: who controls culture, how it circulates, and what it can do.



MUTUAL AID

The New Literacy

Reading the City-Wide Mutual Aid Network



Reported from the imagination of
Matt Peterson
Written by Noah Fischer

isographed posters in lively pinks, yellows, and greens cover the wall of the Manhattan gathering space. The posters integrate urban maps with the shapes of fruit, loaves of bread, and bees. "Routing the Community Table: Food Distribution in Philosophy and Iteration," by Shiva Banju Cohen, is written in a hand-crafted typeface.

Banju Cohen sits underneath the posters in a deep purple jumper. She has long curly dark hair with a few grey strands, wireframe glasses, brown skin and bright eyes. She's speaking with a book group at the Woodbine Center in Manhattan; they've been given advance copies from the initial 500 printed in Queens. Soon, digital copies will be available through the text-only servers of the Homespun local networks, under a community fair-use license.

"I want to dig deeper into your localism chapter," says Geon, a once-upon-a-time NYU adjunct and current member of the Crown Heights Tenant Gardeners. He praises her critique of luxury cuisine, connects local food production to the Right to the City framework, then asks his question: "but this region isn't exactly a breadbasket, especially after the long winters and unseasonal frosts of the last decade. The Crown Heights Tenant Gardeners have developed the 60/360 framework: sixty percent produced within three hundred sixty miles — the framework is optimized for cost. We balance local food with the cheaper prices we pay for imported staples like rice and dried legumes. The cost balance means more equitable distribution. But we're getting a lot of pushback from the OnlyLocallyGrows. I say we need to get beyond purity politics to continue scaling up. What are your thoughts?"

Banju Cohen nods. She has spent fifteen years with the Flatbush Food Autonomy Collective, and she speaks with the confidence

of someone whose knowledge was built outside the walls of an Ivory tower, though she's an avid reader of philosophy.

"Lefebvre, when he wrote about the Right to the City, wasn't describing a consumer right," She begins. "He was describing the right to participate in shaping urban life itself. We should think of food as a relationship between people and land and labor — not a product. So the OnlyLocallyGrows are voicing an ethical principle I respect. But we can also step back and see that ethics that can't scale are often aesthetics more than politics. Your 60/360 framework is asking: how do we build something that can actually feed the largest city in the US? We need both philosophy and iteration. But you're absolutely right that without scale and equity, we're on the wrong path."

A hand goes up from a man in his fifties who teaches political theory at Yale. He wants to know about the ontological implications of food sovereignty for citizenship theory. Banju Cohen listens, then gently steers back. "Listen, I love theory. But let's be sure we unite the book

worms and the earth worms to meet the moment." Fingers around the room snap. The New Literacy Movement

Scholars come to spaces like Woodbine the way their predecessors once came to the spaces like Brecht Forum or 16 Beaver — because the democratic energy in the room is something their institutions can no longer provide. What they're coming to participate in is being called the New Literacy Movement.

The movement emerged from three overlapping crises: Decades of AI-generated slop that made it increasingly difficult to distinguish knowledge from noise, the collapse of public trust in institutions that once organized information; and the rise of the mutual aid economy and its emphasis on self-governing. You cannot run a food distribution network, negotiate a community land trust, or coordinate a flood

response across five boroughs without a shared capacity to analyze, argue, and decide. That's the kind of literacy the movement is about.

Woodbine's co-founder Matt Peterson had been warning about this for years, connecting the erosion of serious reading to what Régis Debray called mediological decline — the shift from word to image to video, and the corresponding loss in depth of collective thought. "The most important political training is the ability to read carefully," says Peterson. "To think together, and articulate what you tually believe — not what an algorithm has decided you want to hear"

Banju Cohen is part of a generation of academics for whom the dream of an institutional career is genuinely over, but who invested early in their affinity networks and found, in them, continuity of purpose.

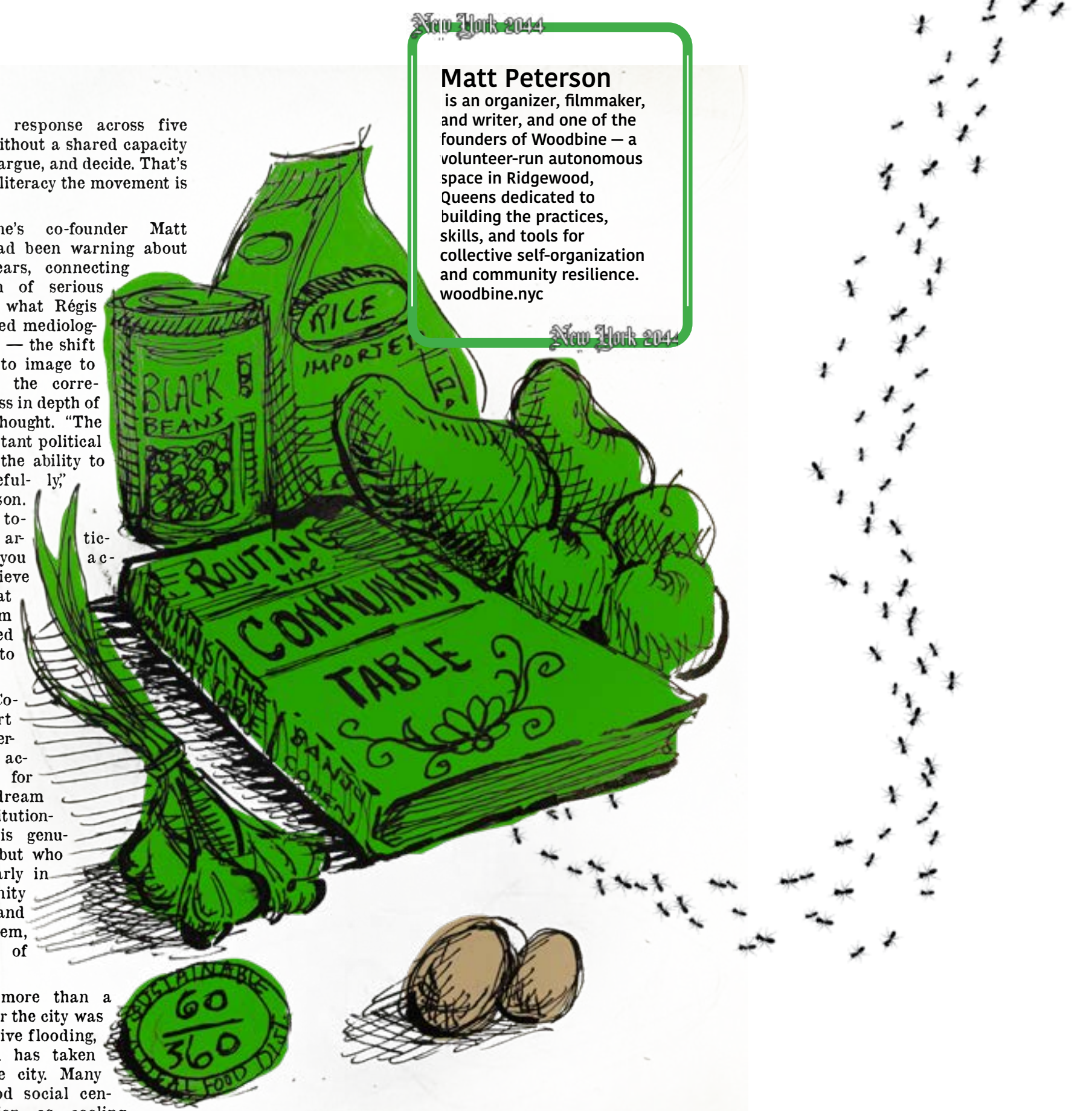
Today, more than a decade after the city was hit by massive flooding, mutual aid has taken hold in the city. Many neighborhood social centers function as cooling rooms in July and warming rooms in February. Woodbine has always understood itself as part of a longer sequence: the secular American version of what a church used to be.

The Party he celebration for Routing the Community Table is at the Nostrand Commons in Ridgewood — a social center in the ground-floor retail space of a forty-story luxury tower. The developer needed community amenity space to get permits. The community took the offer and opened a small bar run on the honor system, and a makeshift stage where a DJ is setting up.

The city is not a utopia. The same land pressures that made Woodbine necessary have not been abolished; But now it feels like the anarchic spirit of the city has fought to a partial draw with the forces of capital.

At the book launch afterparty, Banju Cohen is dancing near the stage. Leaning on the bar, Geon is arguing about food miles. Matt is in a corner, talking to a young member of a new collective in Mott Haven — not far from where the Land Party swept the last borough elections. The music is loud. Some have begun to dance. It will be a long evening.

Matt Peterson is an organizer, filmmaker, and writer, and one of the founders of Woodbine — a volunteer-run autonomous space in Ridgewood, Queens dedicated to building the practices, skills, and tools for collective self-organization and community resilience. woodbine.nyc



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Low Power Network Designers

the university.

Ioana Literat, the Hub's program director, has spent two decades at Teachers College pushing against what she calls "deficit thinking" — the institutional habit of treating young people's relationship to technology as a problem to manage rather than a capacity to develop. She waves me over: "You want to know about the vote. But we need to start a little earlier. Like 2026."

"When Musk bought Twitter, we knew right away what it meant," she says. "Your organizing labor could just disappear overnight, because someone essentially bought the building you were living in. Young people in the 2020s were building their civic lives on the rented land of big tech platforms."

"Pessimism was popular," Literat continues, "but pessimism about technology is a privilege." She is borrowing this concept from scholar Payal Arora "Communities in India, in Pakistan, across Africa couldn't afford to be dystopian. They had to build with what they had. Eventually, we arrived there too."

The building period took decades. It began during BLM, when activists started running private servers that didn't rely on the platforms willing to cooperate with law enforcement. It expanded when ICE operations made corporate platform vulnerability immediate and concrete. DIY mesh networks appeared in Bronx apartment buildings, in Sunset Park community centers, in Southeast Queens churches. By the late 2030s, sixty to seventy percent of people under thirty were using distributed networks as their primary information environment.

Literat introduces Camille Torres, twenty-seven, from Mott Haven — one of the core organizers behind defeating Initiative 7. Her grandfather died in 2033, pulled over two years from local politics on Facebook into conspiracy content that grew from the wreckage of the Epstein and Trump years. He died in a prison upstate. "Fact checking can't counter the power of the platform," Torres says. "You need to build person to person connections. Trust is the infrastructure. Without it, you have nothing."

In the maker corner, Dario, twenty-three, soldiers a circuit without looking up. "A full day of community networking — news, governance, event coordination,

everything — takes about the same bandwidth as one ten-second video stream did fifteen years ago," he tells us. Nearby, a recurring argument about security protocols is underway. "These networks were built during BLM," says Sofia. "Expanded when ICE was going door to door. The core has always been security." Someone groans. "Why this same conversation? Every. Single. Day?" Back in her office, Literat is direct. "I have argued for most of my career that young people are not passive victims of technology. That being critical isn't enough. That pessimism is a posture. That you have to actually build the alternative." But AI is already mapping our networks, warns a student in the room. "They know our strategies better than we do. Next time, they'll just optimize their messaging and win." The room is quiet. "Yes," Literat says. "And we'll have to build something better than what we have now. That's how it works."

Somewhere across the five boroughs, on rooftops from Mott Haven to Forest Hills, the same quiet work continues — a few kilobytes at a time.

Ioana Literat is Associate Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, co-director of the Media and Social Change Lab, and author of Not Your Parents' Politics — a researcher who has spent her career arguing that young people are skilled builders of media culture, not passive victims of it.



POLICIES IN THIS ISSUE M-Z (CONTINUED FROM SECTION 1)

Mental Health Support System (MHSS) - 2035: Citywide mental health support system for students, funded by a 1% tax on luxury goods.

Mutant Plague emergency health initiative - 2032: Mayoral order authorizing mass chip deployment as real-time vaccine adaptation during post-Flood plague surge. When NYC's Youth Suffered from Possession

New Vision platform (NVP) - 2030-2038: Living wage, 20-hour workweek, social security at 30, Medicare for all, IWP council victories in 2038. Independent Workers' Party

NYPD harbor rescue protocol - 2044: Crisis

response intercepted Staten Island Ferry mass suicide attempt; AI recovered from the harbor. When NYC's Youth Suffered from Possession

Nurses Story Circle - 2038-2044: Semi-secret guild of nurses trained in narrative therapy, embedded in hospital staffs across the five boroughs. When NYC's Youth Suffered from Possession

NYU Tisch distributed studio model - 2044: Most film and fine arts students no longer required to live in New York full-time. The City You Pay For

Office of Community Resilience - 2035: City office formed during the Great Storm to support low-income workers unable to work remotely. The Earth Is the Critical Asset

Portrait of a Graduate (POG) assessment - 2035: Rigorous non-test graduation assessment replacing the Regents Exam, evaluating students as activated citizens. What a NYC Highschooler Needs to Graduate

Post-flood community amenity extraction - 2035-2044: Luxury tower developers required to include ground-floor community spaces as permit condition. The New Literacy

Post-Mandani Distributed Network Hub Initiative - 2030s: Eleven Teachers College hubs across five boroughs extending library logic into civic tech infrastructure. How New York Learned to Read the Ballot

Rikers closure and Museum conversion - c. 2034: Rikers closed; youth facility converted into a museum with green roofs and observation decks. Gates of Hell

Rockefeller Institute literacy mapping project - 2030s: Cross-referenced literacy with voter turnout, ER use, and eviction rates by zip code across NYC. NY Leads to Highest Literacy Rankings

Securus's robotic corrections system - 2044: AI system proposed to replace correction officers; data breach derailed rollout. Gates of Hell

Subcutaneous school AI prosthesis - 2030: AI chip adopted by roughly a third of NYC public school students within three years of release.

Art Class and the Blank Slate Epidemic

UBI expansion (creative workforce) - early 2040s: City stipends for automation-displaced workers; CE algorithm read stipends as evidence of non-employment. Not Displayable

Unverifiable Workers Coalition - October 2043: 8,000-member coalition of CE-flagged artists and adjuncts; City Council vote scheduled April 2044. Not Displayable

Zero Gravity Simulation (Blank AMNH) - 2040s: Motorized-cable field trip facility; most sought-after school destination in the five boroughs. Right-month waitlist. Art Class and the Blank Slate Epidemic

BUILDING NEW YORK'S NEW

market, stopped working.

Into that vacuum came the New Vision: living wage, twenty-hour workweek, social security starting at age thirty, Medicare for all. A platform inspired by the unions — and specifically by rank-and-file workers like Stevens, whose rise in 2038 represented the first wave of the new politics.

Stevens will say that education put him on the path to leadership. But Stevens comes out of a different kind of school.

For years before the crash, Stevens had been developing a labor education curriculum for CWA's Verizon workers — and growing frustrated. "You'd get people in the room and within five minutes they knew what you wanted them to think," he said. "The rich got richer and we couldn't build power because of the polarization. We were stuck." Union political education had functioned as internal marketing — leadership justifying its choices to members rather than building genuine worker consciousness.

The banking crisis solved the problem by force. Overnight, millions of workers had a direct, unmediated experience of the coming crisis he'd been warning the workers about in his classes. "It was the worst possible way to learn the meaning of solidarity," Stevens said. "But we learned it."

He encountered John Dewey around this time. Dewey had argued that democracy was not a set of institutions to be explained but a practice to be lived. "He was writing about classrooms," Stevens said. "But he was describing organizing." The Solidarity Caucus Stevens co-founded in a VFW hall basement in Stapleton began every meeting not with positions but with questions: What does a decent life cost in this city? Who has one, and who doesn't, and why?

By 2038, IWP candidates held council seats in all five boroughs. Stevens won his own seat with 61 percent of the vote.

In parts of the city, the twenty-hour workweek is already in practice. On a Wednesday afternoon in April, Carlos Men-

dez, 41, a former warehouse logistics coordinator from Mott Haven, is in a painting class on the third floor of a community arts space on Willis Avenue — a schedule made possible by his new hours as a building systems technician.

"I used to not exist from Monday to Friday," he said, without turning from the canvas. "I was just, like, a function. Now I'm living my own life. I feel like I woke up."

Near the end of his Foley Square address, the crowd had grown quieter, the way crowds do when they sense a speaker approaching something they want said plainly.

"They built their compounds. They built their playgrounds. They built whole cities you couldn't get into without a net worth statement. They thought we'd just clap along when they called it innovation. They called it disruption..."

He paused.

"But we're going to call it a template. We do the hard work, and we're going to share in the rewards from here on out."

The City Council is expected to take up the 20-Hour Work Standards Act next month. A competing measure backed by the mayor's office would establish a voluntary pilot program. The IWP has called it "a delay dressed up as a compromise."

A former Staten Island CWA Union President turned labor educator,

Steve Lawton spent years

democratizing their local and building coalitions around labor, immigration, and healthcare before transitioning into curriculum development and instruction — work focused on empowering union members and activists to shape a more equitable future.



Land Stevens Speaks to the Crowd at Foley Square.

Pen and Ink Drawing: Katherine Dominguez, Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

HIGHER EDUCATION

Learning How to Be Human

The New School's Art of Conflict Corps Sets Out to Heal the City



Obama stands a bit stooped, hair and beard white, eyes alert. He's in the courtyard of the partially renovated Melrose Houses in the Bronx, sun casting shadows through the scaffolding, listening to a circle of residents debate the city-wide housing plan.

A rich human sound emanates from a nearby patch of grass, where a professor of vocal arts is teaching residents to warm up their voices. Next week, all of the Melrose House residents will be singing their grievances on the big stage, arranged into vocal harmonies — a facet of the latest Learning To Be Human show, the civic spectacle series co-organized by the city, the New School, and many other organizations.

A holographic camera from the city's Planning Commission hovers overhead. New School students quietly take notes. But no one can quite ignore the protestors on the other side of the black iron gate.

"Hey Barack. You're not welcome here. Get the fuck out of the Bronx!" shouts a young man, maybe thirty, pressed against the gate.

Obama is headlining the Bronx show, but even the organizers understand his legacy is complicated. His early drone program cast a long shadow over the increasingly unmanned wars that followed. The post-2008 crash was a failed opportunity, and the inequalities that compounded through the Trump era — the floods, the evictions, the AI displacement of working-class jobs — shaped a city still sorting through the wreckage. The young protestors don't remember his presidency, but he's a symbol of complacency.

Obama approaches the gate. "You folks have a moment?" A few protestors nod. "I know I'm part of what you're angry about. That's why I'm here and not somewhere else."

"YOUR ARTWASHING PROJECT IS A JOKE!"

Obama listens. "Maybe. But I've seen what happens when people make something together. I saw it in Chicago in 1985. I'm seeing it here."

The artwashing accusation has a history. In the 2010s and 2020s, murals appeared on walls months before the rents went up from Bushwick to the South Bronx to Sunset Park. New Yorkers have reason to be skeptical.

But Learning to Be Human arrived at a new chapter in the city's history. The post-flood decade brought displacement at a scale the city hadn't seen since Robert Moses. Democracy sputtered — elections halted, polarization eviscerated civic culture. Universities shuttered.

The New School, facing its own existential reckoning with AI displacement and shrinking enrollment, searched for a survival strategy. Its concentrations in visual art, music and performance, research and theory were increasingly merging. Its union, UAW 7902, had taken over the board in the last strike. It was the union that negotiated with the city to create Learning to Be Human — the giant, interdisciplinary, often chaotic exper-

iments which breathed new life into The New School.

The Hunts Point Accord of 2036 is the most cited example: a two-year process after the second flood left large sections of the peninsula uninhabitable. Three hundred residents, two city agencies, the Hunts Point Produce Market cooperative, and a cohort of New School students built a public performance series on a former waste transfer site. Two hundred thousand people came. Four Hunts Point participants ran for local office the following year and three won. The waterfront plan that finally passed in 2039 was first brainstormed in a Learning To Be Human workshop.

Making, it turned out, did

a keyboard, hand drums, and instruments the musicians built themselves in the New Jersey fabrication workshops.

The sound is hard to describe. It carries the specific acoustic of a South Bronx courtyard — buoyant and grieving at once. The faculty member listens with her eyes closed. "There," she says.

"Every place has a soul sound," says Marlene Webb, jazz faculty and lead sound designer on three Learning to Be Human projects. "Every conflict has a sound too. The job is to find it together. If you find it together, we can build all kinds of things together."

home, I could learn any skill on my interface," she says. "But I had to come here to do this." She gestures toward where residents and students are painting a mural behind the stage.

Faculty member Amara Diallo teaches this project each semester, then spends the rest of her time facilitating civic-artistic processes in Medellín, Beirut, Nairobi. She is a part-timer — like most of the New School's faculty — and a union member. At the New School, the union has been the governing body since the strike of 2031, and faculty like Diallo have been key to building the new model.

"We were in the community room in the second week," Jaylen says, "and she stopped everything.

where people live from what they're able to imagine."

The provost has come over. "We used to talk about innovation, design thinking — harnessing creativity for the market. AI forced us to name the processes more honestly."

Obama looks back toward the musicians, still finding the sound. "Interconnection," he says.

That evening, Jaylen and Sun-Yeon take the cross-Hudson express to Newark, where the New School's residential campus opened in 2037 — fabrication studios, a black-box performance space, student housing built into the bones of two former industrial buildings on Halsey Street, workshops open directly onto the street.

"A previous provost — Richard Kessler, back in the 2020s — used to say," the current provost had told me earlier, "that the New School would one day figure out that if it wants to be involved in urban issues, it has to connect to the greater New York area — beyond the glamour of Greenwich Village — where there's space and where the need is real. Newark was a way to be equitable and not displace people."

The union negotiated the Newark expansion as part of a new model: project-based contracts, shared surplus, six consecutive balanced budgets. "It's back to 1919," says union president Dominique Ferrera. "You came, you took the course from the person who knew the thing. The degree was a detour. We're back. And since the strike, we all understand that we're here for the students and workers equally."

Back in his room, Jaylen adds today's documentation to his credential portfolio. Outside, the streets of Newark are alive. Somewhere back in the Melrose courtyard, the musicians are still at it.



Former President Barack Obama Greets New School Professor Marlene Webb at the Learning to Be Human Stage at Melrose Houses
Pen and Ink Drawing: Noah Fischer. Digital Color: Katherine Dominguez

something debate couldn't. Argument activates defenses — words, especially online, turn into polarizing weapons. But when people physically negotiate a sound, a color, a line of dialogue, they access capacities for empathy that language suppresses. A century ago, John Dewey, one of The New School's founders, wrote that democracy, learning, and aesthetic experience are not separate projects. The New School claims it has returned to that insight.

Obama rejoins the participants. They move toward a rehearsal space in a basketball

At a fabrication table nearby, New School students Jaylen Ortiz, 24, from Tremont, and Sun-Yeon Park, 27, from Busan, South Korea, are editing holographic videos of the day's workshop. Jaylen grew up eight blocks from here, came to the New School through a city partnership offering full scholarships to young people from flood-affected neighborhoods. He's assembling his education in pieces — community facilitation, sound engineering, urban ecology. This six-month project is his first full micro-credential, recog-

Nobody talks for the next hour. We're going to draw what this room smells like. We were with older residents — people who'd been through the ICE years. It had apparently been the site of a temporary detention. People began to weep. After that, the conversations were different."

Diallo doesn't mystify it. "AI does most of the skill-building now. But it's made the experience of connection a lot harder to locate. What I do is put them back in spaces where the only thing that works is being present."

Obama approaches alone, pausing at the students' table, glancing at the AR reading list projected above Sun-Yeon's wrist.

"Let me see what you're reading."

Near the top: David Harvey's Spaces of Hope.

"That's a valuable one. They used to say there's no alternative to Capitalism. Harvey tried to open up a pathway to new possible worlds. You can't separate

"Every place has a soul sound. Every conflict has one too. The job is to find it together. If you find it together, it might be more powerful than any negotiation."

— Marlene Webb, New School jazz faculty

court: scaffolding rigged with lights and fabric, a sound system. On the circular outdoor stage, local musicians from Melrose jam with a New School jazz faculty member and a graduate student — a battered upright bass,

nized by the city as qualification for community planning work.

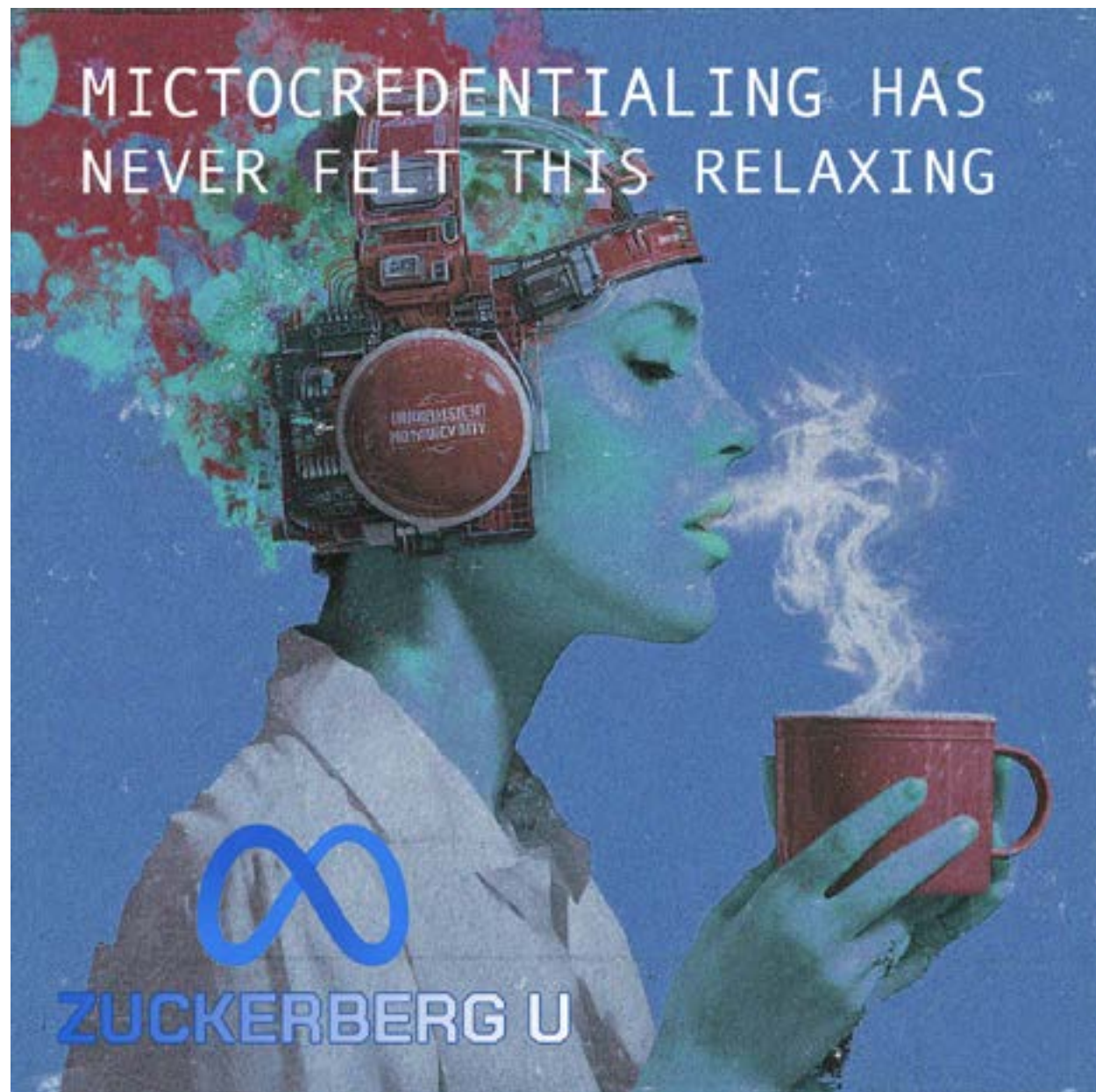
Sun-Yeon completed her degree in Seoul and came to New York for what she calls the "sublime complexity." Learning to Be Human is known for. "Back

HOUSING WANTED / OFFERED

— NY2044 Classifieds

Student & Creative Worker Listings — May2044

- Harlem 2BR, \$1,600/month split. Near CCNY and Helene Fuld. Quiet building, good light, neighbors mind their business. Available June 1.
- Cooperative housing, Washington Heights. 8 members, rotating household responsibilities, CE mutual aid contributions optional but appreciated. One room opening. Preference for educators or community workers.
- Short-term furnished room, Astoria. Available April 15–June 30. \$900/month, utilities included. Ideal for visiting student or residency participant. No CE check. Cash or crypto equivalent accepted.
- Bronx studio-share, near D train. 3 desks, shared fabrication area, urban garden access on roof. \$420/month. Run by Outer Seed Shadow collective. Priority to students in ecology, sustainability, or community arts.
- Fort Greene room, cooperative building. \$850/month. Building has active CE pool, weekly house
- meeting, communal dinner Thursdays. Looking for someone who wants to be part of something.
- Williamsburg loft, converted. 5 desks, fast connection, 2 edit suites, holo-space-capable. \$680/month per desk. Month-to-month. Distributed program students welcome. Spring intensive cohorts: contact for group rate.
- East Harlem 1BR, \$1,100/month. Above a community health clinic. Quiet, clean, good bones. Owner is a former nurse educator. Preference for healthcare or education workers.
- Stapleton, Staten Island. Room in IWP organizer's household. \$700/month, includes utilities. House has 4 residents, all in labor or education. Near ferry. Serious inquiries only.
- Sunset Park room, \$760/month. Multigenerational household, some Spanish spoken, very good food smells. CE not checked. Character references appreciated.



THE EDUCATION & DEMOCRACY ISSUE