

▶ METRO MATTERS: A Newsletter On Urban Issues

February-March, 2004

Table of Contents

- [President's Column: Investing in America's Workers](#)
- [Director's Column: The Importance of Community Colleges](#)
- [Recent Notable Articles and Studies: Incarceration, Welfare, Poverty, Philanthropy, & Minority Enrollment in Higher Education](#)
- [Recent Books of Interest: Low Wages, Black Fathers, Low Income Students, and City Planning](#)



▶ **President's Column: Investing in America's Workers** by Stephen Greenwald

President Bush's record on job creation is less than stellar. Indeed, as many have noted, America has actually lost jobs during the President's three years in office. Nationwide, unemployment stands at over 5.5 percent. In New York City, more than 7 percent are out of work (and this does

not count those who got discouraged and quit looking for work).

The President has not done enough for America's unemployed. This past year, he signed the "Jobs and Growth Act" into law. The law took an indirect approach to reducing unemployment. Rather than reach out to the unemployed and help them find work, it cut taxes in hopes of spurring investment that would create new jobs. So far, the tax cuts seem to be helping Wall Street and investors, but unemployment remains high.

In 2003, the President promised "For everyone willing to work, a job." He also said "We must also help build economic security for workers by preparing citizens to fill the new jobs this economy will create." To this end, he floated an interesting idea: "personal reemployment accounts." The notion was simple and smart: to remedy this skills-occupation gap, workers would receive up to \$3000 to spend on training and schooling that would help get them re-employed. To encourage recipients to spend the money wisely

▶ **Metropolitan Institute Update**

Tuesday March 16 Crime and Violence In The Inner-City: How Do We Return To Civility?

Speakers include Rev. Annie Bovian, Executive Director, Women's Advocate Ministry
Stanley Crouch, Columnist, New York Daily News
Bob Herbert, Columnist, The New York Times
Yvonne Stennett, Executive Director, Community League of West 159th Street.

Admission is free and open to the public. [Click here for further details.](#)

Urban Dialogues 2004

Free lectures held at Metropolitan College of

(and not on courses that would not get them jobs), they would keep the balance of the account as a "cash reemployment bonus" if they became reemployed within 13 weeks. Unfortunately, he did not follow up on this proposal.

This past month, President Bush hatched his Jobs for the 21st Century policy (which you can examine by [clicking here](#)). It is an interesting proposal, but beyond offering an extra \$1000 a year in Pell Grants to students, it does not empower individuals to get the education they need to find jobs.

Clearly, many jobseekers cannot find employment because they lack the skills demanded by the market. As the economy becomes more and more technology and information based and globalized, jobs move overseas, or disappear altogether.

At Metropolitan College of New York, I see many students who are in their late twenties or thirties. They have come to school to retrain themselves for better careers. But these are only the few who can afford college and handle the burdens of student loans. What of those who cannot?

The President should return to his idea of of personal reemployment accounts. Help people invest in themselves by helping them pay for training and education.

Of course, if individuals are going to all the training they need, then they'll need more than \$3000. So why not up the amount to \$15,000? Imagine what one could achieve with \$15,000. With an investment that size, a citizen could get an associates college degree or better at many colleges or trade schools. Or one might take a number of courses in the newest software or technology. And with any money left over, one could pay down credit card bills, invest it in a retirement account, or put it in a college fund for one's children. The possibilities are incredible.

The President often speaks of "the dignity of work." He says that Americans spend money more wisely than the government. He also has argued that "When people have more money, they can spend it on goods and services. And in our society, when they demand an additional good or a service, somebody will produce the good or a service. And when somebody produces that good or a service, it means somebody is more likely to be able to find a job." All true and all the more reason for getting personal reemployment accounts enacted immediately.

Stephen Greenwald is the President of Metropolitan College of New York.

New York addressing pressing issues in America's cities. [Click here to see the winter and spring schedule.](#)

Metro Matters

is published by the Metropolitan Institute at Metropolitan College of New York. Readers are encouraged to forward Metro Matters to others. Metro Matters welcomes [letters](#) to the editor.

Subscribe/Unsubscribe

[Click here](#) for your free subscription to Metro Matters.

Current subscribers may unsubscribe by clicking the link at the bottom of the newsletter.

Metropolitan College of New York

**75 Varick St
New York, NY 10013
800-33-THINK
212-343-1234**

EDUCATION THAT WORKS.

Director's Column: The Importance of Community Colleges

by *Hakim Hasan*

President Bush, during his recent State of the Union Address, talked about his proposal to increase support to community colleges "so they can train workers for industries that are creating the most new jobs." He was vague on specifics; but, with a presidential election looming in the background, the president and his speechwriters realize (one assumes) the difficulty poor, working class, and middle-class Americans now face trying to afford elite colleges and universities.

While I find the idea of community colleges as merely institutions where efficient job training can take place shortsighted, I am not among the contingent of high-minded intellectuals who lambaste students who link the utility of obtaining college degrees to their ability to acquire good, stable, and well paying jobs. Proprietary, for-profit, and community colleges are an important force in the educational landscape.

All too often, these institutions are engaged in educational triage, serving poor and working class people of color. To many students, they represent a stabilizing force in their lives and are symbols of social mobility or, if you will, a mastery of high ideals and classics, which is the end result of a good liberal arts education. Fair enough. Job or vocational training versus a sound liberal arts education is part of a much larger philosophical debate that transpired between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. To be fair, what is required is a practical synthesis of the two realms of thought.

President Bush's reference to community colleges reminded me of a very critical review I wrote of Carol Swain's *The New White Nationalism In America: Its Challenge To Integration* that was published in *City Limits*, an urban affairs magazine, early last year. Swain, a black woman and professor of political science at Vanderbilt University, is a product of Virginia Western Community College and a former divorced welfare mother of two sons.

The larger value of Swain's book, in my view, does not rest with its preposterous central thesis-that Americans should seriously listen to the views of white nationalist groups as legitimate concerns reflecting a growing consensus as part of our nation's history of freedom of speech. Instead, its value is to be found in tidbits in the preface, introduction, and a chapter titled "Concluding Observations and Policy Recommendations,". Here she writes very clearly about the importance of community colleges, jobs, migration patterns, and immigration, all important social variables in the realm of education policy.

President Bush and his top educational advisers should seriously consider the following quotes from *The New White Nationalism In*

America:

"Most minorities reside in metropolitan areas, so white movement out of the urban center may be precisely because of the influx of minorities and immigrants to urban areas."

"The cumulative redistribution of white residences and jobs out of the urban center has led to a lower quality of life for native minorities remaining in these areas."

"Relatively low-skilled immigrants provide competition for jobs with poorly educated long-term and native-born residents, and therefore serve to bid down their wages and take away employment opportunities."

"Provide public school funds to ensure that all public schools districts offer vocational training along with traditional academic programs so that students who do not intend to go on to college can graduate from high school with a marketable skill."

"The community college route to higher education and personal advancement needs to become more widely known and available. In my own case attendance at a community college was a decisive in pointing the way to a successful academic career."

While President Bush is right to lend greater support to community colleges, we need to pay for more attention to jobs, urban education, and the future of minorities.

[Hakim Hasan](#) is the Director of the Metropolitan Institute.

Recent Notable Articles and Studies

The High Cost of Incarceration

According to New York City's Independent Budget Office, it costs \$100,000 per year to keep someone locked up at Rikers. This jaw-dropping figure does not, of course, include the cost of post-incarceration rehabilitation. Meanwhile, at the other end of the country, the Delancey Street Foundation of San Francisco has an innovative training and employment program for ex-convicts

See Paul von Zielbauer, "[Rikers Houses Low-Level Inmates at High Expense](#)," *New York Times*, January 16, 2004; and Adam Cohen, "[Editorial Observer: A Community of Ex-Cons Shows How to Bring Prisoners Back Into Society](#)," *New York Times*, January 2, 2004 (abstracts available, articles must be purchased).

Using Welfare to End Reduce Poverty

Viola P. Miller, Secretary of Kentucky's Cabinet for Families and Children, recently implored Congress to reconsider its thinking about welfare and welfare reform. In short: there's more to welfare

than employment; working poverty is still poverty. You can access this at the [web site of Stateline.org](http://www.stateline.org), which is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Private Foundations: Making Them Give More to the Needy

In a very brief but potent piece in *The New York Review of Books*, philanthropist Lewis Cullman opens readers' eyes to the "Five Percent Rule." What is it? It is an Internal Revenue Service requirement that a private foundation must spend 5 percent of its assets annually. "Only rarely," Cullman writes, do foundations expend all 5 percent on grants. Usually they give 3 percent away and spend 2 percent on administrative costs. "Since even a mediocre money manager should be able to average a 5 percent return on a foundation's principal, the IRS is in effect requiring that the foundation spend only its income plus capital gains." The result? Foundations that give little, last forever, and tend to accrete money-sapping bureaucracies. Cullman urges folks to get behind The Charitable Giving Act (TCGA), a measure being pushed by Rep. Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Harold Ford (D-TN). TCGA would require foundations to give away a full 5 percent of their assets yearly.

For further details, see Lewis B. Cullman, "[Private Foundations: The Trick](#)," *New York Review of Books*, September 25, 2003 (abstract available, article must be purchased). Readers can follow the status of TCGA on the federal government's excellent web site, <http://thomas.gov/>.

Study: Work Support Program at One-Stop Centers

This report, *All in One Stop? The Accessibility of Work Support Program at One-Stop Centers* by Elise Richer, Hitomi Kubo, and Abbey Frank, comes from the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Under the Workforce Investment Act, all local workforce areas in the U.S. are required to have one-stop centers that provide access to seven work support programs (Earned Income Tax Credit, subsidized child care, food stamps, publicly funded health insurance, cash assistance, child support, and transportation assistance). The report discusses the findings of the survey, innovative techniques for making work supports more accessible, and the barriers to better access. Get the report for free at the web site of [The Center for Law and Social Policy](#).

Work, Marriage, and Welfare

When first announced, the President and the right's proposal to reduce poverty and dependence by promoting marriage elicited sharp criticism which, in turn, elicited equally sharp counter-criticism. Over a year has passed and the initial emotional melee has cooled- a little. Happily, the Brookings Institution has weighed in on the subject, bringing more reason and research to the debate. The authors compare two strategies for poverty alleviation:

direct cash transfers and policies that encourage work and marriage. They find the latter more effective, but, note that present programs need to be expanded (e.g., more child care and, Sawhill suggests, offering paid leave to new parents). In short, the report suggests a continued evolution of welfare along the big government conservatism line advocated by Lawrence Mead: spend more on welfare but require able-bodied recipients to work.

"Work and Marriage: The Way to End Poverty and Welfare" by Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill; readers may download a copy from the web site of [The Brookings Institution](#). On Lawrence Mead's research, readers are advised to see his [*The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*](#).

Issue Brief: Minorities and College: The Improving Picture

Public Agenda has put together a nice issue brief that draws upon a number of studies on the subject of whites, nonwhites, and college-attendance. On the bright side, college attendance by minorities has doubled since 1981; on the downside, attendance gaps remain: 46 percent of whites attend compared to 40 percent of blacks and 36 percent of Hispanics.

For further details, readers may access this brief at [Public Agenda's](#) web site (free).

Recent Books of Interest

*Eileen Appelbaum, Annette Bernhardt, and Richard J. Murnane, eds., [Low-Wage America \(Russell Sage Foundation\)](#)

*Obie Clayton, Ronald B. Mincy, and David Blankenhorn, eds., [Black Fathers in Contemporary American Society \(Russell Sage Foundation\)](#)

*Richard D. Kahlenberg, [America's Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education \(The Century Foundation Press\)](#)

*Jon A. Peterson, [The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917 \(Johns Hopkins University Press\)](#)