

SCARLET

MAGAZINE


Spring 2024

- 10 BACKGROUND CHECKED
- 14 GEN Z MOTIVATED TO VOTE
- 24 AS NEWARK BUILDS
- 34 THE LONG AND DANGEROUS ROAD
- 40 DROPPING OUT, DROPPING IN



THE POLITICS ISSUE

SPRING 2024 | 11



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CONTENTS

08

Background Checked

A determined alum highlights an obstacle for undocumented students.

By **Jacob Anthony Amaro**

12

Gen Z Motivated to Vote

But polling shows they're dissatisfied with both Biden and Trump.

By **Anel Mata-Payerro**

16

Standing Up For the Ironbound

Despite a new environmental justice law, residents must still fight against a gas-fired power plant.

By **Nagely Castro**

19

Schooled Behind Bars

History professor Whitney Strub speaks to *Scarlet* about teaching in prison.

By **Naim Ali-Pacheco**

20

The Case for Reparations

A statewide council with strong Rutgers representation is studying slavery's legacies.

By **Julie Jang**

22

As Newark Builds

Its skyline shifts, its people reflect, our cameras click.

Photo essay by **Jacob Anthony Amaro and Daniel Cuesta**

28

Can Newark Grow and Keep Its Character?

With construction booming, residents and city planners debate how to preserve affordable housing and prevent gentrification.

By **Daniel Cuesta**

32

The Long and Dangerous Road

One New Jersey family's story of migrating through the Darién Gap.

By **Nagely Castro**

36

Bringing Students – and Data – Into Political Life

A new center focusing on race and politics aims to help students enter public service.

By **Cydney Smith**

ON THE COVER

KENNY JARAMILLO playing in an Ironbound soccer league.

Photograph by **Nagely Castro**

38

Dropping Out, Dropping In

Amid a steep decline in enrollment, one student recounts why she left and how she found her way back.

By **Kenneth Weiss**

42

From the Holy Land to Campus

The war in Gaza has roiled Rutgers. Here's a round-up of the major news here.

By **Daniel Cuesta and Abdullah Allen**

44

The Ultimate Civics Lesson

Newark lowers the voting age to 16 in school board elections.

By **Ein Bryant**

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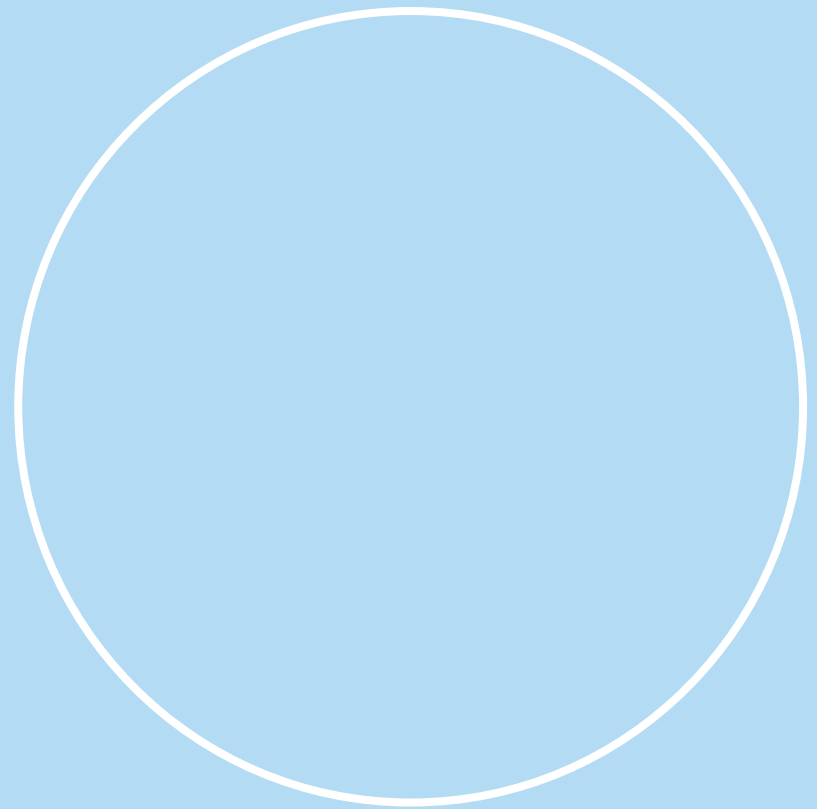
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Democracy Dies in Darkness

We shine a light on people entangled in the day's politics – and using politics to fight back

By Ein Bryant and Cydney Smith

This issue of *Scarlet*, the second since the magazine's rebirth after the pandemic, focuses on politics and social justice in Newark and here at Rutgers-Newark. Both the city and the university have long histories of fighting for social justice in the political realm, and both continue to be leaders for change.

protests, we believe it is more important than ever to think about how democracy is preserved in our community. In this issue, we asked our peers about the election, and the fighting in Gaza, and we found them heavily engaged and strongly opinionated.

On campus, we examined how Rutgers-Newark is playing a part in the fight for democracy by educating its students and the community on political and social issues. A new research center inaugurated earlier this year plans to focus on politics and race and aims to direct students into public service. Meanwhile, Rutgers faculty members are playing

horizon. In this issue, we asked whether Newark could make strides economically while still serving its longtime residents.

One thing that has not changed in Newark is our diversity, and our welcoming of immigrants. (Rutgers-Newark has long been ranked as one of the most diverse universities in the country). In this issue we tell two stories of immigration, talking to a family who recently made the harrowing journey through the jungles of the Darien Gap, and speaking to a so-called "Dreamer" whose undocumented status had frustrated her ambition to go to medical school. Immigration has



Windows at 110 Warren on campus provide a view of Newark's changing skyline. Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.

Ein Bryant and Cydney Smith are juniors majoring in Journalism.

It is through politics that the demands for social justice can begin to be met. In this issue, we look at how the city and its residents are struggling with the consequences of growth, how one neighborhood is fighting for environmental justice, and how activists and students won the right for 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in Newark school board elections, enfranchising thousands of young people.

In 2024, when many people believe the future of democracy is at stake in the U.S. presidential election, and the war in Gaza has sparked nationwide

a leading role in studying the issue of reparations, looking to address the centuries-old wounds suffered by the descendants of slavery. We also looked at the underlying causes of lower enrollments, telling the story of one student who left school after the COVID-19 pandemic, but recently found her way back.

For many years, Brick City has been seen as the city that once was, the city that once had hope. Newark has faced everything from rebellion to white flight to the loss of industry, but in 2024 revitalization is on the

always been a political issue, and we found the lives of the people we interviewed deeply entangled with the politics of the day.

With all the challenges facing our world, we encourage our readers to be educated about and involved in the political process. To quote Jacqueline S. Mattis, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and co-director of the new Center for Politics and Race, "We don't care who you vote for, we don't care what you believe. We do care that you are informed and engaged."

BACKGROUND CHECKED

A determined alum highlights an obstacle for undocumented students

By Jacob Anthony Amaro

“Something I was worried about for a really long time was that, ‘What if I’m working toward this, and I don’t even know that I want to be a doctor? I’ve never stepped foot in a clinic. I’ve never been able to shadow someone. What if it turns out I hate it?’”

- HALEXTHER RIVERO MORALES



Halexther Rivero Morales found a home and “people who fully, completely accepted” her at Rutgers-Newark. Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro

When Rutgers-Newark alum Halexther Rivero Morales enrolled at Essex County College in 2018, she was determined to become a doctor. She knew she’d need significant clinical experience to be a competitive applicant to medical school. She’d also have to shadow a medical professional or be involved in patient care for at least 100 hours, and she wanted to get ahead of the curve. Morales applied for volunteer jobs at local hospitals soon after she began her studies at Essex County. Almost as quickly, she ran into problems.

As an undocumented person, Morales lacked a critical piece of the information required to apply for jobs at most hospitals in the New York metro area: a social security number. Without one, she couldn’t undergo a background check. And without submitting to a background check, her applications couldn’t be processed. Morales’s future — her dream of going to med school — was in jeopardy.

It was a problem for which a solution existed. If Morales applied for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and was approved, she could receive authorization to work, be eligible for a social security number and be safe from deportation. The only problem was that she hadn’t applied.

“My mom was scared,” she said. “I remember her telling me, ‘You’re going to put your name on, essentially, a hit list.’”

Her mother, undocumented for almost two decades, had reason to be afraid. In the United States, where she supported her children by cleaning houses and occasionally doing odd jobs, she lived a life far less privileged and protected than she had in Venezuela. But living in the shadows provided some degree of safety. Applying for DACA jeopardized that.

“We weren’t on anybody’s radar,” Morales explained. “But as soon as you submit a legal case to the

government, they have all your information, and a lot of people fear that something may happen and they’ll come and knock your door down and they’ll take you.”

The fear grew as national politics changed. Obama was out, and Trump was in.

Morales became part of the growing number of undocumented students facing systemic barriers on the road to becoming working professionals. It’s a problem that grew more intense during former President Donald Trump’s presidency, said Keish Kim, a presidential postdoctoral fellow in Race, Racism and Inequality at Rutgers-Newark, who teaches in the English Department and was once herself an undocumented college student. Under Trump’s leadership, DACA halted new applications. As a result, “there’s a whole new category of young people who cannot even apply for the authorization to work,” Kim said.

Though Trump was later replaced by President Joe Biden, challenges to the DACA program continued, and immigrant advocates have argued that Biden has done little to help. His administration started accepting applications again, but the courts have stopped them from being processed. Morales ultimately decided to apply but by the time she did, all applications were frozen in limbo. In September 2023, a federal judge in the Southern District of Texas ruled DACA was unlawful, putting any new applications on hold again. The case will likely head to the Supreme Court in the coming years, where it’ll be heard by a conservative-leaning court.

These larger, national issues play out in smaller ways. Hospitals requiring social security numbers for background checks are, according to Kim, “arbitrary” policies that act as a barrier for undocumented youth aspiring to make a difference.



“The university and institution has to be more flexible, and move on its feet, as it is receiving younger students who need more support.”

- KEISH KIM, Rutgers Presidential Postdoc on Race, Racism and Inequality

in chemistry, biology and organic chemistry. “It was really hard. I’ve never been naturally smart, but I’ve always been really hard-working,” she said. Meanwhile, she was working 30 hours a week at a beauty supply store to help at home. It was a juggling act.

Morales credited her involvement in what was then known as RU Dreamers, now called Rutgers Immigrant Student Empowerment (RISE), with providing the community she needed to make it through her studies. The organization operates in part as a resource hub for immigrant students and also as an advocacy group. “When studying got hard, when the academics got really hard, it was an escape,” she said. “I can’t even explain to you what it is to be surrounded by people who fully, completely accept you.”

Having had no luck landing a volunteer job at hospitals during her time at Essex County, Morales embarked on a mission to do so while at Rutgers. This time, she had a supportive community and help from Jason Hernandez, an attorney who offers free legal advice to undocumented students as head of the Rutgers Immigrant Community Assistance Project. He reinforced what Morales had learned previously: there are alternative methods to background checks. But yet again, this made no practical difference.

The salt in the wound for Morales was that she couldn’t even land a

volunteer job at University Hospital in Newark, the primary teaching hospital of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. “You go to Rutgers so that you can graduate with your career and so that you can advance in life,” she said. “Why is Rutgers going to be the one to hinder anything? It can’t be like that...especially not if they’re saying that they’re supportive of undocumented immigrants.”

“They’re both under Rutgers, so there has to be some sort of communication between the two and something that can be worked out,” she added.

Kim, who comes from Georgia, a state where people who have DACA can’t enroll as students, said that Rutgers does support undocumented students in ways that public colleges in Georgia do not. But, she added, “that doesn’t mean we should stop asking for more protection.”

“The university and institution has to be more flexible, and move on its feet, as it is receiving younger students who need more support,” she said.

For Morales, the university’s lack of flexibility meant that she was unable to gain clinical experience during her time as an undergraduate student, even at an institution that says it strives to create a safe space for immigrant students. That’s why she helped author a list of demands that RISE sent to the university administration this past August. In it, she called on the university to “amend exclusive policies within the University Hospital’s volunteering services that are disadvantageous to both parties in the long run.”

Yulisbeth Rojas-Romero, the president of RISE, said that the administration responded to that demand by asking for the name of the specific student who needed help, promising to help her — an inadequate response to Morales.

“That doesn’t solve anything. That is having a connection and things

working out for you, but it shouldn’t be like that,” Morales said. “If Rutgers truly is supportive of undocumented students, it needs to address all the barriers that are in place to them becoming the professionals that they want to be.”

There has been no policy change to date. And efforts to reach university officials about how Rutgers might address the issue were unsuccessful. Morales has moved on, in any case. In fact, her circumstances have changed entirely. As a native of Venezuela — a country “in the midst of an unprecedented social and humanitarian collapse,” according to the United States Institute of Peace — she had been advised by her lawyer to apply for Temporary Protected Status during the summer of 2022. Morales received TPS a year later, in August 2023.

She said that moment felt “surreal,” even though she expected to receive it because her older sister had gotten hers a month earlier, and they had applied at the same time. She was flooded with immense gratitude because she could finally see the fruits of her labor and struggle, she said.

Since then, Morales has picked up a full-time job as a scribe tech at an urgent care facility in Manhattan, where she’s getting hands-on experience in healthcare, including running basic tests like EKGs. She has also landed a volunteer job at Bellevue Hospital in New York City as part of New York University’s Screening,

Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment Clinical Research Associate Internship. There, she’s been working with patients who struggle with substance abuse, who interest her because some of her own loved ones have struggled with substance abuse disorders. “Just being there, looking around and seeing the things that people are doing, the doctors helping them...it’s just been incredible, completely mind-opening,” she said, excitedly. “Six months ago, I wouldn’t have believed you. Where I am right now. It’s incredible. It’s filled with blessings. I’m living the life that I prayed for.”

For the time being, Morales plans to continue working at the urgent care facility while gaining volunteer hours. As the summer approaches, she’ll study for and take her MCAT, the test required to apply to medical school, known to be extremely difficult. If she does well, she’ll apply to medical school.

Though she doesn’t know yet what kind of physician she wants to be, Morales said her mission is to “ensure that people are getting the best quality of care they can get.”

Jacob Anthony Amaro is a senior majoring in Journalism and minoring in Latina/o Studies.

“Where I am right now. It’s incredible. It’s filled with blessings. I’m living the life that I prayed for.”

- HALEXTHER RIVERO MORALES



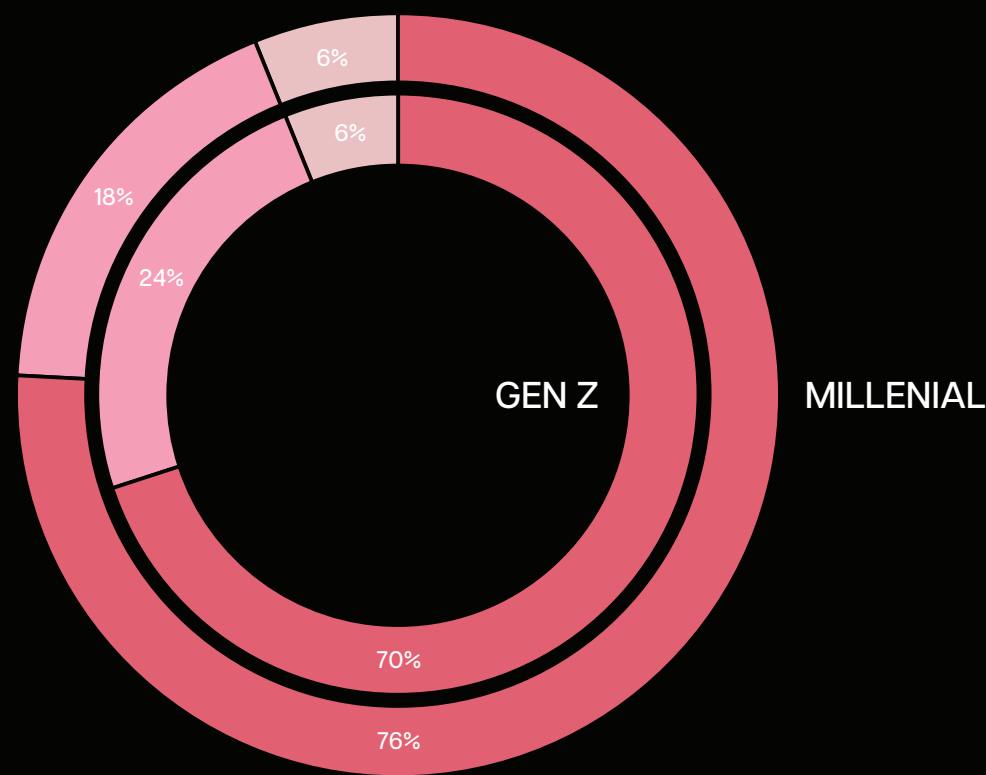
Halexther Rivero Morales prepares to screen patients at her first volunteer job at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan. Photograph Courtesy of Halexther Rivero Morales.

GEN Z MOTIVATED TO VOTE

But polling shows they're dissatisfied with both Biden and Trump

By Anel Mata-Payerro

If the 2024 presidential election were being held today, and the candidates were Trump and Biden, would you plan to vote?



Data Source: GenForward - Nov. 2023 survey.

- Yes, I would vote.
- No, I would not vote.
- I'm not eligible to vote.

Photograph Courtesy of Diane Wong.



Diane Wong, a political science professor at Rutgers-Newark, surveyed Millennials and Gen Z-ers about the presidential election and the issues that matter most to them.

“Compared to historic voter turnout rates for younger Americans, these numbers are pretty significant.”

— DR. DIANE WONG

The upcoming presidential election will be the first since Rutgers-Newark freshman Khushi Lakra became eligible to vote, but the rematch between President Biden and Donald Trump is less than ideal for her. Like many young voters, she leans to the left, but Biden's support of Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza has troubled her.

“You have all the power in the world, and you're doing that?” said Lakra, 19. She said Gaza is hardly her only concern. “Student debt...the economy, it is all so bad right now.”

Lakra is not alone in her dissatisfaction with Biden, as polls show a majority of voters under the age of 30 strongly disapprove of his job as president, despite more than 60 percent of the same age group voting for him in 2020. That does not mean young voters suddenly lean Republican, as a large majority also describe that party as unfavorable.

Given this, the question is whether young people will be motivated to head to the polls this fall, and whether

they will continue to back Biden, who likely needs strong support from them to defeat Trump.

The answer to the first part is clear – Yes, young people will be voting, according to Diane Wong, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers-Newark and a research consultant at GenForward, which surveys Millennials and Gen Z-ers. A recent GenForward poll found that majorities of Gen Z voters across all racial groups said they intended to vote in the presidential election – 56 percent of Black, 57 percent of Latinx, 72 percent of Asian-American, and 79 percent of white voters.

“Compared to historic voter turnout rates for younger Americans, these numbers are pretty significant,” Wong said.

That said, some young people could withhold their ballots to protest the war in Gaza, Wong noted. In the recent Michigan primary, more than 100,000 Democratic voters opted to be “uncommitted” to pressure Biden

to change his stance on Gaza. That protest vote was the result of the political organizing of Muslim and Arab-American youth in Michigan, who have been demanding a ceasefire in Gaza.

“Many (young voters) are already mobilizing to hold their elected officials accountable,” Wong said. “Clearly, Gen Z and Millennial voters are strategic in how they will vote in November.”

Aminah Sarowar, a 19-year-old New Jersey native attending college in Rhode Island, said she understood the urge to skip the election but called that “a borderline dangerous ideology.”

“Because once you start saying ‘I'm not going to vote because I don't like anyone,’ you're going to end up never voting.” Sarowar urged her peers to cast their ballots, describing it as the “best opportunity to make sure your voice is heard.”

The harder question is who Gen Z voters will choose at the polls – in addition to Trump, there could be several third-party candidates on the ballot who might appeal to younger voters. Sarowar said she would not decide until closer to the election, but she would pick the “smarter choice.” When asked what issues she would keep in mind, Sarowar named “the genocide in Gaza, Congo, and domestic issues like what is going on at the border.” She was referring to Texas, where authorities have installed razor wire and buoys along the Rio Grande and acted independently to arrest and deport migrants who enter the state without authorization.

While many Gen Z voters have international concerns, they also have domestic ones like student debt, gun violence and climate change. They may be dissatisfied with Biden's handling of these issues as well, but they still favor Democratic approaches, Wong said.

Rutgers students marched in February against Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza. Some young people could also protest by withholding their vote. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.



“These issues tend to mobilize more Democratic voters, so when it comes time to cast the ballot, these issues are going to be at the forefront of many of the young voters’ minds and will influence their vote choice,” she said.

Perhaps no domestic issue will loom larger in the minds of young voters this fall than abortion. Wong said abortion “is an issue that will undoubtedly shape turnout in November.” When asked in the GenForward survey about the Supreme Court’s decision overturning federal protections for abortion rights in the Dobbs case, 61 percent of Black, 61 percent of Latinx, 72 percent of Asian American, and 67 percent of white Gen Z voters expressed strong disagreement.

In addition, when asked whether abortion will have an impact on vote choice, 31 percent of Black, 33 percent of Latinx, 26 percent of Asian American, and 36 percent of

white Gen Z voters said that they would vote only for a candidate who shared their views on abortion.

Since the Dobbs decision, the battleground over abortion and reproductive health has only become more intense. Fourteen states have banned abortion in almost all circumstances and others have placed tight restrictions on the procedure. In February, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are children, putting the future of infertility care in the state at risk.

Jamie McKnight, 23, a student at Rutgers-Newark, said she was not sure who she would vote for, but she was leaning Democratic because of those domestic issues.

“I don’t necessarily love any candidates right now, but I think anyone would be better than the Republican candidates that I’m seeing,” she said. “Because they

want to take my rights away as a woman and also a lot of human rights in general.”

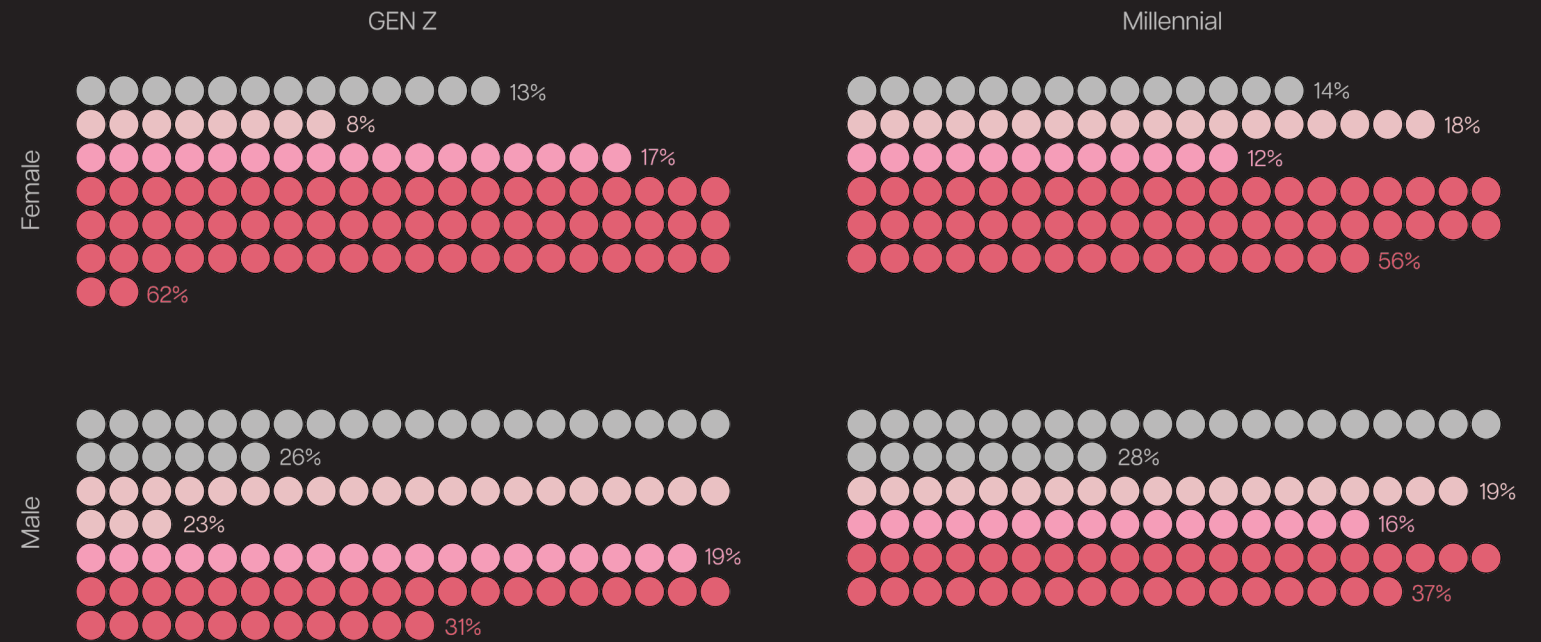
When it comes to Gaza, McKnight might be unhappy with Biden’s handling of the crisis, but “you also have to look at how any other president would deal with it.”

“It always goes back to picking our poison. (It’s a) shitty situation. What would make it shittier?” she said. “Even though that’s said really bluntly, it’s sadly how it is in American politics right now.”

Young voters might never be enthusiastic about an 81-year-old incumbent who is already the nation’s oldest president, but the Biden campaign has been working hard to draw the contrast with Trump, calling him a threat to the future of democracy. That message seems to resonate with some young voters.

Do you agree with the Supreme Court’s 2022 decision to overturn Roe V. Wade?

Strongly Agree Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree Strongly Disagree



“I don’t necessarily love any candidates right now, but I think anyone would be better than the Republican candidates that I’m seeing. Because they want to take my rights away as a woman and also a lot of human rights in general.”

- Jamie McKnight, 23, a RU-N student

“I get the concerns people have about Biden and his age, but what we’re dealing with is bigger than all of that,” said Darius McClain, 23, a student at Rutgers-Newark. “We’re literally fighting for what the country is and what it stands for. So whatever minor stuff people have about Biden, they can at least put that aside for the next couple of months and hold him to task for that if he wins again. Because if Trump wins again, then there’s a decent chance this is the last real, free and fair election we have.”

McClain also urged his peers not to vote for a third-party candidate, saying that liberal voters choosing a third-party candidate in 2000 threw

the election into the chaos that eventually led to President Bush taking office.

“So much of what happened in the last 23 years goes back to that moment and that decision, and a good part of why that happened is because people went with a third party,” he said. “I get people’s frustration with having to do this constantly, but that’s just what the system is right now, and making sure you work within the two-party system first and then eventually maybe someone will come along who will force something different.”

Anel Mata-Payero is a freshman.

Standing Up For the Ironbound

Despite a new environmental justice law, residents must still fight against a gas-fired power plant

“We can only save ourselves. There is no hero coming. There’s no super-heroes here. There’s just community members that care...”

- MARIA LOPEZ-NUÑEZ,
deputy director, Ironbound
Community Corporation

This year, a new law intended to keep polluters out of environmentally overburdened communities went into effect in New Jersey. A Newark community group fought hard for the law, the first of its kind in the country. Yet, the group still finds itself fighting a gas-fired power plant in its own backyard. Proposed by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC), it would be the fourth such plant in the Ironbound section of the city.

The immigrant-rich neighborhood of 50,000 people is about a 10-minute drive from the Rutgers-Newark campus. It is only four-square miles and choked with trucks emitting exhaust and greenhouse gases. The power plant would be built at the PVSC’s headquarters on Wilson Avenue as an emergency, back-up power supply. Flood walls now surround the wastewater treatment facility, after Superstorm Sandy knocked out power there 12 years ago. Across a busy highway intersection sits Darling, an animal

fat rendering facility, which fills the air with the smell of rotting meat and attracts flocks of birds.

Both facilities are stops on a tour of toxic sites run by environmental justice organizers. On a nearby road, called Manufacturer’s Place, they point out that all the homes have air filters attached to the side—and with good reason. One in four children in Newark are diagnosed with asthma, three times the national average, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

By Nagely Castro

The tour also stops at New Jersey’s largest incinerator, Covanta, which burns garbage to produce energy and which they said also pumps lead, dioxin and other pollutants into the neighborhood through its giant concrete smokestack.

The tour is run by the Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC), a community group that, along with the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance and Clean Water Action, played a major role in passing the environmental justice law.

The law requires that the state’s Department of Environmental Protection, after evaluating the environmental and public health impacts of proposed projects, reject potentially polluting facilities in overburdened communities. A community is considered overburdened if, like the Ironbound, it is home to many lower-income people, large Black and brown populations and many facilities that harm the environment. For the Ironbound, the law was a huge victory because it meant that new facilities could not be added to the long list of already existing polluters.

That was the hope, but the new law does not apply to the PVSC’s proposed plant, because it applied for its environmental permit a decade ago, before the law was passed.

“Using the EJ Law we cannot do anything since they are not subject to it,” said Maria Lopez-Nuñez, ICC’s deputy director for organizing and advocacy. “We are able to exert political pressure on PVSC.”

The pressure is applied primarily at monthly public meetings held by PVSC and mandated by the DEP, ever since the environmental justice law was implemented last April. The new law helps the community to participate in deciding whether or not a new facility is able to develop in Newark. For residents and neighbors, this is an opportunity to voice their concerns about facilities that could add to pollution in the area.

Chloe Desir, an ICC environmental justice organizer who leads the “toxic tour,” said that PVSC shares the advertisements for the monthly meetings in “small ads in newspapers to say they did their due diligence in informing the public, but how often are people looking at these things, right? And not even that but in the Ironbound itself, most people speak Portuguese and Spanish. How accessible are we doing these things?”

Despite this, Ironbound residents have been consistently attending the public meetings and asking PVSC to listen to their concerns and, even if the power plant is grandfathered in, to choose not to build it. They want PVSC to find an alternative solution to its potential loss of power in an emergency. Efforts to reach PVSC about the power plant were unsuccessful.

In the two years since the ICC has fought the power plant, dozens of residents have attended monthly public meetings to oppose it, said ICC organizer JV Valladolid. At the meeting held virtually in March, five people voiced their opposition to the plant.

Background Image: The streets and highways of the Ironbound are choked with trucks emitting exhaust.

The group is able to mobilize residents, because they receive support year round from it in many ways, Lopez-Nuñez said. It has helped residents fight eviction. It helps when students need school supplies. And it distributes fresh produce for free every Thursday.

People show up when the group fights for environmental justice. That was evident in 2022 when the Ironbound community stood strongly and successfully against Aries, a company that had proposed building a sludge treatment plant in Newark. The community learned from ICC’s educational programming that it was against the zoning laws, and they voiced their concerns at public meetings.

Desir said the group “mak(es) sure that we are continuing to find creative ways to let people know about what’s going on.”

ICC hosts educational events at Down Bottom, the urban farm it created to build a green sanctuary in the industrialized neighborhood. And the group led an exercise asking Ironbound residents to count the number of trucks that drove past an intersection.

“It (was) memorable because even with the mask on you can smell it,” said Yanett Ramirez, a resident who participated. “I can’t imagine the people living there in that same corner have to hear it, but also smell it and are literally consumed by this fog of pollution.”



She has also spoken out against the proposed power plant at PVSC's monthly meetings. Ramirez feels so strongly about the impact that the plant will have on the neighborhood's quality of life that she has held off on having children for now.

"I see (PVSC) as an occupying entity because people didn't consent for these pollutant factories to be here," she said.

She is part of a community that has fought for clean air together, through successes and also through challenges, like the PVSC plant.

"We can only save ourselves," Lopez-Nuñez said. "There is no hero coming. There's no superheroes here. There's just community members that care and actually show up in our protests, put pressure, call people and ask elected officials what's going on and hold them accountable to what's going on."

Nagely Castro is a junior majoring in Journalism and minoring in Translation and Interpretation Studies.



Rotting meat at Darling's animal fat rendering facility attracts flocks of birds. Photograph by Nagely Castro.

Schooled Behind Bars

By Naim Ali-Pacheco

Scarlet Magazine talked to Associate Professor of History Whitney Strub about his experience teaching in the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ-STEP) initiative. It was founded at Rutgers 12 years ago to help incarcerated people earn college degrees and begin new lives. The state helps fund it, and Rutgers also provides some students with federal Pell grants towards tuition.

What do you teach at Newark's Northern State Prison?

WS: U.S. Immigration History

Besides the location, what's the difference between teaching at a university and teaching in a prison?

WS: In a setting without the technological accouterments taken for granted in daily life on the outside, there's a remarkable clarity of focus in the classroom that you almost never experience on campus in our present era. Nobody is distracted by texting or social media — there are certainly other forms of interruption but it was nonetheless striking to me just how deeply we dove into the course texts.

Have there been any challenges that you faced while teaching?

WS: Most of the challenges come structurally from the nature of the institution, which is to say, things like "codes," which are called fairly regularly and halt movement and interfere with students and/or professors getting to and from class.

What's a "code"? And how did you handle it when they called one?

WS: I don't know the formal definition, but it's when an incident causes the correctional staff to halt movement within the facility. There's no choice but to ride it out, depending on where one is located; some days that meant not being able to make it to the classroom, others it meant being contained in the classroom longer. I will say, on the days when we were all held longer, it provided a great opportunity to chat more informally and get to know the students on another level, and I always found it rewarding to get a better sense of their interests and life experiences.

What are the rewards of teaching in prison?

WS: The NJ-STEP students are genuinely fantastic. They're overwhelmingly there out of sincere intellectual interest, and it shows. I love and respect my students on campus but I can't think of a class that's ever collectively read so closely and carefully, and that level of profound engagement meant we could sail through the basics in class and really dig into the philosophical, ethical and political forces at play in this history.

What's it like teaching people who have had their freedoms revoked?

WS: It's never something that anyone in the class, including me, is unaware of, and so that consciousness obviously shapes and structures our whole classroom context. It doesn't limit it though; the material I assigned was expansive in coverage and we talked about plenty of completely unrelated topics. But in immigration history, the carceral system of detention and deportation is never far away, and neither is it abstract. At the same time, NJ-STEP students are in no way defined by incarceration — it's a thing that's



Professor Whitney Strub taught at Northern State Prison. Photograph Courtesy of Whitney Strub.

there, the way other features of people's lives always are, but there's plenty of humor in the classroom, interpretive debates over texts, questions about the midterm, etc.

Have there been any challenges with teaching when it comes to students having the resources to do what they need to do?

WS: This is definitely a challenge, though I think everyone at NJ-STEP finds ways to make it work. The lack of tech forces a reminder that there was a time before the internet, and so while students don't have the same unlimited information access that we take for granted on the outside, that constraint does cultivate very focused, intensive reading practices toward the texts that are assigned. And we find ways to have breakout discussions and side conversations to check in with folks individually as best we can — everyone understands that we're operating under certain constraints but in my experience, we all simply do our best in good faith and it works quite well.

Do you think that there should be more programs in place like what NJ-STEP is doing? To have education put in prison?

WS: Yes, absolutely. It's both a deeply moral and a socially productive program, and there is every reason to expand it as broadly as possible. People on the inside are eager for learning, and education is a huge collective benefit, so more state investment in this work would make New Jersey a better place.

Naim Ali-Pacheco is a junior majoring in Journalism and Video Production.

THE CASE FOR REPARATIONS

A statewide council with strong Rutgers representation is documenting slavery's legacies

By Julie Jang

The New Jersey Reparations Council, a non-profit organization that aims to address the deep historical wounds of slavery in the state, began conducting research and holding public hearings late last year with the goal of publishing a report on Juneteenth 2025. The report could be used as a guide to tackle the inequities faced by the descendants of slavery in the state.

"The work of this committee will prompt the state of New Jersey to take seriously the need to study reparations and to leverage state expertise to further study this issue and begin crafting state programs," said Taja-Nia Henderson, dean of the Graduate School of Rutgers-Newark, who is the co-chair of the council. The group was convened by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice co-chaired by Henderson and Khalil Gibran Muhammad of Harvard's Kennedy School.

The council is approaching the question of reparations from a historical perspective.

"One of the things that we miss is the opportunity to explain some of the current disparities that continue to plague us to this day," Henderson said. "Without the historical lens, it becomes easier for people to rely on stereotypes or racist explanations for how we got here."

The quest for reparations has typically focused on making cash payments to the descendants of enslaved people – last year, U.S. Rep. Cori Bush called

for the federal government to issue a minimum of \$14 trillion in reparations – but those efforts have gained little political traction.

In recent years, some states have turned to commissions and task forces to study the issue and make recommendations for systemic changes. In New Jersey, lawmakers have been pushing legislation to create such a task force since 2019, without success.

Other states have made more progress. Earlier this year, California lawmakers introduced a slate of 14 bills to address the inequities faced by the descendants of enslaved people – the first such legislative package in the nation. The bills touched on reforms to education, civil rights and the criminal justice system, but did not include financial compensation to slavery's descendants.

Henderson agreed that reparations should be catered to each state but added that "we have to be careful that we don't lose sight of this larger history."

"White supremacy has no boundaries," she said.

The New Jersey council has established nine committees that will focus on various issues, holding a series of public meetings and seeking public comment. One of those councils, the Health Equity Council, met for the first time in February, with experts in the field presenting research, historical context and videos. The meeting was held on Zoom and live streamed on YouTube.

While it's too early to know what the committee's final report will say, the Health Equity Council meeting showed how the report could draw the line from historical harm to present day inequities, and possibly offer some solutions.

Inequities Rooted in History

In the meeting, Chris Pernell, founder of public health consulting firm The Esther Group and director of the NAACP's Center for Health Equity, explained the historical roots of the barriers and challenges Black Americans face today in accessing quality health care.

The structures of the transatlantic slave trade, inter-slave trade, and chattel slavery denied opportunities, including health opportunities, to the enslaved, harming them and their descendants, said Pernell. Today, Black Americans have a higher death rate, lower life expectancies and increased vulnerabilities to cancer and disabilities compared to other races.

One of the root causes is poverty, which can make it difficult to access nutritious foods and creates housing insecurity, explained Denise V. Rodgers, vice chancellor for Interprofessional Programs at Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, and a professor at the Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. She cited statistics that showed the median household income for

African Americans in New Jersey was \$65,850 in 2022. U.S. Census Bureau data shows that white people in the state had a median household income of \$105,428 per year.

Environmental Injustice

Marcus Sibley, an environmental and social justice advocate, said that reparations must also take into account environmental justice, as issues like water and air quality can affect health.

Newark, for example, has been dealing with a water crisis since 2016, as the city works to replace lead pipes that have contaminated drinking water and forced some residents to turn to bottled water.

The Newark Water Coalition is an organization that fights for clean water in Newark and has been involved in other social justice causes. The coalition is funded through grants and partners with a nonprofit co-founded by Jaden Smith to bring food and clean water to neighborhoods in Newark.

"We were never on an equal playing field when it came to society," Anthony Diaz, co-founder and executive director of the Newark Water Coalition, said in a recent interview.

Diaz said environmental justice has to be part of a holistic movement for reparations, as "all our struggles are interconnected. That's how you know it's a system problem."

Reparations can't just be monetary, he said. "Even if you give us money we are just catching up." Diaz emphasized the need for systemic changes with funding mechanisms and accountability in place because "the state doesn't have written in black and white how to operate this."

Experiments on Black Bodies Sow Suspicion

Enobong (Anna) Branch, senior vice president for equity at Rutgers University, explained how Black health is impacted today through medical misinformation and biases that date to slavery.

During slavery the medical community often treated Black bodies as disposable property, and Branch said it was even common practice for medical schools to rob Black bodies from their graves for testing and dissections.

Even after slavery ended, Branch said, the unethical treatment of Black people continued with inhumane studies like the Tuskegee syphilis study in Alabama from 1932 to 1972, which involved 662 men. The men were not told the purpose of the study, which was to see what would happen if their syphilis was left untreated. Thirty percent of the men died.

Branch said Black people were also sometimes unknowingly sterilized because they were categorized as "unfit," and that even today some medical students believe racist lies like Black skin is "thicker" than white skin; the same beliefs held by slave owners were used to justify torture.

These past and current biases have generated suspicion in the Black community toward medical institutions. Branch said reparations must seek to address these issues through structural changes.

Higher Mortality Rates

The legacy of slavery also can be seen in reproductive health, said Kimberly Mutcherson, reproductive justice scholar, co-dean and professor at Rutgers Law School. Among wealthy nations, the United States has the highest rate of maternal mortality, she said, and the majority of these deaths are among Black women.

Mutcherson said Black women in New Jersey have a maternal death rate that is seven times higher than white women. Black babies are three times more likely to die than white babies before their first birthday. Ninety percent of these deaths are preventable, she said.

Psychological Harm

The health impacts on Black Americans transcend the physical effects. Maisha

Simmons, director of the Health Equity Committee and legal grants specialist at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, also discussed the psychological effects of health disparities on Black communities.

Benjamin Rush, known as the "Father of American Psychiatry," held the racist belief that Black skin is a form of leprosy, said Simmons. Racist beliefs in psychiatric care manifested as differences in mental health treatment by race. In 1848, the first mental health "lunatic" institutions in New Jersey forced Black patients to labor physically to get rid of what was believed to be infectious mental diseases. In stark contrast, white patients were prescribed art for their mental health treatments.

Considering the intergenerational harm, Rodgers said: "In addition to the financial reparations owed Black people, we must also find reparative mechanisms to help address the adverse physical and psychological damage done to African Americans that started when the first slave was brought to the United States in 1619, and when the first slave was brought to New Jersey thereafter."

Julie Jang is a sophomore majoring in Political Science and minoring in Philosophy.

"All our struggles are interconnected. That's how you know it's a system problem."

- ANTHONY DIAZ, co-founder of the Newark Water Coalition



Anthony Diaz of the Newark Water Coalition, pictured at a recent climate march in the Ironbound, argues that reparations can't just be monetary. Photograph Courtesy of the Food and Water Watch.

As Newark Builds

Its skyline shifts.
Its people reflect.
Our cameras click.

By Jacob Anthony Amaro
and Daniel Cuesta

Next to the Halo 1 tower, workers confer at the site of the family courthouse under construction.
Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.



Father Edwin Leahy, the headmaster at St. Benedict's Prep, worries whether residents of new highrises will spend their dollars in the city.
Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.



Rather than spend hard-earned money on expensive apartments in Newark, "you gotta invest in land," said Jahel Joyner, a Newarker.
Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.



"You had Macy's down there, Bamberger on the corner," said Terrance Mitchell, recalling a different era.
Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.



The Halo Tower rises against the backdrop of the storefronts of mom-and-pop businesses on the corner of William and Broad Streets. Soon, they will have a new neighbor, and possibly new customers. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.



The old RKO Proctor's Theatre, which fell into decline in the late 1960s, sits beside the site of a proposed new skyscraper that will incorporate the Art-Deco facade of the old Metropolitan building. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.



Newark is changing. At the heart of the city, new buildings have transformed the downtown skyline, eclipsing the residents and businesses below.

These photos capture some of the shifts. They focus on Halo I, the first of three luxury apartment skyscrapers going up on the corner of Branford Place and Washington Street. Around the tower, many older buildings remain, some with Art-Deco architectural grace, others dilapidated or for sale. Their rough textures, graffiti and vibrant colors contrast the glass-and-steel shimmer and smoothness of the new.

Signs of constant construction are everywhere. It disrupts the flow of traffic, and it forces pedestrians to adjust their paths through the city.

On Broad Street, we encounter two Newarkers, Jahel Joyner and Terrance Mitchell, who are not opposed to the changes, if they mean a better Newark.

Up on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., at the Benedictine Abbey of Newark, we meet with Father Edwin Leahy, a Benedictine monk who has been running the school for five decades.

Leahy has witnessed his fair share of change in Newark, including those scorched into the landscape by the 1967 uprising. When several Benedictine monks, as part of white flight, left Newark, he stayed. He said that some of the recent changes have benefited the city, but he doesn't know if they are all good for its people.

“Do I think it helps right now? Yeah. Now, if you ask me the same question seven years from now, I may say to you, ‘It hasn’t turned out that way.’”

— FATHER EDWIN LEAHY,
headmaster, St. Benedict's Prep

ABOVE: “PROCEED CAREFULLY” warns a sign near the Halo Tower. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.

The textures of old Newark are weathered but also vibrant. In downtown Newark, "LOVE" is announced. Photograph by Jacob Anthony Amaro.



One of many signs advising the public to be careful around a major construction site. Photograph by Jacob Amaro.



The former Seth Boyden housing projects were demolished to make way for the Lionsgate Studios development. The site is desolate, save for a few weeds. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.



Can Newark Grow and Keep Its Character?

With construction booming, residents and city planners debate how to preserve affordable housing and prevent gentrification

By Daniel Cuesta



Former city planner Damon Rich (in checked shirt) helps Newark residents visualize and analyze “upzoning.” Photograph Courtesy of Hector Urban Design.

With new luxury towers rising downtown and around Penn Station, and huge projects planned along the Passaic River and in the South Ward, Newark is in the midst of a long-sought transformation.

But with such explosive growth comes concern.

“Big change is coming to Newark, and many residents can sense it,” Pamela B. Daniels, a resident of the South Ward, said in a recent interview. “My worry is seeing these new structures covering the sun from my apartment, which I hold so dear to me.”

In 2023, Daniel attended a series of Newark City Council meetings where lawmakers debated controversial changes to zoning laws that would impact the way the city continues to develop. The changes were part of the “Newark360 Master Plan” unveiled in 2022. After a long process of gathering public input, Newark360 laid out a “community-

driven” plan to manage the city’s growth while charting “the path for an equitable future.”

The question now is whether Newark can continue to grow without forcing out lower-income and Black and brown residents, and whether the changes proposed by the city are the way to avoid the pitfalls of such gentrification.

Christopher A. Watson, who was the director of the Newark Office of Planning and Zoning when the Newark360 plan was written, predicted gentrification would not happen in Newark, but also said smart, new development is necessary to avoid it.

“The world is changing, and Newark must keep up with this,” said Watson, who now works for the commercial real estate law firm Murphy, Schiller and Wilkes. “It is just the way of the world.”

With rising housing rates and inflation across the country, he said compromises need to be made to create a “better Newark.”

An affordable housing crisis has been plaguing the city for years, as both renters and homeowners struggle to make ends meet. A 2021 study by the Rutgers Center on Law, Inequality and Metropolitan Equity (CLiME), found that 60% of Newark residents were spending more than a third of their income on rent, while the 2020 census found that 26% of Newark homeowners spent half their incomes on mortgage payments.

Supporters of the zoning changes said they would address this crisis by spurring new development, but some residents have expressed concern that the proposals would actually make things worse.

A Plan to Help a Small Group: Homeowners

“We are not against these new businesses. Economic change needs to happen. But at its current state, it is just too much for residents to handle.”

— PAMELA B. DANIELS,
South Ward resident

Part of the plan to curb the housing strain is through “upzoning,” allowing two or three-family homes where only single-family homes were previously built. Watson said upzoning could let homeowners rent out their extra units.

“It allows them to have extra income,” he said, adding that rental income gives homeowners “a safety net against unexpected financial pitfalls.”

But this is an option for only a minority of Newark residents – less than 24% own their homes, according to the 2022 census. In addition, Rutgers CLiME found an increase in large institutional buyers snatching

up property in Newark, with just three companies owning more than 500 properties.

The zoning changes proposed in Newark360 also allow for more and bigger apartment buildings, and more and more varied commercial uses in parts of the city.

“We continue to have all of these perks for your developers. But you have nothing for the people that establish neighborhoods and communities here.”

— LISA PARKER, South Ward Environmental Alliance member

Residents Push Back

Many residents pushed back against those changes, including members of the South Ward Environmental Alliance, founded by Kim Gaddy in 2015, and the 5-Ward Resident Task Force on Zoning, a subset of the South Ward group. In an open letter, the 5-Ward group argued the zoning changes would create overcrowding, permit the building of units with smaller backyards and fewer windows, and bring too many polluting and other undesirable businesses, like liquor stores and vape shops, into residential areas.

In 2023, council passed an ordinance championed by Baraka to restrict sales on up to 50% of city-owned vacant lots and property, requiring them to remain affordable for 30 years and giving nonprofits first right of refusal to purchase the properties. The move was intended to combat the rise of corporate investors documented in the CLiME study.

City Council also voted in July to give the Halo developers, Washington Street Urban Renewal LLC, a 30-year tax abatement, saying the economic benefits of the project outweighed any loss in tax revenue. Members of the South Ward alliance objected to the tax break.

“In Newark, where we have worked hard to expand homeownership, we have created a strategy to do everything possible to fight this dangerous trend,” the mayor said in a statement at the time.

“We continue to have all of these perks for your developers,” Lisa Parker, a member of the alliance said at the July council meeting. “But you have nothing for the people that establish neighborhoods and communities here.”

“We are not against these new businesses. Economic change needs to happen,” said Daniels, a member of 5-Ward. “But at its current state, it is just too much for residents to handle.”

In addition, Baraka has promoted Newark’s Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance, which stipulates that 20% of the units in new construction must be affordable and gives current Newark residents an exclusive 90-day window to rent or buy the units.

In addition, what is set aside as affordable varies in every ward.

Damon Rich, who was the Newark planning director before the Newark360 plan was written, was hired by the South Ward group to analyze the zoning changes. While he said that “gentrification isn’t quite here yet,” he worries that the city’s current direction could “set the grounds for the destruction of currently affordable housing in favor of market rates.”

But some critics question whether affordable housing units are truly affordable for Newark residents. At a city council meeting in July, Allison Ladd, the city’s director of economic and housing development, was asked what metric the city used to identify what is affordable. Ladd said affordability was based on the median income of \$115,000 for a family of four living in Essex County, a figure set by the federal government.

At the CitiSquare development, a massive 11-tower project slated for the site of the old Newark Bears baseball stadium, only 200 out of the estimated 4,200 units are set aside for affordable housing – far less than the 20 percent required by the city’s inclusionary zoning. CitiSquare, which also received millions in tax exemptions from the city, instead intends to make a \$21 million “payment toward the city’s affordable housing,” according to its website.

Opponents also said the changes exempted many developers from making public notices and attending hearings. In the open letter, Gaddy said that “in the name of streamlining the development process, the proposed replacement ordinance goes too far, removing resident voices from the process.”

At the Halo development, three luxury residential towers being constructed downtown, the builders plan to set aside affordable units for residents making 40%, 60%, and 80% of that average median income. But the 2020 census found the median income for an individual Newark resident is \$41,000, meaning even the most generously affordable units may not be within reach for the average Newark resident.

Following the hearings in 2023, many of the people who spoke out felt like their voices were not heard.

On November 1, by a 5-3 vote, council approved the looser rules on notices and hearings.

The administration of Mayor Ras J. Baraka has sought to address the affordable housing crunch in other ways – initiatives that have also drawn criticism for not doing enough.

“I am not sure what else we can do. It is scary,” said Daniels. “But I like to be an optimist. I do believe in the power of my neighbors.”

This map shows which neighborhoods in the city are most at risk of being gentrified. Data Source: Newark360 Master Plan.

Daniel Cuesta is a senior majoring in Video Production and minoring in Journalism.

The Long and Dangerous Road

One New Jersey family's story of migrating through the Darién Gap

By Nagely Castro

More than a month after embarking from their native Ecuador on an arduous, overland journey to the U.S., 12-year-old Kenny Jaramillo and his family were held hostage, for the second time, by a group of men – “coyotes” – demanding money in exchange for aid and safe passage.

When Kenny's mother, Vanessa Ochoa, refused to surrender her phone, the man in charge put a gun to her head.

“I said to myself, ‘This is the end, we're dying here,’” Kenny Jaramillo, now a sixth grader at Washington Middle School, in Harrison, N.J., said in a recent interview.

Kenny's father, Jose Jaramillo, deescalated the situation by grabbing the phone from his wife and giving it to the man. But Ochoa was angry, and she told the coyotes that if they wanted to be paid, she needed her phone to call her brother. After some time, the man in charge returned her phone. She called her brother, who sent the money, and the family was released and taken to a hotel.

This was just one of the dangers and hardships the Jaramillo family faced early last year on their journey, which included a trek through the Darién



The Jaramillo family has found a new home in Harrison, N.J. Photograph by Nagely Castro.

Gap, a remote region of rainforests, swamps and mountains straddling the border between Colombia and Panama. Three adults and three children made the two-month trip from Ecuador, encountering death, extortion and kidnappings along the way.

The family was among the hundreds of thousands of migrants who have come to the U.S. from Central and South America in recent years. Most are fleeing poverty, gang violence and oppressive governments, but the arrival of so many migrants in such a short time has strained resources in the U.S. and touched off a political

firestorm, pushing immigration to the top of the agenda in the coming presidential election. In February, President Biden and Donald Trump made dueling appearances at the southern border with Mexico, blaming each other for the crisis unfolding there.

Neither the flow of migrants to the U.S. nor the political debate on how to accommodate new arrivals are likely to be resolved any time soon. The story of the Jaramillo family shows that no matter how perilous the journey, migrants are willing to accept the risks for a better life in a country that is not always welcoming to them.



Most South American migrants follow the same path to the U.S., starting in the Darién Gap. In 2023, more than half a million migrants, some from as far away as Asia, made the journey through the jungle, according to Human Rights Watch. A decade earlier, the number was less than 1,000 a year.

Kenny and his parents, who are both 35, trekked through the Darién Gap with his aunt Laura Chuñir, 33, and two younger cousins, Keyreina and Cataleya. Each carried what they hoped would be enough clothes, food and water. The journey left a deep impact on the children, who recalled seeing dead bodies and watching families bury their loved ones.

“I was with my aunt. My mom traveled a little ahead of us and I was scared something would happen to her,” said Keyreina, who is 7 years old. “She told us about how she saw a family behind her, the dad was walking with his daughter. The girl took one wrong step and fell into the river and died.”

Kenny remembered accidentally stepping on a dead body with a bloated belly.

“(It) looked like the stomach was going to explode,” he said. “It was already open a bit and it smelled horrible.”

The U.S. has been pressuring the Colombian government to halt the flow of migrants through the Darién Gap, and in late February Colombian authorities finally arrested two boat captains who had been taking migrants across a gulf to the entrance of the jungle. Less than a week later, though, the boats were running again, ferrying thousands of migrants from Venezuela and Ecuador who had been waiting for transportation.

Kenny's parents and aunt said they decided to make the journey from their home in Agua Caliente, Ecuador, about 230 miles south of the capital of Quito, for better opportunities in the U.S.

“The state of the economy is bad,” said Jaramillo. “We were going through a hard time, and I had to make the tough decision to leave that country and come to this country to look for a better future for myself and my family and my kids.”

Ochoa was hesitant to leave, but she trusted her husband and cousins, who assured her the trip would not be that difficult.

“We were all convinced it would not be as bad as it turned out to be,” she said. Jaramillo said the hardships of the

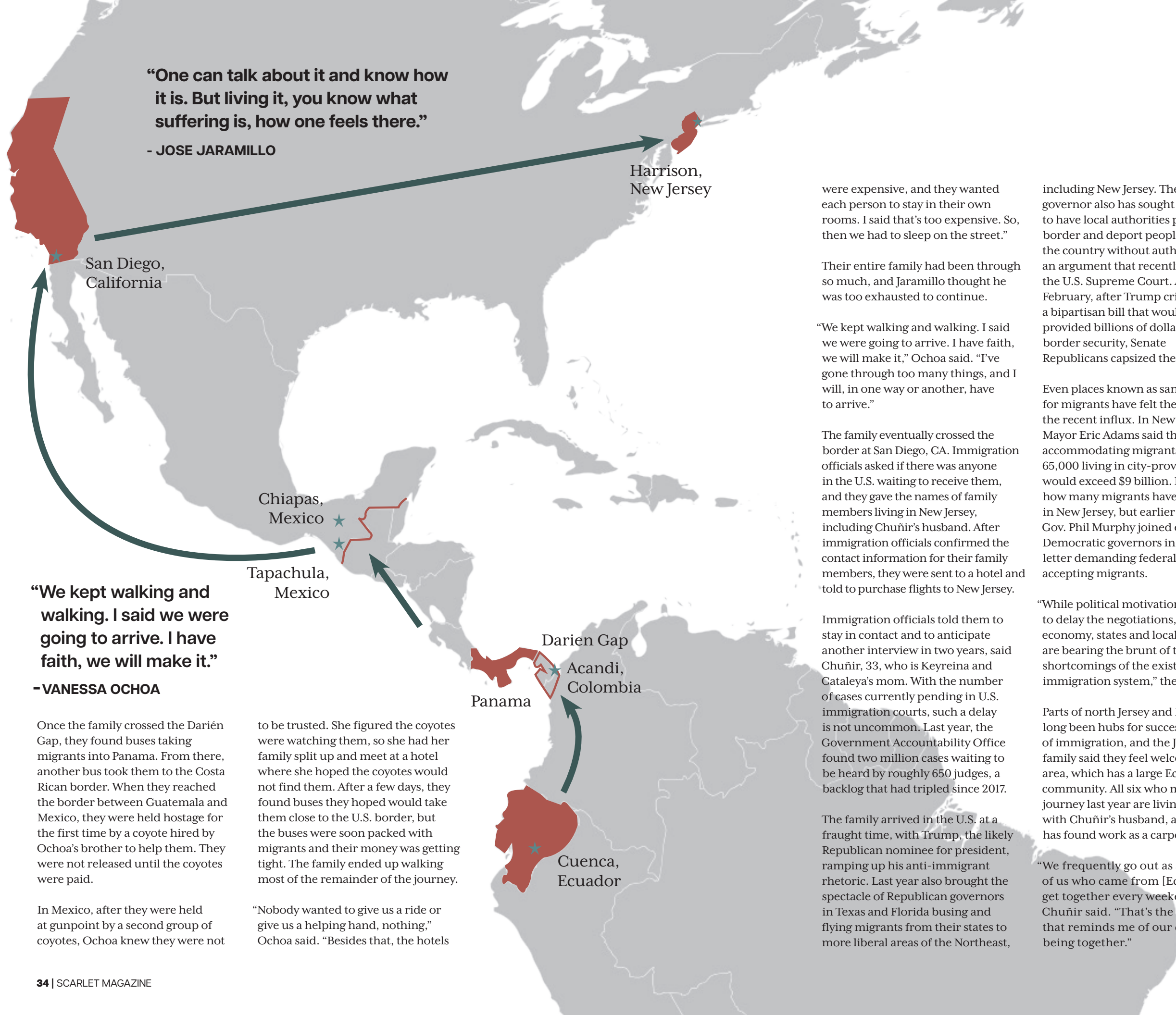
trip, including the endless walking, the countless costs, and the periods of waiting and uncertainty were difficult to explain.

“One can talk about it and know how it is,” he said. “But living it, you know what suffering is, how one feels there.”

“I said to myself, ‘This is the end, we're dying here.’”

– KENNY JARAMILLO

ABOVE: Playing in an Ironbound soccer league has helped Kenny Jaramillo make new friends since his arrival in the U.S. last year. Photograph by Nagely Castro.



“One can talk about it and know how it is. But living it, you know what suffering is, how one feels there.”

- JOSE JARAMILLO

Harrison,
New Jersey

San Diego,
California

Chiapas,
Mexico

Tapachula,
Mexico

Darién Gap

Acandí,
Colombia

Panama

Cuenca,
Ecuador

“We kept walking and walking. I said we were going to arrive. I have faith, we will make it.”

- VANESSA OCHOA

Once the family crossed the Darién Gap, they found buses taking migrants into Panama. From there, another bus took them to the Costa Rican border. When they reached the border between Guatemala and Mexico, they were held hostage for the first time by a coyote hired by Ochoa’s brother to help them. They were not released until the coyotes were paid.

In Mexico, after they were held at gunpoint by a second group of coyotes, Ochoa knew they were not

to be trusted. She figured the coyotes were watching them, so she had her family split up and meet at a hotel where she hoped the coyotes would not find them. After a few days, they found buses they hoped would take them close to the U.S. border, but the buses were soon packed with migrants and their money was getting tight. The family ended up walking most of the remainder of the journey.

“Nobody wanted to give us a ride or give us a helping hand, nothing,” Ochoa said. “Besides that, the hotels

were expensive, and they wanted each person to stay in their own rooms. I said that’s too expensive. So, then we had to sleep on the street.”

Their entire family had been through so much, and Jaramillo thought he was too exhausted to continue.

“We kept walking and walking. I said we were going to arrive. I have faith, we will make it,” Ochoa said. “I’ve gone through too many things, and I will, in one way or another, have to arrive.”

The family eventually crossed the border at San Diego, CA. Immigration officials asked if there was anyone in the U.S. waiting to receive them, and they gave the names of family members living in New Jersey, including Chuñir’s husband. After immigration officials confirmed the contact information for their family members, they were sent to a hotel and told to purchase flights to New Jersey.

Immigration officials told them to stay in contact and to anticipate another interview in two years, said Chuñir, 33, who is Keyreina and Cataleya’s mom. With the number of cases currently pending in U.S. immigration courts, such a delay is not uncommon. Last year, the Government Accountability Office found two million cases waiting to be heard by roughly 650 judges, a backlog that had tripled since 2017.

The family arrived in the U.S. at a fraught time, with Trump, the likely Republican nominee for president, ramping up his anti-immigrant rhetoric. Last year also brought the spectacle of Republican governors in Texas and Florida busing and flying migrants from their states to more liberal areas of the Northeast,

including New Jersey. The Texas governor also has sought permission to have local authorities patrol the border and deport people who enter the country without authorization – an argument that recently reached the U.S. Supreme Court. And in February, after Trump criticized a bipartisan bill that would have provided billions of dollars for border security, Senate Republicans capsized the deal.

Even places known as sanctuaries for migrants have felt the strain of the recent influx. In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams said the cost of accommodating migrants, including 65,000 living in city-provided shelters, would exceed \$9 billion. It is unclear how many migrants have settled in New Jersey, but earlier this year Gov. Phil Murphy joined eight other Democratic governors in signing a letter demanding federal aid to states accepting migrants.

“While political motivations continue to delay the negotiations, our economy, states and localities are bearing the brunt of the shortcomings of the existing immigration system,” the letter said.

Parts of north Jersey and Newark have long been hubs for successive waves of immigration, and the Jaramillo family said they feel welcome in the area, which has a large Ecuadorian community. All six who made the journey last year are living in a house with Chuñir’s husband, and Jaramillo has found work as a carpenter.

“We frequently go out as a family, all of us who came from [Ecuador], we get together every weekend,” Chuñir said. “That’s the only thing that reminds me of our country, being together.”

The most difficult part of the trip for the Jaramillo family was leaving behind their 16-year-old daughter. They could not afford to bring her along; they could only afford to bring Kenny with the help of Ochoa’s brother.

The daughter’s absence has been especially hard for Kenny, who was close with his big sister. Through tears, Kenny described his hope of becoming a professional soccer player and buying a house for his family.

“I know one day I am going to fulfill my dream that I am working towards, and God-willing, I’ll become a millionaire and I’ll buy the home I told my dad about,” he said.

Kenny has played soccer since he was 4, and he recently joined the Pre-MLS Next team at Ironbound Soccer. He played his first matches in March, scoring seven goals in his first two games. Since arriving in the U.S., soccer has been his outlet and the way he has made friends despite the language barrier.

Now that they can reflect on the treacherous journey through the Darién Gap, being held hostage and extorted, and having to walk countless miles over two continents, all three adults are grateful to be here, but they wish they had not subjected their children to such a traumatic experience.

“If I could turn back the time, I would not have put my son and wife through this situation, because it was a very difficult one,” Jaramillo said. “That’s what I would have done differently.”

Nagely Castro is a junior majoring in Journalism and minoring in Translation and Interpretation Studies.

Bringing Students – and Data – Into Political Life

A new center focusing on race and politics aims to help students enter public service

By Cydney Smith

Politics and race are not the easiest topics to discuss, but a new research center founded at Rutgers-Newark hopes to provide students and communities across New Jersey with the right tools and knowledge to have more productive conversations.

The Center for Politics and Race in America aims not only to produce and distribute data and information on race and politics, but to train students to analyze and think critically about the issues, and to help them pursue careers in public affairs.

“Our mission is to enlighten, empower and expand participation in American politics,” said James Jones, the director of the center and an assistant professor of Africana Studies and Sociology at Rutgers-Newark. “We aim to expand our political knowledge through research and programming in workshops for both Rutgers students and our community at large, to expand their ability ... to be non-partisan in politics, to understand what’s happening, and to spur political engagement.”

The center held its inaugural event on campus in February. It featured discussions with Keith Boykin, an

author, producer and commentator on CNN, and Clay Cane, a Rutgers-Newark graduate who is a journalist and the host of his own show on SiriusXM. Both discussed their latest books – Boykin’s *Why Does Everything Have To Be About Race?* and Cane’s *The Grift*, about Black Republicans in the age of Trump.

At a ceremony in March, the center was renamed in honor of Sheila Y. Oliver, the former lieutenant governor of New Jersey who died in office in August 2023. Oliver was the first Black woman to hold statewide elected office in New Jersey.

Jacqueline S. Mattis, co-director of the center and the dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers-Newark, said many people have been looking for ways to honor Oliver, who was also the first Black woman to serve as Assembly speaker and the second in the nation to lead a legislative chamber.

“Sheila Oliver was interested in the most inclusive ways, in how everybody could gain opportunities to participate in the political life of the state,” Mattis said. “So, it makes sense to have a center that raises the

question of how everyone is included and how we understand what the major issues and concerns are for our various groups.”

Research will be key to the center’s mission, Jones said, with one area of focus being the representation of Black women in elected offices across the state – information that can inform future activism and advocacy.

“Oftentimes [when] we’re making claims about racial and gender representation, we have no data to see if things are actually getting better. And if so, how? Or, if things are getting worse,” he explained.

“We don’t care who you vote for, we don’t care what you believe. We do care that you are informed and engaged.”

– **JACQUELINE S. MATTIS**, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers-Newark



Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way and James Jones, co-director of the center, pose with a portrait of the late Lt. Gov. Sheila Y. Oliver. Photograph by Nick Romanenko / Courtesy of Rutgers University.

“We need to have a database that looks at how Black women are represented. With this type of data we can begin to hold our elected officials accountable. We can inform our organizing efforts to see where people of color are missing.”

The idea for the center originated with Chancellor Nancy Cantor, Mattis said.

“She and I had a discussion about what would it look like if we created a center,” said Mattis, who has a doctorate in clinical psychology and researches the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. “I wrote the proposal for the center, gave it to Nancy, and her office and my office worked with our government officials and made sure we got funded for the first year.”

The center received \$500,000 in state funding for its first year, as well as a \$100,000 donation from Johnson & Johnson in honor of Oliver.

Jones said seeking student input and understanding how students interact with politics will be crucial for the center and its programming.

“We met with student group leaders and asked those very questions,” he said. “Who do they want to hear from? What do they want to see from the center?”

Jones said he imagined the center becoming a space on campus “for us to have really important conversations, where there is a meaningful exchange of ideas and perspectives, which means faculty members not just talking to students, but listening as well.”

“I could bring a number of speakers to campus. However, if students don’t know who those people are or they don’t find them relevant, then we are going to fail,” he said.

The center is also organizing two sets of student internships through its public service leadership program. One internship will be coordinated with Braven, an organization that works with universities to empower low-income students of color and first-generation students to help them get good jobs.

“We are working with them to launch an internship where we will be taking four Rutgers-Newark students to

Capitol Hill to work for eight weeks,” said Jones, who studies inequality and racial representation in political institutions, with a focus on the experiences of Black government workers. The Rutgers-Newark interns will be given a stipend and housing.

“The end goal is to give Rutgers-Newark students opportunities to participate in public service opportunities. We know unpaid internships are a problem in many different sectors, especially in the public sector,” Jones said. “When it comes to working in government, I would like to see these internships be the beginning of meaningful opportunities for students to pursue their passions and start their careers.”

The center also will work with the Rutgers-Newark journalism department to provide two student internships, one in the summer at WNYC Radio and one in the fall at the education news website Chalkbeat, Jones said.

Mattis said one of the center’s goals was to “broaden who is in political life,” by producing the kind of research and creating the kind of opportunities that would enable people “to participate fully and thoughtfully in the system.”

“We are a nonpartisan organization,” she said. “We don’t care who you vote for, we don’t care what you believe. We do care that you are informed and engaged.”

Cydney Smith is a junior majoring in Journalism.

“Our mission is to enlighten, empower, and expand participation in American politics.”

– **JAMES JONES**, assistant professor of Africana Studies and Sociology at Rutgers-Newark

Dropping Out, Dropping In

Amid a steep decline in enrollment, one student recounts why she left and how she found her way back

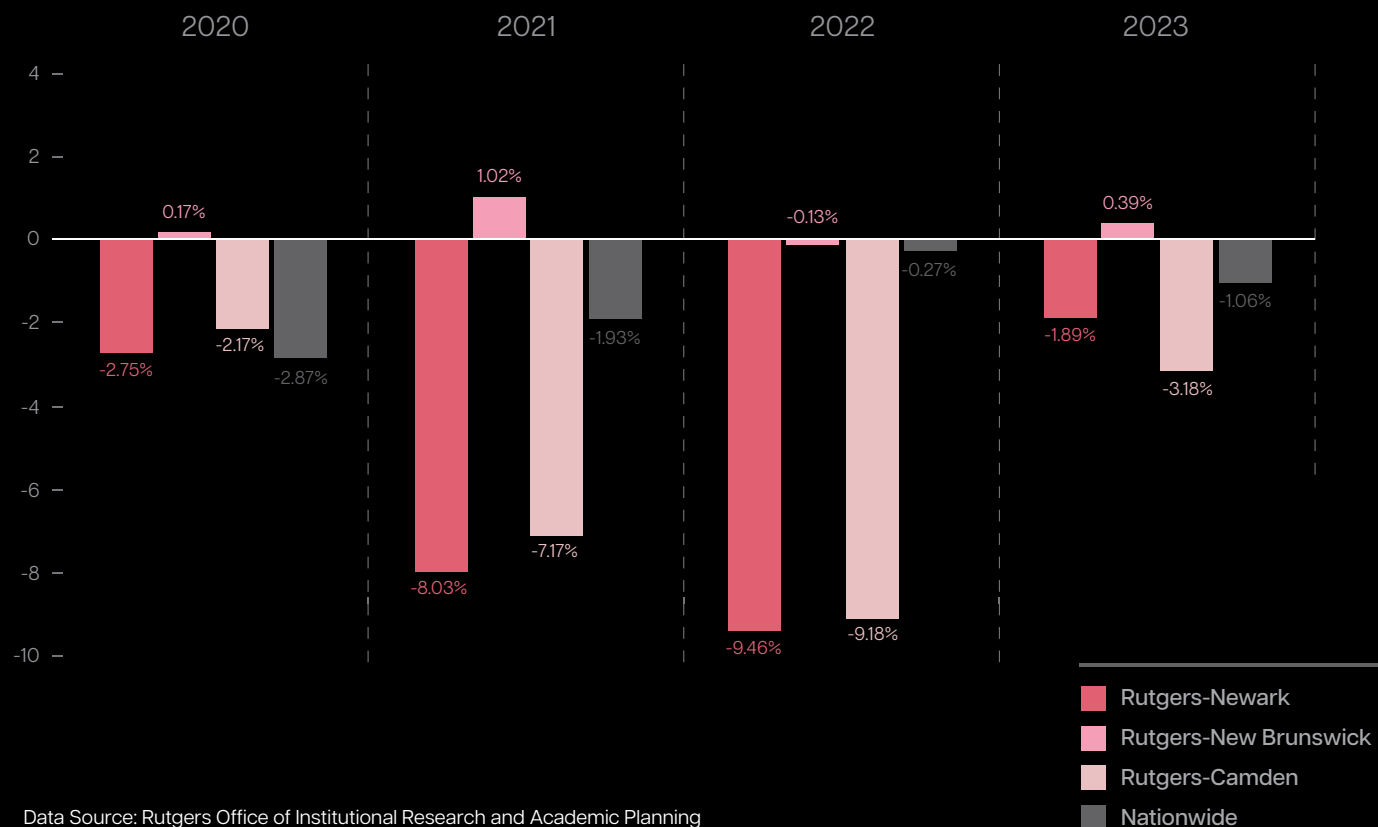
By Kenneth Weiss



After a two-year hiatus from college, Samia Jahangiri will graduate from Rutgers this year.

Photograph by Isaiah Bristol.

CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT BY STUDENTS, 2020-2023



Data Source: Rutgers Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning

Enrollment at universities across the country has dropped since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The decline at Rutgers-Newark, however, has been five times as steep as the decline nationwide. The rate of decline slowed significantly last year, but our campus has still seen a 20% drop in students – or 2,796 people – since 2019. Rutgers-Camden has also seen a significant drop in enrollment, while enrollment at Rutgers-New Brunswick is up. (See charts.)

The reasons for the decline range from a shrinking U.S. birth rate, the financial pressures of paying for college as COVID-19 battered the economy, and the rising cost of tuition. At Rutgers, the Board of Governors voted last year to increase tuition by 6%, twice as much as it did the year before, costing students as much as \$1,000 more this academic year. Administrators have justified the hike by saying raises won by faculty and staff after last year's historic strike made it necessary.

The unions have pushed back, arguing that the university has a \$900 million surplus that it can spend however it wants—but chooses to spend it on athletics and other high-profile items over students, faculty and staff.

“An institution like Rutgers-Newark is an anchor institution, and its mission is not just to be fiscally healthy,” said Frank Edwards, the Newark chapter president of the Rutgers Faculty Union Executive Council and a professor at the School of Criminal Justice. “Its mission is to provide a public service and in particular to provide a public service to the working class, largely Black and brown folks who live in Newark and want to attend classes here.”

The university has responded to the enrollment decline with initiatives to help students who have dropped out return to classes, including the support office RU-N Rising and a plan to give students academic

credit for real-world experience, in the military or on the job, said John Cunkel, senior vice chancellor for Academic Affairs and Strategic Partnerships.

Against the backdrop of rising tuition and falling enrollment, one student who recently re-enrolled recounted her journey for *Scarlet Magazine*.

Samia Jahangiri, 27, left Rutgers one semester after the university returned to in-person teaching. At the time, she was double majoring in Graphic Design and Journalism. She'll graduate this year after a two-year hiatus in her college career. Jahangiri has been pursuing her bachelor's degree for a decade, from the University of West London in England, to Raritan Community College, to the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers-New Brunswick and, finally, to our own campus in Newark. Here's her story.

In Her Own Words

I grew up in the Middle East. I did all my high school years in Dubai. But the thing with the United Arab Emirates is that they don't give citizenship (easily). And so my nationality, even though I was born in Saudi Arabia, and I've lived in the UAE my whole life, my nationality is Pakistani, right? Because I'm from Pakistan. And in Pakistan, there was a law passed in 1984 that basically made Muslims that belong to my (Ahmadi) sect of Islam, non-Muslims.

So my family has kind of been living outside of my homeland, if you will, for the past, 40-ish years now. There was no future for us (in the UAE). So my parents made a decision that ... we need to go somewhere else. And they chose America because there is, like, you know, a lot of opportunity.

So in 2015 I ended up in New Jersey. Originally, I was only planning on being here for a year, so I enrolled myself in community college. I was at Raritan Valley Community College, just to kind of kill time, but obviously, life happens and around this time, what they did was they had passed a Muslim ban.

My dad established his business here. What he does now is freight forwarding. It's supply chain logistics, like shipping and all this stuff. And so, my parents and my younger brother ... kind of came on, a business visa, right? So they could stay in America. (The government was) like, you know, "You guys can stay in America." Except for me. "This girl probably can't because she's going to be like 21 soon. So she's gonna have to go back to Pakistan."

The thing about that is: I don't have any friends, I don't have any family there. And I've also never lived there my whole life, right? To me, it really is like a foreign place.

I became a refugee, a political refugee. I was an asylum seeker.

And, you know, I kind of got stuck here, can't leave the country until I get a green card, basically. And also, you remember there was the Muslim ban thing going on. So they were like, "you know, she could leave America. She just probably can't get back in."

So then, I finished my associate's degree in Fine Arts (in 2017).

Interview by Kenneth Weiss

And at this point in time, my mental health tanked because I was like, 'Yo, like, this is not the life that I wanted to do.' It's a little crazy, right?

Then I enrolled at Mason Gross (at Rutgers-New Brunswick) because I got a scholarship to go there. ... I really hated the course. It was too Fine Arts, not Graphic Design enough for me. And then also where I had been raised, it was an extremely diverse environment, and it just didn't have that. So I went to school for, like, two days and then I dropped out.

And then I was working at the community college (where) I did my degree, in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. This is sort of like when President Trump has just come into office, right? And it was a very tumultuous time. Our office kind of catered to international students, undocumented students, people who came from places of financial insecurity. So our office was sort of a safe space for everybody who really didn't fit in.

(Mentors at work encouraged her to go back to school.)

So ... I'm at my computer and I literally searched up: "What's the most diverse college campus in North America?" 'Cuz that's one thing I needed, right? And sure enough Rutgers-Newark was either number one on the list for all of North America or was number one on the list for the United States of America. Either way, I was, like, Rutgers-Newark! That's 24 minutes away from my house. That's closer than Rutgers-New Brunswick, you know what I mean? And I came onto campus, and ... the staff and faculty, they were so amazing. They were so qualified. Their work was so impressive that, you know, I just kind of threw myself into it. And then I was in school.

And then COVID hit. And then life happened. I just had personal family situations come up. So I was still in classes. I was still taking my classes, but I was an older student now, old enough to, you know, you want to start building up your resume. Once you've had employment, you don't want to have too big of a gap in your employment.

So I started working (again). And for me, just the stress of being in school as a double major working full time... At one point, I was working two or three jobs. It was just too much for me, you know what I mean? And I went from getting like all A's and then all A's and a B to literally having, like, A A D D C or something in my semester. And then I just went from that to, like, taking two classes. I eventually withdrew just because I had so much stuff to do outside of school.

I told you, when my parents came to America, they started a freight forwarding business. So I ended up coming on to our company. They needed somebody to take over the workload. And also my dad, he's been working to provide for his family since he was literally 9 years old, which is when they kind of became refugees in their own country. So I was like, you know, he's nearing 60.

He's worked hard his whole life. I kind of want him to retire today. ... So my education took a backseat during this time. I had to throw myself into work.

The way the courses had been set up, didn't necessarily accommodate people who were working full time and were older students and had life responsibilities. It was really designed for kids who were 18-19 years old. A lot of them lived on campus. There were courses that were offered once a week at a certain time and one semester per year. If you couldn't take it, you had to wait for a whole other year to pass and then you could take the class. I just didn't have the luxury of time at that point in my life. I was like, yo, I got grownup stuff to do.

And one thing I honestly didn't like, ... (I was told) that these classes cannot be taught online, which I think if you're in a lab or you're doing nursing, fine, you can make that argument. If it's design, and everybody has Adobe Cloud, where you're literally working on a computer... I can't buy it. And also we just had two years of COVID. So everything was online. So anyway, I was just like, let me drop it.

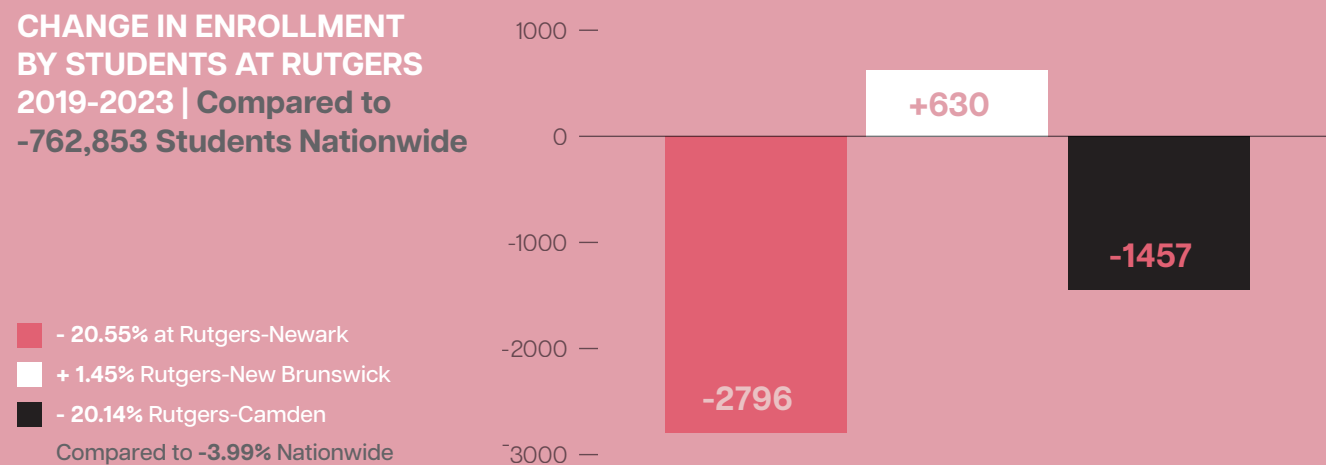
And that brings us to this semester. I don't have a business or math background, but I work in supply chain, right? I work as the administrator (in the family business), but I also oversee and handle all of our accounts. So - money coming in, money going out. I'm auditing and balancing that every single day. So it's just a little bit of pressure (when) you don't have a background to handle that. So I was like, right, let me put myself in a master's program where it focuses on things like marketing, and it's going to help me crunch numbers and really grow this business. The only problem was I had to first complete my undergraduate.

So I went back to Rutgers and formally dropped my (second) major, which was the Design major that I hadn't completed the classes for. I'm not messing around. I just want to get

this done. And the universe literally aligned to make that possible. It really did. It was something I had been struggling to get done for literally two years. And I got it sorted out in two days. I got lucky and met great faculty and great staff who were able to kind of help me finesse a Fine Arts minor from classes that I had taken at Rutgers or at my community college.

I'm hoping this is my last semester. I'm done with my classes. My major and minor requirements are complete. I'm gonna have my degree. I graduated high school in 2014. And I'm gonna have my bachelor's degree in 2024. That's 10 years. But I still got it. It's not worth any more or any less than anybody else's undergraduate degree. There's no shame in re-turning, and there's no shame in picking up where you left off.

CHANGE IN ENROLLMENT BY STUDENTS AT RUTGERS 2019-2023 | Compared to -762,853 Students Nationwide



This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity. Kenneth Weiss is a senior double majoring in English and Journalism.

From the Holy Land to Campus

Here's a timeline showing how the war in Gaza has roiled Rutgers

By Daniel Cuesta and Abdullah Allen

OCTOBER 7, 2023

Hamas gunmen attacked Israel from Gaza, killing 1,200 people and taking 240 hostages. Israel retaliated with air strikes and, later, a ground offensive.

JANUARY 2, 2024

Yoel Ackerman, a 36-year-old Orthodox Jewish student in his first year at Rutgers-Newark's Law School, sued the school and the university, alleging discrimination and a hostile educational environment. Ackerman faced disciplinary action for allegedly doxxing law students who had shared an Instagram video disputing aspects of the Hamas attack, including allegations of systemic rape, to a Student Bar Association chat group. In another online forum, Ackerman described the students as Hamas supporters.

In an open letter, Ackerman's lawyer, David Mazie, wrote that his client "felt a duty to report this abhorrent video to other Jewish law students." The act led the Student Bar Association to impeach Ackerman. His lawyer called the impeachment "a sham process intended to socially shame and destroy a person's reputation and silence any others who may privately hold minority viewpoints." In the suit, Ackerman said that he felt so unsafe at Rutgers-Newark, that he wore a hoodie to cover his yarmulke on his way from the parking lot to class.

DECEMBER 11, 2023

The U.S. Department of Education launched an investigation of Rutgers for ethnic discrimination resulting from fallout from the Gaza war. The Newark campus was the source of the charge. The probe is ongoing, and it puts Rutgers in the bullseye of federal scrutiny, along with universities such as Columbia and Harvard, which are facing similar probes and similar questions about the line between free speech and hate speech.

FEBRUARY 7, 2024

The Republican members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee attacked the Center for Security, Race and Rights (CSRR) at Rutgers-Newark's Law School. The lawmakers accused the center of providing platforms to anti-semitic speakers and "terrorist sympathizers" and called for an investigation of its funding. Founded in 2018, the center is directed by law professor Sahar Aziz, author of *The Racial Muslim* and an expert on Islamophobia. She told *Scarlet*: "This is the first and only civil rights center at a U.S. law school that focuses on Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities, and yet is being attacked for this very work and through the same Islamophobic stereotypes the Center seeks to stop. The irony is glaring."



FEBRUARY 20, 2024

In a letter to the senators, the Rutgers' union, AAUP-AFT, defended CSRR as a "hub of intellectual activity that hosts speakers of diverse backgrounds and diverse viewpoints," on many subjects, from U.S. residential segregation to the international law that prosecuted Nazis after the Holocaust. The union urged the senators to respect the center's academic freedom and freedom of speech.

APRIL 16, 2024

It's announced that students at all three Rutgers campuses voted for the university to divest from companies and organizations that do business in Israel and to sever its relationship with Tel Aviv University. More than 8,500 students voted. At New Brunswick, 80 percent voted in favor of divestment, and 77 percent, in favor of cutting ties with TAU. At both Camden and Newark, 71 percent of students voted for divestment, while 65 percent of Newark students voted to end the relationship with TAU.

Zaineb Haider, a Rutgers-Newark graduate student, said that the university's connections with TAU disturb her. "If you go to Smith Hall, there are literal flyers about, I think, a neuroscience conference.... And it's a collaborative thing between Tel Aviv University and Rutgers University," Haider told *Scarlet*. "If you're a Palestinian student, an Arab student, a Muslim student, you're walking by and you see that, that's a huge slap in the face." At a conference planned for September, Rutgers neuroscientists hope to work with TAU scientists to research Alzheimer's Disease.

President Jonathan Holloway told students, in a letter after voting had ended, that he views cultural, academic and artistic exchanges with TAU as valuable. "Our partnership with TAU adds to our fundamental academic and research mission," he wrote. "Rutgers has relationships like this with universities all over the world and they help move our mission forward." He also expressed his opinion that divestment is wrong: "I believe in engagement, not isolation," he wrote.

LEFT: Rutgers students joined others in a February ceasefire march to Newark City Hall. Photograph by Daniel Cuesta.

APRIL 10, 2024

On Eid-al-Fitr, the day marking the end of Ramadan, the Center for Islamic Life at the New Brunswick campus was vandalized. The New York Times reported that its windows were shattered; religious artifacts, damaged; and a Palestinian flag and charity box, stolen. A 24-year old man from North Plainfield, Jacob Beacher, was arrested and charged with a federal hate crime in connection with the incident. After the incident, President Jonathan Holloway wrote to Rutgers faculty, staff and students: "Acts of violence and bias have no place at Rutgers. We must be better than this."

APRIL 19, 2024

The Rutgers University Student Assembly at New Brunswick passed a bill to combat anti-Palestinian racism. It said that it's the first student governing body in the country to adopt a definition of anti-Palestinian racism. The definition includes identifying people who are pro-Palestinian as inherently anti-semitic or as terrorist sympathizers.

APRIL 23, 2024

Advocates for Arab Americans and Muslims filed a federal civil rights complaint against Rutgers, alleging "an ongoing pattern and practice of direct and indirect discrimination" and "indifference to a hostile learning environment" by the university. In their complaint, the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (ADC) and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) stated that student groups at Rutgers-Newark's Law School provided insight into the problem. A university spokesman said that it "takes seriously every claim of bias, intolerance and hate."

APRIL 24, 2024

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, wounded 77,000 and displaced more than 2 million. Hamas continues to hold 129 hostages captive.

Daniel Cuesta is a senior majoring in Video Production and minoring in Journalism. Abdullah Allen is a senior majoring in Journalism.

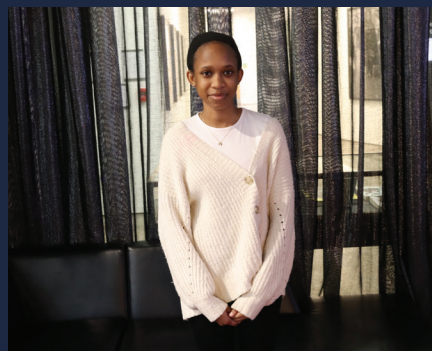
The Ultimate Civics Lesson

Newark lowers the voting age to 16 in school board elections

By Ein Bryant

“My main motto in government is that people who are most impacted by the policies should have input over who represents them.”

- LAMONICA MCIVER,
Newark City Council president



Earlier this year, Newark made history by becoming the first city in the state to lower the voting age in school board elections to 16, potentially giving thousands of students a say in how their schools are run.

Following a push by a coalition of activists and students, Newark City Council unanimously approved an ordinance in January that enfranchises 16- and 17-year-olds. Starting in 2025, those students will be eligible to cast ballots in the annual school board elections held in April.

“Why not let young people be able to have an opportunity to engage in the election process when it comes to selecting people who are directly representing them?” Council President Lamonica McIver said in a recent interview. “We talk a lot about schools, and how schools are helping shape our next leaders, our next generation, and young people should have an opportunity to say who represents their best interests.”

Among those who advocated for the change and spoke to Council in favor of the ordinance were Breanna Campbell and Nathaniel Esubonteng, both 16-year-old students at Newark’s Science Park High School. Esubonteng told Council that students should have a voice in making sure the school board reflects their values.

“We should not allow others to speak for us,” he said. “Today, we speak for ourselves.” In a recent interview, Campbell said it was important for students to express themselves, and giving them the vote “extends democracy.”

“Our involvement has already inspired other students our age to speak on and advocate for what they believe in,” she said.

Esubonteng said his Social Studies teacher has begun talking to 16- and 17-year-old students about the issues “so when they’re able to vote, they’ll vote rationally and

know what they’re going to vote on.” Lowering the voting age, he said, has given Newark students “a jumpstart” on understanding the democratic process.

“We can identify what the problems are, and we can speak on it,” he said in an interview. “It would be better for the students to actively communicate with the school board.”

The effort in Newark was part of a national push to expand the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds. Some smaller municipalities across the country have lowered the voting age in school elections, but Newark appears to be the largest city in the country to do so. Last year, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy also called in his State of the State address for the voting age to be lowered in school board elections statewide.

In Newark’s annual school board elections, voters typically elect three school board members to three-year terms on the nine-member board. Voters also decide whether to approve or reject the annual school budget. The Newark School District, with origins dating back to 1676, is the largest in the state, overseeing 66 schools with more than 35,000 students. The district has a \$1.3 billion budget this school year.

Turnout in school board elections has been dismally low. In 2023, just 3% of the city’s eligible voters went to the polls, with each of the winning school board candidates receiving about 3,500 votes. Lowering the voting age to 16 would enfranchise an estimated 7,000 young people, meaning Newark high school students would not only have a voice in choosing their leadership, but potentially a deciding one.

The work behind the scenes to bring this change began with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and Micauri Vargas, associate counsel for the Institute’s Democracy & Justice Program. She and others at the Institute did the initial legal research and then worked with McIver to write the ordinance that was eventually approved by the City Council.

“When you’re trying to pass a law, generally, you try to get all the stakeholders involved,” Vargas said. “In this case, the stakeholders were the council members, the mayor, city clerk, superintendent of the district, [and] we also spoke to school board members.”

Vargas also collaborated with Vote 16 NJ, which started a campaign to lower the voting age in the state about three years ago. Vote 16 is a national campaign, organized by Generation Citizen, which aims to support any effort to lower the voting age across the country.

“They were looking to do something at the state level for a long time, but when we started working together late 2022, I shared my research and how we thought that this was possible at the municipal level,” said Vargas. “It doesn’t have to be a state level legislation. Instead of this being a state bill, it could be a local city ordinance.”

Vargas and the Institute also collaborated with the NAACP Youth & College Division. The Institute often works with racial justice organizations, Vargas said, as issues like voting rights tend to coincide with issues related to race. More than 90% of Newark students identify as Black or Latino.

Many supporters of lowering the voting age described the move as a racial and social justice initiative, and Newark, a city with a long history in the fight for civil rights, as a fitting venue to lead the charge.

McIver, who represents the Central Ward, sponsored the ordinance and was essential to getting it approved. She said that Ryan Haygood, founder of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, first approached her with the idea.

“I was intrigued and excited about the research that he and his team had done around young people voting in local school board elections,” she said. “I said this is something we should definitely do in Newark.”

The decisions that school board members make about the budget, activities and initiatives, the curriculum being taught, the books being read, all have an impact on the youth and their schooling, said McIver.

Although the ordinance did not go into effect before this year’s school board election, next year should be the dawn of a new era of suffrage for young people in Brick City.

“My main motto in government is that people who are most impacted by the policies should have input over who represents them,” McIver said.

Ein Bryant is a junior majoring in Journalism.

“We should not allow others to speak for us. Today, we speak for ourselves.”

- NATHANIEL ESUBONTENG,
Science Park High School student



Science Park High School students Breanna Campbell (left) and Nathaniel Esubonteng (right) advocated for the law that lowered the voting age in Newark school board elections. Photographs by Ein Bryant.

SCARLET

