

# Psychohistory News

## Newsletter of the International Psychohistorical Association

### Volume 31, Issue 1 — Fall 2012

#### CONVENTION AND ORGANIZATION REPORT from IPA President Denis O’Keefe

Greetings to members and friends of the International Psychohistorical Association,

I would like to begin this address with a special congratulation and thank you to the 50+ scholars who presented their research at IPA’s 36th annual convention this past June at New York University. The feedback from presenters and attendees has been excellent. For members who did not have an opportunity to attend, the conference was organized thematically into 11 panels over a 3 day period including *The Personality of Presidential Candidates* (sponsored by the Psychohistory Forum), *Psychohistorical Social Policy* continued on page six

*View of Washington Square Park from the IPA Convention venue*



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*Mitt Romney circa 1984*



#### ELECTION 2012: THE PLUTOCRACY STRIKES BACK

by Brian D’Agostino

It is always risky to speculate about the psychohistorical significance of elections, since so many factors other than individual and group psychology operate in politics such as the role of money, the competence of candidates, international events like the European debt crisis and turmoil in the Middle East, and of course the unemployment rate, the 800 pound gorilla in the re-election or defeat of incumbent presidents according to political data.

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## 2012 KEYNOTE BY HOWARD STEIN: "CHOSEN TRAUMA" IN WIDESPREAD JEWISH IDENTITY AND HISTORY

by Molly Castelloe [mollyscastelloe@gmail.com](mailto:mollyscastelloe@gmail.com)

Howard F. Stein of the Department of Family and Preventative Medicine, University of Oklahoma, gave a compelling keynote on the experience of history among Jews. He spoke on how memory takes the form of story, a "master narrative" which, although not exclusive, is a common pattern in Jewish identity. Donald Spence's distinction between "historical truth" and "narrative truth" is important here. In remembering, groups often create myths about themselves and historical events, what Howard calls "retrospective mythology."

One example: the condensation of Jewish enemies since the Exodus into the figure of Amalek, reputed founder of the Amalekites, a tribe that attacked the Hebrews in the Sinai Desert as they escaped from slavery to the Promised Land. (See Biblical books of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Deuteronomy*, *Judges*, *Samuel* and *Chronicles*.) The figure of Amalek reappears throughout Jewish history: later in the Christian Crusades, as Hitler, the British when blocking the entrance to Palestine, and most recently as Yasser Arafat.

The linguistic change from "Amalekites," a people or tribe, to "Amalek," an abstraction, an "It" and "reification of all-bad" – marks a psychological change. A psychological vulnerability becomes exploited economically and politically by American Jewish organizations that fuel "Israel's Siege Mentality" (The Economist 2010: 13) or what Norman Finkelstein refers to as the "the Holocaust industry."

Historical experiences of actual persecution merge with fantasies of demonized figures and idealized places. Another example: the building of the first and second Holy Temples represent historical events of which Jews are most proud (Volkan's "chosen glories"). There are countless references in Jewish liturgy for the rebuilding of the first temple. The destruction of both temples on Tisha B'Av is a central trauma of the Jews. As Howard put it, Tisha B'Av "condenses (as in a dream) Jewish tragic history into a continuum through the present."

The inability to mourn, common among groups, perpetuates a vicious cycle of traumatic reoccurrence. In the ritual practice of observing Tisha B'Av, one reads the *Book of Lamentations* and is encouraged to personally relive the exile from Jerusalem.

*Molly Castelloe, Ph.D. is a writer and artist very interested in psychohistory.*

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## THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE AND PSYCHOHISTORY OF RUDOLPH BINION

by Paul H. Elovitz [Pelovitz@aol.com](mailto:PElovitz@aol.com)

In the September issue of *Clio's Psyche*, 24 colleagues honored the late Rudolph Binion (1927-2011) and at the June 2012 IPA convention, three colleagues spoke at length about this brilliant member of our organization and friend to many early IPAers. Rudy taught at Columbia, Rutgers, MIT, and the Collège de France prior to serving for 44 years at Brandeis University, where he was the Leff Families Professor of Modern European History. Among his many books were *Frau Lou: Nietzsche's Wayward Disciple* (1968), *Hitler among the Germans* (1976), *After Christianity* (1986), and *Traumatic Reliving in History, Literature, and Film* (2011). He was passionate about his scholarship, which he wrote in English, French, and German.

Rudy Binion started out as a dedicated Freudian, but eventually decided that Freudianism, with its emphasis on childhood, was "psychohistory's false start." Group psychohistory became his focus. He was the most meticulous of researchers and authors, immersing himself in the primary sources. During the Cold War he went behind the Iron Curtain to find valuable sources for his brilliant and controversial book on Hitler. Rudy's extraordinary erudition was recognized around the world, as he often lectured in Europe in English, French, German, and Italian and on occasion in Australia and China.

*The IPA board of directors invites you to contact us with feedback or ideas about this publication, our organization, or the field of psychohistory.*

### IPA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Rudolph Binion (1927-2011)*

Genuine intellectual exchange was Binion’s forté, as reflected in the four symposia he published in *Clio’s Psyche* in recent years. I’ve never known or even heard of a colleague nearly as generous with his time and intellect. He could be enormously responsive to his students, moving into new areas of research, such as the study of Freud, at the request of a student. When he left Columbia University, rather than leaving graduate students writing dissertations in the lurch, as so many professors have done, he worked with them until the completion of their doctoral degrees. In a Featured Scholar Interview he said that “a number of people honor me by sending me their drafts and asking for comments and I love that.” In fact, he assisted independent scholars

such as Jay Gonen, Deborah Hayden, David Lewis-Hodgson, George Victor, and Irvin Yalom in researching, writing, and rewriting their books, in all cases offering invaluable advice and guidance. In addition, he was a wonderful friend to many colleagues.

Unbeknownst to most of his colleagues and friends, there was a poet and short story writer lurking in Rudy’s heart as reflected in his 2009 book, *Flights of Fancy*. His sister describes him as “a born lover of poetry.” As a small child he spouted Edgar Allan Poe poems around the house and later lines from Shakespeare. In his teenage years this New Yorker suffered the loss of his father and economic deprivation. His education at Columbia University and at the Collège de France was interrupted by service in the U.S. Army and work as a statistical assistant for UNESCO in Paris for three or four years. Fuller accounts of this remarkable colleague may be found at [cliospsyche.org](http://cliospsyche.org)—September 2011.

*Paul H. Elovitz, PhD, is a founding member of the IPA and a longtime friend of Rudy Binion.*

### PSYCHOHISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE AURORA SHOOTING

*It is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime; psychology is only concerned to know who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done.*

—Freud in "Dostoyevsky and Parricide" (1928)

Molly Castelloe launched a discussion on the Clio’s Psyche email list about the mass shooting on July 20 at a movie theatre in Aurora Colorado. Neuroscience graduate student James Eagan Holmes (pictured below) opened fire during a midnight screening of the Batman film “The Dark Knight Rises,” killing 12 and injuring 58 people. What follows are excerpts from the discussion, printed with the *continued on page four*

*suspected gunman James Holmes*



## ON THE AURORA SHOOTING

*continued from page three*

permission of the individuals involved and the Psychohistory Forum, which sponsors Clio's Psyche and its online discussion forum that may be accessed at [cliospsyche@googlegroups.com](mailto:cliospsyche@googlegroups.com)

**from Merle Molofsky**  
[mmpsya@mindspring.com](mailto:mmpsya@mindspring.com)

We have to look at the intersection of various factors in understanding these kinds of phenomena. One factor is the symbolic meanings of Holmes's actions -- his own symbolic framework. We can each free associate till the cows come home, and may even hit upon insight into Holmes's symbolic world, but we don't have his own free associations—at least not in words—we only have his actions. Perhaps we can think of his actions as free associations. So his symbolic universe intersects with a second factor: actual world conditions, actual sociopolitical realities. Which ones?

Do his free associations, does his symbolic universe, match a part of the American group-mind?

America has a romantic fascination with guns, romantic in that we can too easily forget what bullets do to a human being. Romantic in that we associate guns with the westward expansion, the Wild West, the freedom-seeking, independence-seeking, macho man. This is an integral part of the American romance with guns.

I bet everyone in this discussion group—everyone, women and men—played with some form of toy gun in childhood. Water gun, anyone? What, no cute little plastic guns in your toy box? No toy box? What about your index finger and the Kh-kh-kh-kh sound you learned to make when pointing your finger-gun? The fantasies about power, and the fear of being powerless, certainly are part of our group-psyche. What group? The human-group.

**From Alice Maher**  
[alicelmaher@gmail.com](mailto:alicelmaher@gmail.com)

(Provocative) question: What is the difference between the "horrifying, meaningless, and pure evil" of a paranoid and psychotic individual who commits an act of violence, and heroic acts of war that we watch on the TV news every night? . . . What society labels "evil and meaningless" in relation to the psychotic individual may have profound meaning that we have yet to understand, and that which society labels "heroic" in relation to war may contain elements of psychotic, even evil, reality.

**from Joel Markowitz**  
[markowitzjoel@gmail.com](mailto:markowitzjoel@gmail.com)

I agree with that, Alice. Our collective minds still avoid psychodynamic thinking. As in pre-Freudian times, we (collectively and, therefore, individually) criticize; condemn; insist that we have no human connection with such "bad" people and motivations.

## THE CHRIST STORY AS CHILD ABUSE by Henry Lawton [hwlipa@gmail.com](mailto:hwlipa@gmail.com)

When I initially wrote about Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* I focused on the obedient son sacrificed. When I was preparing for the 2012 conference, I realized that I had missed the role of the father. Consider that God is the actual father and Christ is an actual son. Thus we have a situation of child abuse. It would be a mistake to assume that I am advocating demolition of all that is good about religion. What I have in mind is an additional dimension of religion.

*Bouguereau's The Flagellation of Christ*



Consider the role of obedience to God. If you are disobedient God will punish you. This has a lot to do with guilt as a way to keep expected punishments in bounds. One reason religions exist is to enforce/help believers to keep guilt feelings in manageable limits. God is always angry and must be appeased no matter what. It is never clear why God is angry and what he is angry about.

The film was very violent but not as violent as I remember when I first saw it. I found the notion of God as a child abuser unsettling. Those that came to the film seemed to take my insight in stride, which surprised me. Christ pleads with the Father/God not to make him sacrifice himself—in essence commit suicide—in garishly violent manner. What does this movie communicate? That remains uncertain. But the dimension of child abuse is part of the emotional mix. *Henry Lawton is a founding member and current Secretary of the IPA.*

**ELECTION 2012** *continued from page one*

In the face of all of this, how should we think about the specific contributions of psychology to American politics? I argued in the Winter 2012 *Journal of Psychohistory* (vol. 39, no. 3) that the fierce political polarization in the United States today seems to reflect the clash of two major psychoclasses, which I labeled “strict father” and “nurturing parent,” following terminology by cognitive linguist George Lakoff. This typology can shed some light on the 2012 presidential election season.

The Tea Party movement, which helped elect extremely conservative candidates in 2010 and gave the Republicans control of the House of Representatives, represents the hard core of the “strict father” psychoclass. I have argued that this psychoclass is associated with punitive parenting, a displacement of unconscious rage onto “government,” and a displacement of unconscious idealization of the punitive parent onto the state’s military power and the “free market” (in reality, big corporations). This segment of the Republican Party would have preferred a more radically right-wing candidate than Mitt Romney, but rallied around him in the end, especially after he chose Tea Party favorite Paul Ryan as his running mate.

Liberal Democrats, I would argue, are largely coterminous with the “nurturing parent” psychoclass. Having experienced greater satisfaction of their infantile needs and harboring more benign parental introjects, such people hold a favorable view of government as an instrument for meeting human needs and taming predatory capitalism, while having fewer illusions about militarism and nationalism. While the election of Barack Obama in 2008 suggests the ascendancy of this psychoclass, it is hard to assess the magnitude of this effect since Obama also outspent his Republican rival John McCain and was swept into the White House in part due to the growth of black, brown, and Hispanic groups as a percentage of the U.S. population. One demographic factor—a gender gap in which women disproportionately support Obama—is most likely correlated with the nurturing parent/strict father typology.

The election of America’s first black president in 2008 energized ethnocentric whites, galvanizing the Tea Party movement within months after Obama’s election. (Social scientists have identified ethnocentrism as a correlate of “the authoritarian personality,” which I am associating with the “strict father” psychoclass). The success of the Tea Party in the 2010 elections—and subsequent political attacks on unions, public employees, and women’s and gay rights—in turn energized progressives, who occupied the Wisconsin State Capitol building three months later and

the Wall Street area’s Zuccotti Park the following September. The Occupy movement captured the political imagination of America’s beleaguered middle class, spawning encampments in dozens of other American cities and shaking America’s plutocracy to its core. My new book, *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America* (Praeger 2012) presents an agenda of institutional and policy reform that can guide such movements and realize their aspirations for justice and sustainable prosperity.

When Mitt Romney selected the extremely conservative Paul Ryan as his running mate, many pundits thought he had blundered, since the shrinking demographic base for conservative Republicans would leave him vulnerable in a general election. But another political calculus favored his decision: Ryan would harness the party’s right wing base for Romney’s campaign and ensure a massive Republican voter turnout, while the collateral damage with moderate Republican and undecided voters could be managed, other things being equal, through a lavishly funded campaign of anti-Obama advertising. Note that such an advertising campaign says nothing psychohistorical about the electorate. It only says that people are influenced by the information to which they are exposed and that the rich—more influential than ever through super-PACs enabled by the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision—have aligned themselves with the country’s most psychologically backward elements.

If Romney loses on November 6, which seems likely at the time of this writing, it won’t be because this strategy was necessarily wrong. More likely it will be because of the personal limitations of the candidate himself and his top staff, combined with fortuitous events such as the expose of unguarded statements Romney made at a fundraiser revealing his contempt for nearly half the American people. Equally important, it will be because President Obama played his cards with consummate skill, turning the election from a referendum on the state of the economy to a referendum on plutocracy, or at least on the question whether a former Wall Street C.E.O. would be a better steward of the economy than a career public servant. But whatever happens on election day, the dead hand of state capitalism will still dominate American democracy and public policy. Changing that will take a sustained revolt of the middle class and grass roots leaders guided by an agenda of fundamental institutional and policy reform.

*Brian D’Agostino is the author of [The Middle Class Fights Back](#) and edits the IPA Newsletter; visit him at [www.bendag.com](http://www.bendag.com)*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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*Analysis, Psychobiography, Trauma: Personal, Collective and Reenactments, The Study of Historical Personality, Psychohistory of War, The World Financial Crisis, Group Psychohistory, The Psychohistorical Study of Film, Graduate Student Panel on Social Justice in the 21st Century, and The Rudolf Binion Memorial Panel.* Long time IPA member and prolific psychohistorian Howard F. Stein provided the Keynote address on the topic of "chosen traumas" in Jewish identity and history. Howard also provided guidance during our traditional group process sessions. Themes of loss and renewal appeared to be prominent in the group.

Dr. Brian Koehler of New York University, a psychologist with a specialty in neuroscience and psychoanalysis, followed Dr. Stein speaking on the impact of epigenetic findings on our current understandings of mental disorders and human behavior in general and outlined implications for cultural and psychohistorical analysis through his concept of the "social epigenome."

Our third speaker of the morning Psychohistorical pioneer Dr. Charles Strozier, Professor of History, John Jay College and the Graduate Center, CUNY and Director of the Center on Terrorism, John Jay College applied research findings on cultic psychology to aid in his analysis of modern forms of state violence. His work provided an interesting and unique view on how social violence has evolved from interpersonal to more collective/systemic forms throughout modern history.

Our afternoon panel began with Dr. Susan Anderson of New York University's Department of Psychology. Dr. Anderson has spent the majority of her academic career empirically investigating transference and its varying forms demonstrating the long-standing clinical concept of transference. In her presentation, Dr. Anderson extended her research into social forms of transference in which intergroup bias and social identity play a significant role in social perception highlighting the complex interplay of relational and collective levels of self.

Our opening day of papers was capped off by Dr. Theresa Aiello of New York University. Dr. Aiello is a psychoanalyst and professor in the Silver School of Social Work where she is the Director of the Advanced Certificate program in Child and Family Treatment. Dr.

Aiello's paper reviewed her recent study of children's verbal narratives and other enactments through the medium of play therapy regarding the events of 9/11. Psychohistorically, her work offered a unique perspective into how children have internalized this important, collective traumatic event and provides insight into the some of the ways in which traumas common to a group may come to affect identity.

One of the more exciting panels was presented by graduate students who took on the task of exploring unspoken undercurrents in social policy development resulting in paradoxical or unintended consequences in implementation. Isabel Jay started the panel with a comparison of psychogenic forms of autism, caused by clear forms of early neglect such as post-partum depression or maternal substance abuse and the DSM-IV label of reactive attachment disorder, inhibited subtype advocating relational forms of treatment over applied behavioral and psychopharmacological forms currently recommended by government policies. Abigail Klein followed with a historical analysis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder highlighting developmental, social, clinical and policy implications. Darlene Jervis analyzed New York City's policy of finger printing food stamp recipients situating the policy within a larger historical tendency to criminalize the poor. Kim Gershon looked at values based prejudices impacting the development of the Stop Aids in Prison Act thwarting the evidenced based HIV prevention interventions leaving the program largely ineffective. Heather Ascher explored the paradoxical impact of public/education policy on influencing parents and professionals to seek the benefits of an autistic diagnosis in borderline cases. Lastly Sasha Hare used the psychology of scapegoating and diffusion of responsibility to analyze the hijacking of Michigan's Matt's Safe School Law by religious conservatives whom included a provision allowing harassment of students if it is motivated by deeply held religious or moral values. The material and presentations were brilliant. The student panel was a tremendous success and we hope to be able to provide students the same opportunity for IPA 2013 and beyond. IPA members with students interested in sitting on the panel should forward the student call for papers to those interested or contact the conference chair directly. Providing this unique opportunity to present their original research is an invaluable experience for young scholars. Their encouragement must be one of our primary tasks as stewards of the field.

IPA was able to secure space at New York University through a new co-sponsorship with the School of Social

Work. Our affiliation with NYU allowed for considerable savings on the use of the Kimmel Center, whose location, reputation and quality makes it a far superior choice to comparably priced options. We've secured space at the Kimmel Center for IPA 2013 again on the 9th floor with a similar co-sponsorship. We hope this mutually beneficial relationship with NYU proves to be longstanding and provides a consistent location for IPA conventions for years to come. A call for papers can be found within these pages.

Taking the reins of IPA in the Summer of 2011 has been a tremendous honor and privilege. The agenda for my tenure as President has been focused on several general areas. These include increasing membership with a focus on introducing younger scholars to the joys of our field, facilitating communication intra-IPA (members to members, members to leadership), establishing a university affiliation to provide a home for our yearly convention, re-evaluating and updating IPA's bylaws and maintaining IPA's financial solvency.

IPA was established over 35 years ago to provide a home for scholars interested in the field of Psychohistory. Psychohistory, by its nature an interdisciplinary endeavor, has relied on IPA as its organizing body to establish the camaraderie vital for the creation of a foundational body of literature. The popularity of interdisciplinary research has waxed and waned over the years and we find ourselves in period of intense specialization throughout most of higher education. The existence of IPA, and its role in providing a home for scholars daring enough to cross interdisciplinary boundaries in search of "why," is as important today as it was all those years ago. The survival of psychohistory as an independent field is tied to the survival of IPA and the few remaining similar groups. The success of IPA has always been dependent upon member's volunteer efforts. Increasing member involvement by facilitating open communication between IPA members and leadership has become one of the top priorities of the IPA board. IPA Vice President Joe Reilly and Secretary Henry Lawton have taken on the long overdue task of creating an email database of IPA members. Such a database should prove much more efficient in distributing vital member information as well as eliciting feedback from members on important IPA agenda items. Our current communication tool, the Psychohistory News has been underutilized in recent years. Brian D'Agostino has taken on the editorial duties of IPA's newsletter revamping the format and bringing renewed energy to the task. IPA members are encouraged to contact Brian

with news items, short articles and personal achievements that he can include in the publication.

The board is exploring a number of other potential changes in the near future. International Vice President Christian Lackner is in the initial stages of planning a European meeting to focus solely on the current state of international psychohistory. IPA is exploring the possibility of attaining 501 (c)3 status with the benefit of tax deductible charitable giving and ability to secure private foundation grants to support research projects. The board is also discussing the potential overhaul of our website to become a communication hub for IPA members, but also draw interested outside parties and house an online publication for IPA convention papers which have not been accepted for publication elsewhere. IPA members can expect to receive a survey, via email to provide feedback on many of the initiatives highlighted above. This feedback will be critical in the board's decisions regarding all future action and direction of IPA. IPA Board meeting minutes will be posted for members to view on IPA's website at [www.psychohistory.us](http://www.psychohistory.us).

In our first 35 years, IPA has helped to establish a robust and fertile foundation for the field of psychohistory; so firm in fact that it has started to seep into mainstream cultural and historical analysis. From historian's acceptance of emotion, importance of historical personality and group process in history to John Stewart on his program "The Daily Show" using the term group fantasy while delivering his satirical analysis of the mistruths spoken at the Republican national convention, we can see a slow integration of psychohistorical work into a larger group consciousness. With the current state of political discourse across the globe and ever spreading technological and systemic violence, this integration cannot happen soon enough. IPA members must increase their involvement by joining us at our meetings, engaging in and publishing psychohistorical research, volunteering within IPA and sharing our work and organization with colleagues across all disciplines with the goal of increasing our numbers and ultimately awareness of our work. IPA members expressed a sense of renewal in group process meetings regarding the future of IPA. We must be the renewal potentiated.

Warmest Regards,

Denis J. O'Keefe, IPA President  
[dokeefe.frc@verizon.net](mailto:dokeefe.frc@verizon.net)

## MEMBER NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

(Please send your news and announcements to Brian D'Agostino, [bdagostino@verizon.net](mailto:bdagostino@verizon.net))

- Henry Lawton is currently doing long-term research on Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Mormons. Psychohistorical scholarship on this topic is in its infancy. He would be happy to hear from anyone interested in this subject at [hwlipa@gmail.com](mailto:hwlipa@gmail.com)
- Brian D'Agostino recently published *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America* (Praeger 2012). The book analyzes American state capitalism and outlines policy and institutional reforms that can create sustainable prosperity for ordinary people, at home and abroad. The author is looking for speaking opportunities. For more information about the book, visit [www.bendag.com](http://www.bendag.com). A discount for IPA members is available. Contact Brian at [bdagostino@verizon.net](mailto:bdagostino@verizon.net)
- If you receive this newsletter in hard copy and are willing to receive future issues electronically to save paper and expense, please indicate that in an email to Brian D'Agostino at [bdagostino@verizon.net](mailto:bdagostino@verizon.net)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

**36th Annual IPA Convention  
New York University, New York  
June 5-7, 2013**

Dear Colleague,

The International Psychohistorical Association is currently accepting papers for its 2013 annual conference to be held June 5-7 in New York City at New York University. For 36 years the IPA has brought together scholars from diverse backgrounds for 3 days of stimulating psychohistorical discourse. Year after year the cross fertilization of so many fields has provided for incredible insights into historical motivations; the “why’s” of social movements past and present.

Interested scholars are invited to submit your proposed presentation title and brief abstract for possible inclusion in the IPA 2013 program. Papers are expected to be psychohistorical in focus utilizing primarily, but not exclusively psychological/psychoanalytic principles in examining historical motivation among individuals and/or groups. Typical presentations are 40 minutes in length which includes 10 minutes for discussion.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Description: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please send your title and a description of your work to Denis O’Keefe at [djo212@nyu.edu](mailto:djo212@nyu.edu) or mail to:  
The Family Resource Center  
215 Main Street  
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