

15. The College in the Tire Factory

The people of Northside had gone to battle for a fire station. In the South Bronx, a neighborhood racked by fire, they fought instead for a college.

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College of the City University of New York was hardly a grand structure—nothing at all like any of the classical limestone buildings that formed the imposing quadrangle of Columbia University at 116th Street. Instead, the school was housed in an abandoned tire factory in the South Bronx. The school administration had scrambled to ready the building, located at the corner of 149th Street and Grand Concourse, in time for the first Hostos classes in the fall of 1970. The school had no blackboards or chalk, and what was supposed to serve as the library had no books. “We walked into school the first day and saw what we had—a renovated factory,” one student told the *New York Times*.¹

Hostos was an unusual educational experiment. The two-year community college was expressly designed for a bilingual population, offering classes in Spanish and English. The students were hardly a conventional group, including many single mothers, older students, Vietnam veterans, former inmates, and students struggling with addiction.² Many faculty members were on the left politically, committed to

teaching a working-class Puerto Rican, Dominican, and African American population.³ One of its goals was to train students for careers in the health professions; it also sought to provide the potential for a path to the four-year senior colleges of the CUNY system. Beyond those educational ambitions, Hostos served as a community center that offered free dental services, helped people prepare income tax returns, and hosted Latino theater, opera, choir groups, and local meetings. Its location in a space created by capital flight seemed, in a way, appropriate: it represented the possibility that the neighborhood's devastation could be turned in a hopeful direction. From its earliest days, people saw Hostos as a rare example of city investment in the South Bronx. As one professor put it, "Hostos was like an oasis, it was like a chance to start over again."⁴

Protest and political agitation marked the school from its earliest days. During its first year, Hostos students led a boycott and sit-in to demand more black and Puerto Rican faculty, the creation of a student council, the establishment of black and Puerto Rican cultural studies centers, better facilities, and improved access to reading materials—books for the library, for starters.⁵ The students also wanted to fly black liberation and Puerto Rican flags atop the building. The college president, a doctor from Lincoln Hospital, agreed to do so, though he noted that by law the American flag had to fly higher than the rest.⁶ In the autumn of 1975, the fiscal crisis threw both CUNY and Hostos into turmoil. The founding premise of CUNY—free tuition—came under threat, as the city's fiscal overseers called upon it to make the students pay. And as that struggle progressed, it became an open question whether Hostos would continue to exist at all. The people who had welcomed the school into their neighborhood only a few years earlier suddenly had to confront the possibility that soon it might no longer be there.

The City University of New York dated back to 1847, when the president of the city's Board of Education, an autodidact named Townsend Harris, pressed the state legislature to fund a "Free Academy" that would be open to all qualified applicants in the city regardless of their financial

status. "Open the doors to all—let the children of the rich and the poor take their seats together, and know of no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect," he wrote in a letter explaining his proposal.⁷ Originally located at 23rd Street and Lexington Avenue, the Free Academy moved up to 138th Street in 1866, when it was renamed the College of the City of New York. It expanded early in the twentieth century to include Hunter, a women's college that was originally intended to train high school teachers, and eventually Brooklyn and Queens Colleges as well. The system grew again in the postwar years, driven by the GI Bill and by increased interest in higher education as a means of creating a skilled workforce. In addition to the four-year senior colleges, during the 1950s and early 1960s the city opened several two-year community colleges; more schools, both two- and four-year, would be added in the late 1960s to create a network spanning all five boroughs. In 1961, Nelson Rockefeller authorized the creation of a Graduate Center, with the ability to confer doctoral degrees, so that the system truly became the City University of New York.⁸

For most of the postwar period, any full-time student at the municipal colleges could obtain a bachelor's degree free of charge. The view of higher education as a right that could be claimed by any New York resident was among the most striking aspects of the city's social policy. It articulated a conception of citizenship that was much more expansive than any to be found at the national level. CUNY was at once utilitarian and utopian, a means to upward mobility as well as an extension of the promise of intellectual life for all, regardless of their ability to pay. Its distinctiveness was precisely what led the city's critics, including President Ford, to focus on CUNY as a symbol of the city's excessive generosity overall. That CUNY was free was key to its identity; charging tuition would thus be a way for the city to demonstrate that things had fundamentally changed.

To be sure, the popular notion of a "free" CUNY was somewhat oversimplified. Students did have to pay library and laboratory fees, and graduate students and part-time undergraduates had to pay "instructional fees," which were tantamount to tuition and which generated a substantial amount of income for the university.⁹ The city and state had

tussled over whether CUNY should start charging tuition and just offer tuition aid to the poorest students—who often had to attend part-time and were thus already paying instructional fees.¹⁰ And in the early 1970s, the situation of CUNY became especially complicated because of a new “open admissions” policy. Adopted following student protests at City College about the small proportion of black and Latino students at the four-year schools, the policy guaranteed placement in one of the system’s colleges to every high school graduate in the city.

Many older professors saw open admissions as a threat to the educational quality of their institution and their status. They worried that the new students would dilute the caliber of a student body that had been made up of well-prepared students, many from the premier schools in the system. On the other hand, the more politically radical teachers saw open admissions as a way to fulfill the deepest promise of an urban university by including minorities not previously served. As the poet Adrienne Rich wrote in an essay about teaching literature to underprivileged students at City College, she chose to do so because of “a need to involve myself with the real life of the city . . . to ally myself, in some concrete, practical, if limited way, with the possibilities” of the multicultural metropolis.¹¹ The shortage of resources available to pay for the growth of CUNY after the adoption of open admissions was a further grievance. With the new policy in effect, student enrollment grew dramatically, from 118,000 in 1969–70 to 212,000 in 1974–75, straining both the faculty and the physical capacity of the schools.¹² In 1970, the first year after open admissions began, teachers held classes in coat rooms, copy centers, an indoor ice-skating rink, a bingo hall, and a synagogue. One campus president set up his office in a trailer.¹³ Even before the fiscal crisis, CUNY was split, stressed, and uncertain about the future.

In the fall of 1974, the city announced that by the following year CUNY had to cut its budget by nearly 9 percent. The faculty immediately began to protest the cuts, holding teach-ins on the budget crisis and warning students about the “wholesale firing of adjuncts.”¹⁴ Some teachers framed the directive as an effort to turn back the “grand victory of Open Admissions,” only five years old.¹⁵ “We must not panic and we must remain cohesive,” read one letter from the union representing

CUNY faculty and staff, the Professional Staff Congress. "The easiest course of action in any unusual situation is to turn against each other as a means of self-defense. We must NOT become cannibalistic and we must work toward our mutual goal of maintaining the integrity of the total educational process at this college."¹⁶

Even with the announcement of the budget cuts, though, there was at first little appetite in the city for ending free tuition, long regarded as a bedrock of New York's liberalism. When Hugh Carey was campaigning for governor in the fall of 1974, he reiterated his support. "I will do all in my power, whether I become Governor or not, to preserve free tuition at the City University," he wrote to the chairperson of the University Student Senate. "I believe that the state, not the students, must bear the burden of financing higher education in these days of inflation and higher costs."¹⁷

Soon, all that would change.

In October 1975 the president of City College, Robert Marshak, issued a report proposing the "restructuring" of CUNY. To lower costs while creating "a diverse, lean, responsive, urban, public institution of the highest quality," Marshak envisioned keeping only two of the existing eight community colleges, merging the others into the four-year senior colleges, and also merging some senior colleges with each other to create research-driven "university centers."¹⁸ Hostos was among the community colleges that Marshak proposed to eliminate.¹⁹

Although intended as an alternative to across-the-board cuts, Marshak's proposal implicitly suggested that closing campuses such as Hostos might also be a way of preserving the quality of CUNY, which some already saw as compromised by open admissions. One adviser of Marshak's had written him an anguished letter in the summer of 1975, complaining that coming budget cuts would mean killing graduate programs (and "whatever hope there is that research would be one of our missions") or else laying off tenured faculty, which would lead to a drop in morale so severe that the university system would never recover.²⁰ Marshak himself suggested that his plan to rationalize the campuses

and fold programs into each other might make it easier to persuade the state to increase its support for CUNY—that closing some campuses could mean more funding for the school overall. But this underestimated what the local colleges meant to their communities—for instance, what Hostos meant to the South Bronx.

Students and faculty at the South Bronx institution were well prepared to defend the school. The previous year, they had organized a successful campaign to win more space for Hostos, adding another abandoned building to the original repurposed tire factory. When news began to circulate that the very existence of Hostos might be threatened by the fiscal crisis, campus activists who had participated in the drive for the new building were poised and ready. In November 1975, the Hostos faculty senate moved to create a Save Hostos Committee to “mobilize the forces of the students, faculty, staff and community.” They sought to guarantee that the school would survive as a “separate entity,” not be closed or “absorbed into any other institution.”²¹

The SHC—which was chaired by Gerald Meyer, a historian of New York City politics who was also the chapter chair for the Professional Staff Congress, the staff and faculty union—consisted of various subcommittees, including ones for letter-writing, petitioning, voter registration, and community outreach. As the SHC became active, letters from Hostos professors began to appear in the *New York Post*, the *Daily News*, and eventually the *New York Times*.²² Congressman Charles Rangel pledged his support for the school, and a group of Latino state politicians wrote a letter to the Board of Higher Education: “No budget crisis can ignore the devastating impact which the closing of this college would have on the Puerto Rican population which has received the least services from the public education system of this city.”²³ Even the head of the Manhattan/Bronx division of Bankers Trust wrote to the CUNY chancellor to express his hope that the “imminent state of crisis” facing New York would not mean the “complete abandonment” of Hostos.²⁴

In addition to the Save Hostos Committee, a separate, more overtly radical group, the largely Puerto Rican Community Coalition to Save Hostos, also sprang up. Ramón Jiménez, a young Harvard-trained lawyer teaching courses on law and sociology at Hostos, helped get it

started. An activist since his teenage years, Jiménez was highly involved with left Puerto Rican circles in New York, although he was far more concerned with the conditions of his community in the Bronx than with political independence for the island commonwealth. Thanks to his participation, the Community Coalition had useful connections with local groups such as United Bronx Parents, an organization focused on improving public schools, as well as with St. Ann's Church of Morristania, whose progressive reverend was friendly with Bishop Paul Moore. In contrast to the Save Hostos Committee, which emphasized lobbying the City Council and other politicians, the leaders of the Community Coalition argued that the only way to successfully pressure the city was to target the banks. As one flyer put it, "the banks, through 'Big MAC,' are responsible for all the cutbacks which threaten to close all the services that our community needs." The group held a late November demonstration at Chase Manhattan Bank: "Join your neighbors in the struggle to protect our right to a better life."²⁵

But the organizing made no difference. In February 1976, CUNY Chancellor Robert Kibbee announced a plan to remake CUNY largely in line with Marshak's initial proposal. Hostos would be shuttered. So would John Jay College, a school created to train people for jobs in the criminal justice system, which catered particularly to students from the city's police force. Two more schools—Medgar Evers, located in Brooklyn's Crown Heights, and York College, in Jamaica, Queens, both with overwhelmingly black student enrollments—were to be converted from four-year to two-year schools. New York City Community College would cease to offer any liberal arts curriculum, instead becoming a technical school.²⁶

Protests broke out immediately. It seemed hardly accidental that three of the four schools slated for closure and cutback were schools that served mostly nonwhite populations. Medgar Evers faculty members described the plan to reduce their college to a two-year school as "blatantly racist."²⁷ Many suspected it was the first step toward closing the school altogether. "Those who control the purse strings don't give a damn" about the city's working poor, said one professor involved with the Student-Faculty Coalition to Save Medgar Evers College.²⁸ The president of York College called for an "all-out war" on the reorganization

plan.²⁹ One police officer studying at John Jay wrote an op-ed for the *Times* arguing that a school focused on civil servants was especially important given the new demands to restructure services in the fiscal crisis.³⁰ New York City Community College promised a campaign of “massive resistance” to this “latest attempt to destroy the City University of New York.”³¹ More than three thousand people came to a demonstration against the restructuring, at which angry students hanged the CUNY chancellor and chair of the Board of Higher Education in effigy.³² One state senator from the Bronx lamented that his vote to “save” the city had been a mistake, since in practice this had meant bailing out the banks but letting the people drown. “If I could vote again, my vote would be for default.”³³

For young people just arriving at the university, the moment felt politically alive: their schools were poised for upheaval. There was profound skepticism about the city’s claims: it didn’t seem plausible that a city with New York’s wealth could really be out of money. With the right priorities, students insisted, it would be possible to make different decisions. “People were like, Oh yeah? You’re going to take this away from us? Well, we’re going to fight for it,” one student recalled.³⁴

Nowhere was the protest more intense than at Hostos, where the organizing efforts engaged many students and professors. Students insisted that Hostos was the only place they could imagine going to school—because of the welcoming atmosphere and the Spanish-language instruction that made it possible for them to earn a college degree. “They seem to be saying that the students will have to pay for a mistake made by the bigwigs who didn’t know how to keep a budget,” one student, a former bank security guard, told the *New York Times*.³⁵ The chair of the Social Sciences Department at the school penned a furious letter to John Zuccotti: “Why close the only college in the economically depressed area of the South Bronx?”³⁶ In a subsequent letter, he wrote that the creation of Hostos had been a major victory for the people of the South Bronx and Harlem. “When their interests are so callously cast aside, the city loses, and our precious democracy and equality become empty symbols. Our future lies in opening such colleges, not closing them.”³⁷

Over the winter, students and faculty collected 8,000 signatures in the Bronx on a petition to save the school.³⁸ Activists tallied and publicized the number of Hostos students in the district of each city legislator.³⁹ Stephen Berger at the Emergency Financial Control Board noted that he had received four hundred letters in support of Hostos, while one state senator wrote that "the mail on Hostos is so heavy that it is impossible to answer each letter personally."⁴⁰

Still, there was no clear sign of progress, and increasingly frustrated students and faculty opted for more aggressive tactics. Their first step was to block traffic on the Grand Concourse—the major road that ran through the Bronx and past Hostos—using classroom chairs dragged out into the street. One faculty member recalls fire trucks coming and threatening to hose the protesters, who had set up their chairs at an intersection and were blocking traffic in all directions while holding "classes" in the street.⁴¹ In the end, the trucks moved on.

The success of that action proved an inspiration. Early in the morning of March 25, a small group of students and professors arrived at the Hostos building. Using locks and long chains, they closed the gates to limit access to the school, so that people could only come and go through the main entrance guarded by student leaders. The protesters seized the keys from custodial staff and used filing cabinets and desks to barricade the exits. They removed mouthpieces from the phones. Their message was clear: the school—their school—was now in their possession.

The organizers' initial idea was that they would keep classes running and the school in order while the sit-in was going on. "This cannot be construed as a lockout," wrote two student leaders, because "professors would come in and teach their students."⁴² Women set up a child care center in the college president's office. A core group slept in the school each night.⁴³ People from the student government provided security, watching from the roofs to make sure the police were not massing to arrest those inside.⁴⁴ Activists from the People's Firehouse came to visit.⁴⁵ One day neighborhood parents brought more than five hundred children to encircle the school, chanting: "Save Hostos, we too want to go to college!"⁴⁶

The spirit of rebellion went beyond just keeping the school open and

running. The occupiers screened films such as *Black Power*, and held teach-ins on the fiscal crisis for the broader community. They began to talk not only of saving the school but transforming it, kicking out the current president (described as a "traitor") and bringing in a new and more radical administration that would topple all manner of academic hierarchies.⁴⁷ "We, the different student, worker, and community organizations have seized our college and fired the incompetent, corrupt administration," read one open letter written shortly after the occupation began. "There has never been a takeover like this one."⁴⁸ For his part, Cándido de León, the college president, returned the paychecks of faculty members who were participating in the shutdown to Comptroller Goldin, saying he thought there was no legal basis for paying the very people who were preventing the school from functioning.⁴⁹

De León was not alone in objecting to the takeover of the school by the protesters. At a college-wide faculty meeting, professors criticized the occupation for disrupting classes, and the group voted in favor of a resolution to clear the building "using force if necessary."⁵⁰ The relationship between the Community Coalition to Save Hostos, focused on direct action, and the Save Hostos Committee, with its emphasis on lobbying elected officials, grew strained.⁵¹

On April 4, the Board of Higher Education voted (over the objection of its one African American and two Puerto Rican members) to merge Hostos with Bronx Community College. Meanwhile, the college administration obtained a court injunction against the occupation of the school. On April 12, police entered the building and arrested forty protesters. Several hundred people gathered outside the school while the arrests were happening, and marched to the police precinct following the students and faculty who had been arrested.⁵² The handcuffed protesters made for some dramatic photographs on the cover of the *Daily News*—Jiménez tried to keep his mother from seeing the paper that day, knowing she would be miserable to find her Ivy League-educated son in handcuffs—but all the charges were eventually dropped.

The occupation left the organizers exhausted and the Hostos faculty riven by internal dissent. Still, efforts to save the school continued through the spring. In early May, the Community Coalition to Save

Hostos organized a mass protest targeting the Emergency Financial Control Board. (One flyer for the rally featured mug shots of the members of the EFCB, along with text reading: "We Accuse the Members of the Emergency Financial Control Board of CRIMES against the COMMUNITY!")⁵³ A large, mostly Latino crowd marched several miles down to the EFCB offices, with fifty people carrying a block-long Puerto Rican flag. "Unless we stop the Emergency Financial Control Board, Hostos College, open admissions and free tuition will not be available to the vast majority of Latins, Blacks and working people," a flyer read.⁵⁴ As one eighteen-year-old student put it, "Losing Hostos would be like somebody burning down your house."⁵⁵

While the fight over closing the Hostos campus continued in the Bronx, the entire CUNY system was falling apart. With the state refusing to extend further funding to the school as long as tuition remained free, the university was running out of money.

CUNY's leadership tried to postpone the inevitable. In mid-April 1976, Chancellor Kibbee announced that he was going to stop submitting receipts from vendors for payment so he could conserve money to pay faculty and staff.⁵⁶ He also suggested that he might defer paying two weeks of teachers' salaries for two years. Upset faculty members filed simultaneous lawsuits against the school and the CUNY staff union, saying that the threatened wage deferral was equivalent to robbery, a unilateral pay cut by other means.⁵⁷

These plans were obviously short-term measures. From Albany, Governor Carey offered his preferred long-term solution: reversing his support for free tuition, he called for the Board of Higher Education to charge students to attend the school. If the board refused, he said, he would not grant CUNY any increase in state aid. The school would simply have to spend down its funds until it could no longer operate. The university system was in a bind: without charging tuition it could not get state aid, and without state aid it could not function.

There was an immediate outcry—a protest march of one thousand City College students, a three-day boycott of classes at City College, and

a short hunger strike by faculty there.⁵⁸ At the end of May, Sandra López Bird, a Puerto Rican member of the Board of Higher Education, submitted her resignation. She cited the closing of Hostos, "the only institution specifically oriented toward the needs of New York Hispanics," as well as her sense that the restructuring plans would keep them and black students in second-class institutions. The imposition of tuition was the final straw, a "death blow" to the "goals for which the City University was originally established."⁵⁹ Following Bird's departure, the chairman of the board and three other board members resigned as well, all of them saying that they could not support Carey's proposal to impose tuition. Governor Carey lashed out against them all, accusing them of being "unable to cope with the harsh realities of the fiscal crisis" and evading their responsibilities.⁶⁰

On May 29, just a few days after the resignations, CUNY reported that it did not have the money to cover its June payroll. The university shut down completely. It was the middle of exam period, many students had not yet completed their final tests, and none had gotten grades for the spring semester. Graduation ceremonies were canceled, as were summer programs.⁶¹ To some extent, the university was gambling that the state and city would blink—that they'd find the situation intolerable and come up with the money CUNY needed to operate. But the school was also simply unable to go on without funding.

Faculty and students responded to the shutdown in different ways. Some organized impromptu protests. At Manhattan Community College, students and professors set up tables in the street, collecting signatures on a petition urging Carey to bring funding back. "We need your help," one professor shouted. "There's no City University as of 4 o'clock today."⁶² Others argued that the CUNY staff union should insist that the university reopen immediately: the alternative was "default in what is owed to students who have completed a year's work."⁶³ Some tried to go on in whatever way they could; one physics professor held a final exam on the Staten Island Ferry. The union told the faculty not to report for work as long as there was no money to pay them, and denounced the city for its refusal to pay: it was "no less pardonable, legally or morally, for the city to default on its payments to its workers than it is to default

on its payments to its creditors.”⁶⁴ Hundreds of faculty members applied for unemployment insurance, begging for extensions on phone bills and rent.⁶⁵ Some students, making light of their derailed plans, gathered at local bars to jokingly toast the shutdown—“No more exams!”⁶⁶

The closure of the school wore away support for free tuition. As the *Times* editorial page put it, without tuition “the ax would fall, so heavily on so many departments and people that former staunch free-tuition supporters have rushed to accept tuition as the lesser evil.”⁶⁷ On June 1, the Board of Higher Education—with new members hastily installed to replace those who had resigned in protest—voted seven to one to start charging tuition at CUNY.⁶⁸ The lone dissenting vote came from Vinia R. Quinones, a Puerto Rican hospital administrator who was now the sole nonwhite member of the Board.⁶⁹

Once the BHE ruled in favor of tuition—which ranged from \$387 to \$462 per semester for city residents, the equivalent of about \$1,635 to \$1,950 today—Carey and the state legislature approved an infusion of fiscal aid for the school.⁷⁰ The money permitted it to reopen, but it was still not sufficient to fully resolve the financial crunch.⁷¹ Five thousand part-time and a thousand full-time CUNY employees were terminated—mostly counselors, higher education officers, nontenured lecturers, and tenure-track faculty. (Tenured faculty were threatened with layoffs as well, but in the end all of them kept their jobs, although ten people who had been promised tenure were let go.)⁷² The American Association of University Professors censured the Board of Higher Education, calling the mass layoffs “a cataclysmic event in American higher education.”⁷³ Class sizes rose as a result of the layoffs, climbing on average from twenty-five students per class to thirty, and in some cases rising as high as fifty or sixty per class.⁷⁴

The CUNY staff union did what it could to help people who were fired as a result of the crisis. It was able to get some people reinstated and insisted that senior faculty who had been laid off should be first in line to get their jobs back.⁷⁵ Two of the colleges that had originally planned to cut tenured lines—Brooklyn College and Queens College—eventually decided against doing so.⁷⁶ The union filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of members who had lost their jobs, and there was

some talk of forming a coalition to restore free tuition.⁷⁷ But nothing came of it.

The introduction of tuition at CUNY marked the beginning of a change in the financing of the city university overall. Tuition made up a significant new source of revenue: the payments contributed \$135.5 million, while the state gave \$170 million and the city contributed \$160.5 million. In 1979, the state would agree to take over paying the majority of the costs for the senior colleges—a significant expansion of state aid.⁷⁸ Politically, though, winning this aid had required giving up the principle of an inclusive, tuition-free college for all.

By the fall semester, the number of students in the entering freshman class at CUNY had declined by 17 percent, while the number of graduate students had fallen by a quarter.⁷⁹ The annual welcome-back letter from the chancellor to the faculty, usually an opportunity for boosting morale, instead sounded the notes of a dirge: "You have borne the major burden of last year's catastrophe."⁸⁰ Many students, too, felt that their school had been diminished. As one student told the *New York Times*, "Everyone I know is depressed or in despair. They feel so abandoned. There's no spirit any more."⁸¹

At Hostos, the events of the summer of 1976 were not all grim. The bill that provided money for CUNY once the Board of Higher Education agreed to charge tuition included \$3 million to "protect the unique educational needs of Spanish-speaking students at Hostos Community College in the South Bronx."⁸² The school would not be closed after all.

Those who had been involved in the mobilization to save Hostos took great pride in what they had accomplished. Many were acutely aware that they had been instrumental in rescuing the school. Organizing continued over the following two years, and some of the breaches that had opened during the spring of 1976 between radical students and the more moderate faculty were healed. The remaining members of the Community Coalition to Save Hostos joined with Meyer and other faculty activists who had participated in the Save Hostos Committee to work to win funding for the renovation of the new building that had

been purchased in 1974 so the school could finally move out of its sub-standard quarters.⁸³ Years later, Ramón Jiménez, the Community Coalition founder, recollected the impact the experience at Hostos had had on him: "It affected my political life all my life because I got to see that people could win, and sometimes you don't see that."⁸⁴

Yet even though Hostos had survived the plans to close it, the rescue came in the context of CUNY's broader transformation. Like other CUNY colleges, Hostos was forced to retrench. It closed its nursing department and reduced the number of full-time faculty from 170 to 100. Two professors who had been closely associated with the mobilization to save the school, including Ramón Jiménez, were among those who lost their jobs.⁸⁵ And like all the other CUNY students, those at Hostos had to start paying tuition, a significant burden for a working-class student population.

Throughout the city, the end of free college tuition was treated as a real loss. Although the city's establishment had been virtually unanimous about the need to charge tuition, once the change actually happened many felt nostalgic for the old model, which saw public universities as a way of extending both social mobility and democracy. The *New York Times* compared the soaring rhetoric that had marked the foundation of the school—"let the children of the rich and the poor take their seats together and know no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect"—with the sorry bureaucratic language that had ended free tuition due to "non-availability of funds." The arrival of tuition at CUNY seemed to be in keeping with national trends toward much more expensive college bills that would soon set higher education apart as the province of the elite.⁸⁶

One *Times* writer lamented that free tuition might soon be treated as a relic of an earlier era. It should, he suggested, rather be conceived of as an idea that was merely put aside for the moment due to difficult conditions. When times grew easier, it could be resurrected. It could become not just a memory from the past but the way of the future, "a sensible and realistic option for a more affluent, more confident and more generous day."⁸⁷

As it turned out, though, neither the city nor the country was moving in that direction.