



Image by Lisa Tang Liu

# We Are All America Special Issue

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- Erika Uytterhoeven on Free Speech, Fred Korematsu’s Legacy
- History of Birthright Citizenship
- ... and More!

# SAMPAN

The only bilingual Chinese-English Newspaper in New England



# 舢舨

全紐英倫區唯一的中英雙語雙週報

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ANALYSIS

## Citizens’ Role in Defending Rights on Display in Öztürk Rally

By Harmony Witte

“Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe.” This line was among the chants shouted by the thousands of people gathered in Somerville to support Tufts graduate student Rumeysa Öztürk in late March after she was abducted and set for deportation at the direction of the U.S. Secretary of State in what has by now become an international drama.

The call from the protesters may have been more than a simple rallying chant, however, and more likely one of the few strategies that citizens and politicians alike can employ to defend Constitutional and immigration rights, say lawyers, local lawmakers and activists.

“We need a number of things, but first and foremost, we need public pressure,” said Massachusetts State Rep. Erika

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## Northeastern Prof.: Better to Speak Out Now

As international students nationwide are facing deportation threats and canceled visas for their political activism, and universities are under pressure to prevent campus protests and end some diversity initiatives, some professors are taking a stand against the crackdowns and political influences.

Among those speaking out is Alexandra To, an assistant professor at Northeastern University, who cowrote an Op-Ed

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## Killin’ It: Nita Slay Raps About Language, Cambodian Ties and Religion

LOVE OF LYRICS:  
Singer and rapper Nita Slay, a.k.a. Soneta, at the Mission Hill Church. Photo by Adam Smith/  
[www.errorC1301.com](http://www.errorC1301.com)

By Ava Belchez

Nita Slay, a musician and rapper from Lynn, said she finds pride in the lyrics of “Cambodian Ties,” a song by Foule Monk in which she also sings.

In the song, Slay raps: “Cambodian ties / Cambodian in my skin / Breathing in this life / Rejuvenated skin / Cambodian gold / Cambodian sins / Breathing in this life to find the peace within.”

“It gives me another lane that I can use that no else can,” said Slay, who also goes by the name Soneta. “There’s no Cambodian singers in my

city that I know of.”

But for those who are out there, Slay said, she hopes they too share pride in the lyrics.

Nita Slay sings, raps, and plays piano and the drums. She says her style is influenced by Lauryn Hill, but growing up her main influences were Jazmine Sullivan, BJ The Chicago Kid, Rihanna, and Teyana Taylor. This blend of styles has created her unique sound, with notes of R&B, soul, hip hop, and rap.

But her most prominent inspiration growing up was English class — it

led to her lyricism that is rich with metaphors and word-play.

“I loved writing essays, I loved literature,” Slay said. “I get real clever with it. I like to refer to myself as a writer more than a rapper.”

She said her lyricism is represented best in her song “Style,” in which she sings, “I found myself wasting time / I didn’t know at the time / This hunger won’t save me / I’ve had to go get what’s mine / Take me for granted / You’ll just enable my shine / What I bring to the table / It don’t compare to

*Continues on Page 10*

## Opinion

# As Some See a Taller Chinatown With New Zoning, Let's Focus on Getting to the Right Heights

By Mingjia Chen

In the black box theater inside Chinatown's Josiah Quincy School last month, hundreds of people reached into their little gift bags and pulled out small bottles of soap. As Dr. Heang Leung Rubin led the room in a collective wish, her voice was gentle: "Close your eyes and imagine — what could Chinatown look like in ten years?"

Kids, young families, seniors, city officials and others all held their wishes in silence. Then, as bubbles filled the room, they caught the light, scattering tiny rainbows across the theater's black walls. It was a cozy Saturday afternoon and the Phillips Square Community Open House brought people together over food, performance, and shared ideas. The ongoing proposed rezoning of the neighborhood, however, felt like an elephant in the room at the open house. In the community, it certainly has sparked divided

visions and different imaginations of what Chinatown could become. Under the current proposed zoning changes, height increases in the mixed-use (MU-10) and residential (R-1) zones could drastically alter the neighborhood's character. Some saw opportunity with the heights, while others have already voiced worries about access to light, dark shadows, and stronger wind-tunnel effects, with building heights in these zones rising to 350 feet.

Beyond reshaping the neighborhood and further blurring Chinatown's boundaries with Downtown and the South End, abrupt height increases — without meaningful context — could lead to more real estate speculation, and potentially displace more.

Imagine a developer acquires a plot of land in the residential zone (R-1),

near Hudson St., next to the rowhouses. After rezoning, they can now build 15 floors of luxury housing instead of 8. Since each additional floor means more units to sell, the developer's income is directly tied to building height. This hypothetical new property generates more revenue, but none of it benefits the neighbors. Instead, with higher

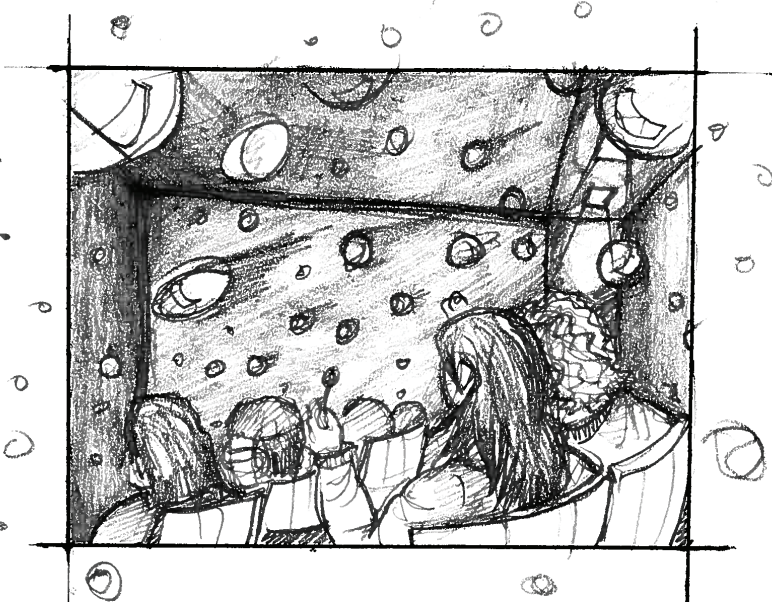


Image by Mingjia Chen

potential income, the developer may be willing to pay more for the land as long as they are making enough profit. This drives up land values.

Land in Chinatown is already expensive and scarce. Our fictional developer plans to build higher by providing the required "affordable" units, likely subsidized by the city. To offset construction costs and maintain a profitable income, the rest of the building consists of high-end market-rate housing at a much higher price, overlooking the row houses on the other side of Hudson St. With demand for luxury towers in Downtown Boston growing over the past decade, real estate speculation is almost inevitable.

This has happened to other high-end towers in Downtown. Like in 2016, when a Chinese investor purchased

16 units in the Millennium Tower on Franklin St. Similarly, in Back Bay, the One Dalton Tower has drawn wealthy part-time residents locally and internationally.

In that sense, little of the benefit will actually make its way back to the community, even with the proposed affordable housing overlay requirements. As land prices go up, it becomes even more challenging for non-profit developers to build affordable housing projects. Without prioritizing people over profit, the question will always be "who will be able to live in Chinatown?" and not "what do people need to stay here?"

The relationship between building height, land value, density and wealth is complex and calls for more careful considerations. The late Tunney Lee, a longtime friend of Chinatown and a visionary planner, foresaw this issue years ago while working on the Density Atlas: "Height in itself is not density. A tall building is not necessarily dense. It may cover only a small portion of the site, or it may have very few residents."

In response to community groups' planned affordability rally on March 18, the City of Boston postponed its rezoning update to take more time and reconsider some of the requirements. This delay offers a chance to better respond to Chinatown's context and the different voices.

The community has already voiced a range of different opinions on new height limits. Some propose keeping it between 150 feet to 200 feet with the affordable housing overlay, others suggest a 80-foot cap, while some want the two sub-districts to go even higher. The question remains: How can rezoning

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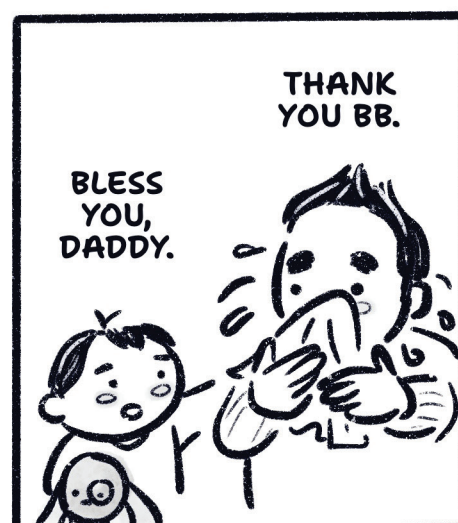
create stability and deeper affordability, rather than fueling more speculation?

Increasing height alone does not guarantee affordability, and density alone does not ensure inclusivity. We have seen the power of community organizing before. Residents and activists in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury successfully pushed the city to take deeper affordability seriously and respond to context through extensive model studies for Plan JP/Rox. The affordable housing overlay is an important pilot that could bring promising changes, not just to Chinatown, but to other Boston neighborhoods as well. It is important to get it right.

Chen is a graduate student at MIT School of Architecture and Planning. Chen's part is at: [sampan.org/2025/boston/zoning-plan-to-boost-affordable-units-will-still-price-out-many/](http://sampan.org/2025/boston/zoning-plan-to-boost-affordable-units-will-still-price-out-many/)

## EMPTY BAMBOO GIRL 竹升女

by Lillian Lee



*\*We Are All America\**

# Double Exposure

*Photographer Lisa Tang Liu explores what it means to be American*

By Adam Smith

Photographer Lisa Tang Liu made a career out of taking other people's portraits. But she was never interested in taking her own photo — not even selfies on her phone.

Then Covid hit, and some old, bad feelings from her childhood began to return.

Having grown up in a predominantly white suburb in New Jersey as a child, she said, she felt “a sense of shame” for being Chinese. She wanted those around her to embrace that she was as American as anyone else, and to stop asking questions like where she was really from.

“And I think that sense of shame came back very much — like very hard — during Covid.”

At the time, Pres. Donald Trump, during his first term, called the respiratory disease “the Kung flu.” Conspiracy theories were spreading as quickly as the virus, and attacks against Asian Americans were on the rise and in the news.

All this made Tang Liu — now a mother with her own children — want to hide from the public — not necessarily for fear of getting sick, but for fear of becoming a target of others' anti-Asian racism.

So, she turned to her art. She picked up her film cameras and began experimenting. Only, this time she was not taking the wedding photos that she had built a second career on after leaving the corporate world decades ago. She was exploring a novel subject: herself.

“I started making these self portraits, because I was kind of hiding during Covid; I didn't want to show my face,” she said. “And, afterward, I was like, ‘You know what? This is just stupid.’ So I started making self portraits.”

She's since created a portfolio of conceptual images of herself that are both personal and universal to the Asian American — and even immigrant — experience. Most make use of cyanotype — or sun printing. Nine of the works are now on display at the Danforth Museum in Framingham for the “Selfhood” exhibit that includes images by several artists who explore identity — and, as the museum states, “voices that have historically been threatened, silenced, and hidden.” The show runs through June 8.

For Tang Liu, this was an opportunity to declare she is American — and to confront her own feelings.

“I just wanted to express my own frustration,” she said. “I am hoping that people would see my face against the American flag and, like, normalize the idea that there are Americans, plenty of Americans out there, with Asian faces.”

The artist came to the U.S. at age nine,



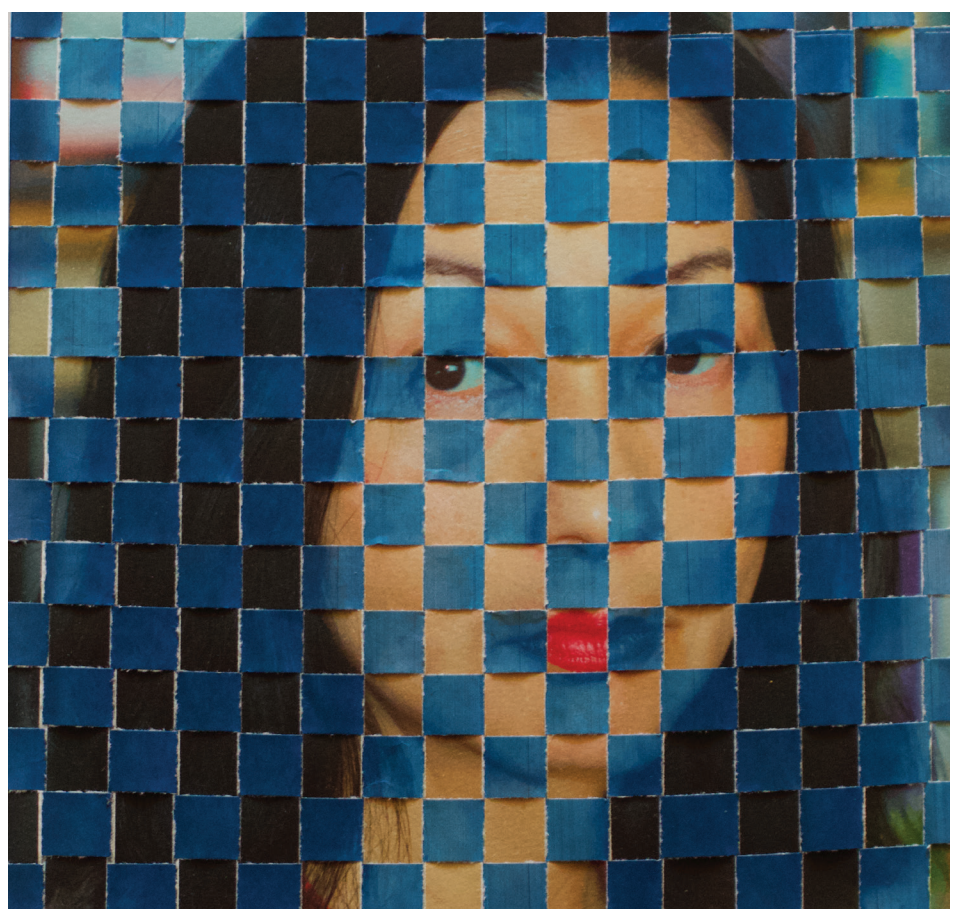
**SENSE OF SELF: Works by Lisa Tang Liu on display at Danforth Art Museum.**

and got her citizenship at 15. “Ever since I was a kid I have been thinking about how what being American means,” says Tang Liu. “I wanted to be ... American.”

Several of her works blend red, white and blue colors with images of her face and sometimes other symbolism like the American flag or Chinese characters. Some are monochrome, and black and white photos and photo composites. The work, “Analog Girl in a Digital World,” takes strips of cyanotype print and ink-jet print and weaves them together to form an interpretive portrait that upon a first glance is vaguely reminiscent of the Mona Lisa. “Facing a New Era” is a double-exposure of a profile view of Tang Liu over the American flag and uses cyanotype and watercolor paper.

Though she was interested in art from

*Continues Next Page*



*\*We Are All America\***Interview  
With Lisa  
Tang Liu**Continued From Last Page*

a young age, Tang Liu said she wasn't permitted to major in the subject in college so entered the "corporate world" after concentrating in computer science at Wellesley College. For a while she worked in information technology at startups and then for a couple years at a large investment bank in Tokyo. But following 9/11 and the dot-com bubble bust just prior, she pursued wedding photography.

Married to the science fiction and fantasy author Ken Liu, she has two daughters. She eventually studied at the New England School of Photography in the early 2000s and recently began seriously showing her art. She was selected for the 28th annual Exposure show at the Photographic Resource Center, exhibited at Panopticon Gallery and at various places in Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, Arizona and Texas.

But the questioning of her identity would reoccur over the years throughout her life, even when abroad — revealing just how much the world itself has internalized the stereotype of what is a typical American. While an exchange student in Japan when she was younger, Tang Liu recalls, her Americanness was questioned.

"We went as a group to visit an elementary school in Kyoto. And it was funny because the kids, looked at me very confused, like, 'Is she an American?'"

Over the years she considered how the center of this identity question was one of belonging.

"All my life, I've been trying to assimilate, right? I mean, how do you feel like you belong somewhere? I think this, there's a more universal level to belonging, and not just, you know, limited to immigrants alone, but I think you feel it much more as an immigrant."

Tang Liu said she feels Asian Americans, especially in her experience Chinese Americans, tend to avoid discussing uncomfortable topics, such as those which she confronts in her images in "Selfhood." But, she suggested, failure to speak out could have real consequences.

"I feel like they just don't really want to talk about it," she said. "They just want to say, 'OK, we assimilate, and we're part of American society. But I feel like that acceptance — to really be accepted as American — is kind of precarious when there are political events that happen that may accentuate your ethnic background. So, for instance, I feel that we're actually not immune to, say, an internment camp, if there's, God forbid, ever a war with China. I feel like, especially with this administration, it could happen again."

*Lisa Tang Liu will attend an artist panel on April 27 at 3 p.m. at the Danforth Art Museum.*

*...And Justice**State Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven Discusses Activist Fred**By Adam Smith*

The day before the *Sampan* had a scheduled interview with State Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven, her district was suddenly under an international spotlight. Thousands of people had come out to rally in the city of Somerville, part of Massachusetts' 27th Middlesex District, for Rumeysa Öztürk. Öztürk is the Tufts University doctoral student who was detained by the Department of Homeland Security and was set for deportation back to Turkey — apparently, because she co-wrote an Op-Ed in her university newspaper a year ago that called for divestment from Israel.

During *Sampan's* conversation with Uyterhoeven, she had a lot to say about Öztürk's detention and how the raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have focused on students who've spoken out for Palestine and engaged in other political activism, including for Ukraine. She also said she sees parallels between the current crackdowns to what happened to Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II.

That dark chapter of U.S. history is close to Uyterhoeven, a Japanese American who's advocated around the legacy of activist Fred Korematsu.

"His story needs to be told and taught in history books, because we don't want to repeat history," she said of Korematsu, who was arrested for defying his incarceration in the 1940s. "At like 20-something-years old, he effectively stood up to his government ... and said, 'I'm not gonna go; I didn't do anything wrong. I'm a law-abiding American citizen. I'm staying here,'" said Uyterhoeven.

Other issues Uyterhoeven tackled during the interview were ongoing in her district and the state, such as the high cost of living. She also expressed concern over the "dismantling" of federal departments for education and health and human services.

Before taking office in the early 2020s, Uyterhoeven, was already interested in economic and social justice, contributing for a while to the 2016 presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders. She attended Wayland High School, later earned a bachelor's degree from Wellesley College and a master's degree from the University of Toulouse. She also got a master's in business administration from Harvard Business School.

The *Sampan* spoke to her by phone. The following interview has been edited for clarity and length.

**Sampan:** I want to start off with the latest news — since this just happened in your district — the detention of Rumeysa Öztürk.... What is your take on what happened?



ERIKA UYTERHOEVEN

Uyterhoeven: Every day, hour — every minute — that Rumeysa is held in detention, and is not here at home in Somerville, is a minute too long. I'm deeply outraged by what's happened. I think many of us in my community are very upset, which is why so many — around 2,000 people — gathered yesterday at Powder House Park.

But I think while we are outraged, we also know it's incumbent upon us to do everything we can to bring her home and bring not just her, but also ... quite a few other constituents of mine as well who were detained in very similar sort of experiences of plain-clothes officers just suddenly ambushing people and then throwing them into a van.

So, I deeply appreciate the amount of public pressure that my community is putting on this.... I think the piece that is so jarring for me is that this woman was speaking out and just advocating peacefully in an extremely civil way for the rights and dignity of Palestinian people and that is the reason why the DHS has said that they detained her.

I think that there's this idea in the Trump administration that that (kind of activism) is an unacceptable thing. And the reality is that this is a grassroots movement that's centered on peace and justice — fighting for Palestinian lives and dignity — and it's actually an American movement as much as anything. This is going to have a backlash in the courts and in the American public....

**Sampan:** ... Do you feel that in some ways that what had happened before the Trump administration

— this cracking down on protests and dismissing and criminalizing the protesters — has allowed what's happening now with the ICE raids on students?

Uyterhoeven: Absolutely. I mean, particularly with the cracking down on protesters. ... It didn't come out of nowhere. There was a lot that needed to be done to make this possible, whether it's the blatant Islamophobia that has been brewing and stewing for decades ... or the crackdown on protests ... or the crackdown on various forms of free speech that were labeled as, I think wrongfully so, as hateful when it was not.

I also think there's a general sense of dehumanizing Palestinian lives.... I think that all of this ideological groundwork that took place in the lead up to where we are now was absolutely necessary (for these crackdowns to be happening now).... But this is not only about Mahmoud Kahlil or Rumeysa or Palestinian Americans, it is also about all of us, because all of our rights are at stake right now. I mean, they've effectively set the precedent that there is no freedom of speech, that we do not have Constitutional rights, if it's OK to just kidnap people from the street for merely publishing one op-ed.

**Sampan:** You've been pretty active around the legacy of Fred Korematsu. Could you talk about whether you see any parallels to that time and to where we are today?

Uyterhoeven: Absolutely. To take a step back even from Fred Korematsu. When learning about Japanese

*\*We Are All America\****for All...***Korematsu, Öztürk, and Trump*

incarceration, I think a lot of people ask, “How is that possible?” It almost seems unbelievable that about 120,000 people lost their homes, they lost everything; they were essentially put in prisons. They were detained with really no due process, really quickly, on the basis of their race. That’s possible through this repeated build up of the dehumanizing of a group of people based on their race. That’s exactly what happened to Japanese Americans during World War Two.

I think the other parallel that’s really pertinent is the ... rationale used to detain Mahmoud and Rümeyşa — effectively saying that their advocacy is a threat to U.S. foreign policy. Similarly, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that ruled against Fred Korematsu said that it’s Constitutional to arrest and incarcerate a group of people based on their race ... because it is a threat to national security. ... I think that parallel there is so striking. ... There are just so many parallels with respect to Fred Korematsu.

**Sampan: In your profile, you clearly put a high value on your family background and even include a photo of your mom. Could you tell me a little bit about your background and how it shaped your perspective and the policies and efforts that you pursue in local government?**

Uyterhoeven: I’m the daughter of immigrants. Both my mom and my dad immigrated to the United States in adulthood. I grew up raised by my mom — she’s a single mom — and I really grew up enmeshed in Japanese culture, and I didn’t speak a whole lot of English at home.

So that experience of having to navigate life in Massachusetts as someone whose family was not from here and who was speaking a different language, was something that shaped a lot of my views on justice. I think that’s also shaped my views from an economic-justice lens as well, because my mom was a union flight attendant, and I watched how year after year her union would get carved out — seeing their contracts just get worse and worse. So that was something that certainly shaped my views around organized labor, ensuring that we are taxing the wealthy to fund our public goods, like education, healthcare, housing and, of course, stopping the climate crisis.

**Sampan: Before you got involved in politics, you were into economics. How did that influence your views?**

Uyterhoeven: I went to business school and I worked as an antitrust economist, and so my job was to analyze when corporations broke the rules. ... What I essentially took away from that experience was that

we have to change these rules. And the rules around antitrust are quite old. They’re from the turn of the century.... I think that that experience gave me a very structural understanding of these injustices. I saw firsthand how ... you need to have the government step in.

You see this influence, especially when we talk about money in politics ... that is extremely and unfortunately increasingly intertwined. And I think the corporate capture of our public institutions is more palpable right now than ever, but I think it has been there. This didn’t just emerge out of nowhere. This is not a new thing.

**Sampan: You mentioned the state is progressive, your district is progressive, and yet this is the only place in the nation that there’s a school for people with disabilities, the Judge Rotenberg Center, that uses (graduated electronic decelerator) therapy that many oppose. What does that say to you about our state?**

Uyterhoeven: That it’s so important that we don’t get complacent and that we remain vigilant, and that we stay centered and focused on what is right and wrong. ... I think there’s this idea in Massachusetts of “Massachusetts exceptionalism” .... But that also gives this idea of, like, “Don’t worry, everything’s figured out in Massachusetts.” Or, “Let’s focus elsewhere.” And that’s something I always implore people not to fall into. And I think this example right around disability justice is spot-on. You know, once you start to engage with people who are living their lives with a disability, you start to see it everywhere — whether it’s from the corner or sidewalk that’s at a grade that someone in a wheelchair would have immense difficulty moving freely around, or how our trains are designed ... are things really accessible...? Once you start to open your eyes to it, it’s everywhere....

**Sampan: Is there anything you wanted to add?**

Uyterhoeven: I have to say this as a state legislator. ...There’s a lot of power, and a lot that can be done, in the state legislature and in the statehouse, and not just in Massachusetts, but across the country. And I think because state governments are sort of in between the federal and the local level, that a lot of times we get overlooked. But there’s so much we can be doing, we must be doing, especially in this current political climate. And so I just urge everyone to dig deeper, to look into what is happening at the state-level, engage with your local and state elected officials. You know, we’re here, and we work for all of you.

**Make America Great. Period.**

What is America at its best?

We put this question to our team — to find out what version of America meets the potential of what we want America to be. Some of us answered, some didn’t. Some wondered if doing so could — in this America we’re living in right now — draw punishment from the powers that be.

Some looked at history and others the future and others, songs. Here’s what we said:

*In my American history class, we learn about Columbus and the Arawaks, the Jim Crow South, and Vietnam. With each lesson there exists the insidious temptation of wishing away history’s blemishes, to believe America at its best is an America without hate or greed. But the best America isn’t a fantasy. It exists in the “however,” the “even though” of each of these lessons. It’s the resistance that rises alongside injustice. America, at its best, is a home for abolitionists, pacifists, protesters, and organizers; those who refuse to accept oppression as destiny. It is the Children’s March, the Palestinian Solidarity Marches, and the man who stood outside the White House with a candle every night against the Vietnam War. As Howard Zinn offers, “I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past’s fugitive moments of compassion rather than in its solid centuries of warfare.”*

— Doris Yu

*America is at its best when neighbors are helping neighbors in building strong communities. I come from Appalachia where we all have to rely on each other to get by on a daily basis. We are proud of our communities and how we work together. I see that work being done on a larger scale here in Boston by mutual aid organizations, by organizers and community leaders (such as the late Caroline Chang), by organizations like the AACA (publisher of the Sampan), and by the protesters who are willing to leave the comfort of their homes to go out on the street and demand justice and equal rights for all. These people all have a vision of how America can be better, and they are brave and patriotic enough to share that vision with their communities and put in the work to build a better country.*

— Harmony Witte

*The United States of America at its best is its humanity, a kaleidoscope tapestry of contradictory images and chaotic sounds that somehow have always made frustrating sense. Its essence is in*

*its people and how they respond to the darkest times. The late Representative John Lewis, a Georgia Democrat who served this nation for thirty-three years until his 2020 death, implored his frustrated constituents to “make good trouble.” From his formative work as a Civil Rights activist in the 1960s, including nearly losing his life in the bloody Selma to Montgomery Marches, he was among the best of us. The greatest among us are the activists, transcendentalists, poets, dreamers, iconoclasts. Think John Coltrane’s “My Favorite Things,” Miles Davis’s “Kind Of Blue,” and Stevie Wonder’s “Another Star” It’s Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass” and Bruce Springsteen’s “Born In The USA.” America at its best is innocence, experience, mercy, and limitless hope.*

—Christopher John Stephens

*At this moment in time, this question really asked me to reflect on why I moved here and that felt like lost thoughts. The idea of America is so different from our lived experiences of it. America feels like a mirror, and some see themselves in it more than others. Having lived here four years, I never really thought “this feels American.” More often, there is a strange familiarity resembling somewhere else: “This feels just like....” Being a foreigner in America feels so immensely local. Being in America is so constantly relate. There are so many different lived experiences. The image of America as a place where different groups relate and find affinity is, perhaps, America at its best.*

— Mingjia Chen

*America at its bare minimum should be a place where a diversity of ideas can be expressed, without fear of punishment: a place where the writer Mohammed el-Kurd can speak to a packed room in Harvard University, and where people objecting to abortion can rally their cause; where a protester can challenge sending weapons abroad, and where a citizen can argue her right to own a gun. America should also be a place where each person is afforded life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These qualities are not coincidentally also the qualities needed for America to be at its best. But throughout history — such as during the genocide of Native Americans, slavery, Japanese incarceration, McCarthy era, war on terror and destruction of Gaza — America has excluded many from “its best.” But hope — which America offers in abundance — can help us one day make America great — for all.*

— Adam Smith

*\*We Are All America\**

# REVIEW: 'White Poverty' Exposes Myths of Race, Class and Democracy

By Christopher John Stephens

The triple threat Venn Diagram bubbles of race, class, and social identity have conspired to define us as a nation since our founding. As we sit on the eve of our Bisesquicentennial in 2026, Americans are more divided and disturbed than ever before. Who are we? What have we become? Is this the legacy we really want to leave behind for our children? The much discussed (but never fully owned) "Project 2025" has planted seeds and borne fruit in the first quarter of this year. Big government is being dismantled, full departments removed, hundreds of federal employees rendered irrelevant, all for the sake of efficiency.

It's the myth that poverty has been the beast of burden primarily for people of color that stands as the thesis of Reverend Dr. William J. Barber III's remarkable 2024 book *White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy*. His subtitle might seem audacious at first glance, as if he can solve the social consequences of poverty once the long-held beliefs that its provenance rests in the hands of the serving class. Surprisingly, Barber doesn't cite one of the more important poverty-related scriptures as one of his guiding principles. While some might read "The poor you will always have with you" (Matthew 26:11) as surrendering to the purpose and inevitability of a lower class, and by default people of color, it actually serves as a clarion call for activists to do something for people in need. We will always have opportunities to alleviate poverty's conditions. Its status may transform and mutate over generations, but those suffering the spiritually empty consequences of poverty (empty cupboard and cold heart) will always have their needs.

Barber, a sixty-one year old Protestant African-American Pastor, comes to this thesis with impressive bona fides. He's a social activist, professor in the Practice of Public Theology and Public Policy and founding director of the Center for Public Theology & Public Policy at Yale Divinity School. He is the president and senior lecturer at Repairers of the Breach and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival. He notes:

"...[P]overty is... everywhere. And while it disproportionately weighs on Black and brown people... white people are by far the largest demographic among America's poor."

Barber immediately latches onto "the culture of poverty," the notion that those who find themselves in destitute straits might just immediately surrender to its inevitability. For every Ronald Reagan originated notion of an

African-American "Welfare Queen" (1988) or Barry Goldwater excoriating linking the welfare state to the rise in crime in the mid-1960s, there was the notion of "White Trash." Think of Erskine Caldwell's tawdry 1932 novel *Tobacco Road* or John Steinbeck's more compassionate and masterful 1939 masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*. Near the end of his preface, Barber is very clear about why he is writing about white poverty:

"I take on white poverty as a declaration that Black people may have problems, but we are not the problem."

For Barber, "whiteness" is a false identity. Why are some many people our nation purports to elevate still carrying the burden of poverty? For Barber, it's a matter of what he calls "moral fusion," not a question of right or left wing, but rather simply right or wrong. Whether it's the North Carolina mountain folk of Mitchell County, an all-white chapter of the NAACP formed in 2013 in the wake of Trayvon Martin's death, or Eastern Kentucky coal miners singing "Which Side Are You On?," the common link is visibility. For Barber, we "... have been pitted against one another by politicians and billionaires who depend on the poorest among us not being seen."

Barber draws from the sublime grace of African American poet Langston Hughes's 1935 classic "Let America Be America Again," in which the poet invokes himself as "...the poor white, fooled and pushed apart... the Negro bearing slavery's scars... the immigrant clutching the hope I seek..." It's Barber's mission here (successfully reached) to emphasize that this search to identify and reckon with poverty is a shared experience. Ninety years later, a variation of Hughes's title takes on a twisted 180 degrees different in the threatening chant of "Make America Great Again."

*White Poverty* offers some fascinating delineations of the specific myths we need to abolish. Chapter 3, "Pale Skin Is A Shared Interest," discusses the unfortunate role religion played in providing convenient definitions of race: "The plantation system created white people to separate them from the Black and Native...force-fed them a thousand stories...why being white was superior..." Barber reminds the reader that white supremacy is as poisonous to white people as it is to people of color. It's unavoidable to not see contemporary reflections of our 2025 political landscape when we read of southern white supremacy candidates of the 1870s promising to "take back" their country.

We can only understand our current condition if we remind ourselves of the past. That's obvious. Barber reminds us of Michael Harrington's landmark 1962 study on poverty called *The Other America*. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of two Americas, where millions drank from the milk of prosperity while others lived daily with the fatigue of economic despair. King's Poor People's Campaign, in its infancy before his assassination in 1968, was a full embrace of poverty's devastating impact. Shine a light on the darkness and expose its flaws. Turn the rocks over, let the termites flee, and transform the barren land into rich, fruitful, growing soil.

Myth #2, "Only Black Folks Want Change In America," is easily proven wrong. The Martin Luther King of 1965 was more radicalized than the man who had a dream just two years earlier. The Selma to Montgomery march, in March of that year, was for voting rights and so much more. Barber, via King's story, reminds us that the southern aristocracy and segregation was intended to separate poor black and white people and hide the fact that their common bond- financial security- would never be in reach. One needs only to see the Rogue's gallery of oligarchs seated behind President Trump at his January 20th 2025 inauguration to conclusively understand a line from Bob Dylan (coincidentally in a song released in 1965):

"Money doesn't talk/ It swears!"

As *White Poverty* continues, Barber keeps reminding readers of history and its tendency to either repeat for those who ignore it the first time around or fade away if not given attention. Myth #3 reminds us that poverty is not just a black issue. The Freedom Riders on Greyhound Buses were a coalition of black and white. However, in the mid-1960s "...we were trained by the media to imagine poverty as a Black problem." Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society missions explicitly

blurred the lines of racial identity.

Thirty years earlier, Dorothea Lange's photographic portraits of "Migrant Mother" and James Agee/Walker Evans's journalistic masterpiece *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* reinforced truths we might not have wanted to remember. Louisiana governor Huey Long's promise (again a vestige of the 1930's) "Every Man a King" and a chicken in every pot just wasn't true.

Barber's final myth to explode, "We Can't Overcome Division," invokes Catholic journalist and social activist Dorothy Day, who asked that we have "...a revolution of the heart...that must begin with each one of us." Facing poverty is about understanding stress and listening to hidden wounds. Poverty is worst in populations replete with feelings about antigovernment and led by reactionary conservatives. Extremism in politics was fomented by billionaires who fed on the racist fears of a primarily white populace. Barber is working here to breach the divide and help with a reconstruction that was tentatively started in post Civil War America, dormant for a hundred years, and still struggling.

If the first reconstruction started with the Emancipation Proclamation, the second with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the third with "Black Lives Matter" and Covid in 2020, Barber is determined to keep on keeping on, head through the unknown future, and build a rainbow coalition. Barber certainly could not have predicted the chaos that's been the result of this current presidential regime, the confluence of an unelected oligarch being given free reign over all aspects of our lives as Americans with a delusional president riddled with a persecution complex and obsessed with seeking vengeance. *White Poverty* is, however, a remarkably prescient text, required reading to offer some sort of hopeful solace when accepting it's always darkest before the dawn isn't enough.

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*\*We Are All America\**

# Knowing About Birthright Citizenship’s Past Critical to Ensuring Its Future, Say Experts

By Darren Liu

“I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.”

That quote, from the first U.S. president, George Washington in a letter penned in 1788, kicked off a panel discussion last month on the future and history birthright citizenship and Trump administration’s attempts to reinterpret the 14th Amendment.

As clear-cut as Washington’s quote sounds, history tells a different story.

That was a key takeaway from the panel of experts who gathered to unpack the complex path to, and future of, birthright citizenship in America during

the “The 14th Amendment: Birthright Citizenship & Belonging in America” discussion on March 17, hosted by the Tenement Museum’s Roosevelt House at Hunter College. Experts at the virtual event included Pres. Abraham Lincoln scholar and director of Hunter College’s Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute, Harold Holzer; Asian American Studies and Professor of History at Columbia University, Mae M. Ngai; Tenement Museum Pres. Annie Polland; and Chinese American politician, Margaret Chin.

Understanding the origins of birthright citizenship is essential to understanding the context and its importance in American culture, explained the panelists. Brought over from common law, many British settler countries continue to use

birthright citizenship in some form, including Canada and 32 other nations, despite Trump’s false claim that the U.S. is the “only country in the world” that allows birthright citizenship.

The passage of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1866 changed “the balance of state and federal power,” said Holzer. Previously state citizenship held more weight, with its regulations differing across the country, which led to a patchwork of rights and protections. In fact, the Civil War was not only significant for emancipation of slavery but also defining the rights and ability of immigrants to reside in America, he said.

But the “Chinese Exclusion Act” of 1882 prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, and by excluding one group of people from birthright citizenship, it threatened the ability for all to obtain citizenship, said the speakers. Consequences of this act were clearly illustrated through the case of Wong Kim Ark, a U.S.-born Chinese man who often traveled between China and the U.S. After fighting for his citizenship in the Supreme Court, he won and set a major precedent, which began the path to equal treatment in the context of birthright citizenship.

Ngai noted the nativist movement that led to the Chinese Exclusion Act and the subsequent Geary Act of 1902, which further restricted Chinese immigration. Then came the story of Max Kohler, a lawyer and advocate, who penned a scathing Op-Ed in the New York Times. In this piece, he called the system of immigration at the time “the most un-American, inhuman, barbarous, oppressive system of procurement that can be encountered in any civilized land today for the treatment of yellow men.”

Kohler’s work highlighted the multiracial coalitions that fought against these exclusionary laws, a theme that resonated throughout the panel.

Polland reminds us, however, that ensuring the 14th Amendment applies to Chinese and other non-Whites, was only one of many challenges for immigrants, given the rampant discrimination taking shape at the time. The Union of Hope is an exhibition at the Tenement Museum, which tells the story of a Black family who, despite being “free,” faced barriers such as New York’s \$250 property requirement for Black men to vote — only

after the 15th Amendment did voting rights get addressed. Nevertheless, the museum acts as a tool to humanize the impact of such laws and policies, allowing history to be tangibly felt by visitors.

Ngai also draws parallels between the past and present, focusing the debate on the idea that shifts in birthright citizenship laws often targeted specific groups of people. For example, she explained that during the Great Depression, the federal government deported 400,000 Mexicans, half of whom were U.S. citizens. Similarly, Japanese Americans were labeled the “enemy race” during World War Two, despite two-thirds being birthright citizens.

Today, so-called “anchor babies” — when non-citizens have a baby in the U.S. — appears of utmost concern to the current administration, and is used as a reason for attempting to “re-interpret” the 14th Amendment.

The amendment’s language, however, is clear: citizenship is granted to those born in the U.S. and subject to its jurisdiction, with exceptions being for children of foreign diplomats and occupying forces — yet fears of reinterpretation lingers. Trump’s first administration also attempted to end birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants, but was blocked by the courts. The focus now appears on reinterpreting the law to avoid “anchor babies.” But, as Holzer noted, “The 14th Amendment is a cornerstone of democracy. Tampering with it risks unraveling the very fabric of our nation.”

Furthermore, the panelists discussed economic and social implications of birthright citizenship. Given that immigrants have always been essential to America’s growth, from the Irish and German workers of the 19th century to the Mexican and Asian laborers of the 20th century, the shifting of such might leave a significant impact on especially the current service industry.

Another fear of tampering with the 14th Amendment is the potential for “stateless” children. Some babies who have been born in the U.S. to undocumented parents might be deported, leading to a lack of citizenship in any country.

The “problem isn’t the 14th Amendment,” challenged Ngai, “it’s an outdated immigration system that needs updating.”



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## News

# Protest Called a Tool for Defending Rights

*Continued From Page 1*

Uyterhoeven, whose district includes the city of Somerville, in a recent interview with the *Sampan*. “The singular ask that we’ve heard from everyone in a position of power who is aligned with us, is that we have to keep the public pressure on.”

Speaking to the *Sampan* the week after her client was detained, attorney Mahsa Khanbabai, said: “I do think protests can help change the tide, but it is but one piece of the puzzle. Alumni should call on universities to support free speech, and to protect their international students, and calling on senators and reps.”

The message that speaking out can help has been repeated by other immigration attorneys, as well, who see obstacles ahead from a Republican-led Congress and a number of federal courts with judges who were installed by the first Trump administration.

“Our appeal is to the population. We will do everything that we possibly can to defend democracy in the courts. But the real defense of democracy has to come from the people,” said Eric Lee in an interview with CNN recently, speaking about other related immigration cases. Lee, of Diamante Law, made a similar appeal in a *Sampan* interview just after the presidential election, when he said, “Americans are going to have to be ready to stand up and defend their neighbors, their coworkers, their families, their fellow students, wherever they may be, and from whatever walk of life.”

Lee’s forecast from November turned out to be accurate as since Öztürk’s abduction, colleges and universities around the nation and Boston — including Emerson, Northeastern, and UMass — have early this month revealed more students had their visas suddenly canceled by the U.S.

At the same time as that news spread, massive protests erupted in Boston and throughout the nation objecting to Trump’s actions and policies. But some demonstrators felt voices in defense of the pro-Palestinian activists who’ve become targets of the administration were muffled, raising questions about the endurance of protests in support of people like Öztürk. Indeed, State Sen. Pat Jehlen, during a City Hall rally on April 1, stressed the need to keep up the protests for them to be effective.

But the fact that thousands were willing to rally at Powder House Square in Somerville on March 26, just 24 hours after the detention of Öztürk, and again days later in front of Boston City Hall, are perhaps early signs that people are willing to stand up for the rights of immigrants, the First Amendment, and due process and against presidential abuses of power. During the 90-minute rally in Somerville, the entirety of Nathan Tufts Park was filled with people chanting, listening to speakers, and holding signs.

Some people wore Palestinian head scarfs, or keffiyehs, wrapped around their shoulders or faces, some wore kippahs on their heads, while others were masked. Chalked signs on the ground read “ICE not welcome in Boston.”

Öztürk, 30, is a Turkish national and has been at Tufts University studying for a doctorate in childhood development. The Fulbright Scholar was taken by six masked, plainclothes agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arm of the Department of Homeland Security on the street while on her way to break her Ramadan fast with friends.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio defended Öztürk’s detention days later in a press conference saying, the



**FIGHTING CHANCE:** Thousands rally at Powder House Square in Somerville on March 26 to support Rümeyşa Öztürk. Photo by Harmony Witte

department revoked her visa: “We gave you a visa to come and study and get a degree, not to become a social activist that tears up our university campuses. And if we’ve given you a visa, and then you decide to do that, we’re going to take it away.” Rubio stated at the time that the State Department had already revoked visas of more than 300 students accused of being pro-Palestinian activists, leading many to call into question the right to free speech in the United States.

No evidence has been given by the Trump administration that Öztürk was involved any illegal activity and no charges had been filed against her by the administration at the time this article was written. It is widely believed she was targeted because she co-authored an op-ed for Tufts student newspaper that criticized the school’s policy on

divesting from companies associated with Israel. The article was cosigned by three other students and endorsed by 32 others from Tufts. The Trump Administration says it revoked her F-1 visa on March 21 but according to Öztürk’s lawyers in a petition filed with the Massachusetts District Court, she was not notified of this revocation before she was detained, raising further questions around due process.

“Rümeyşa’s arrest and detention are designed to punish her speech and chill the speech of others. Indeed, her arrest and detention are part of a concerted and systemic effort by Trump administration officials to punish students and others identified with pro-Palestine activism,” wrote her lawyers in the petition.

— Adam Smith contributed to this report

## Northeastern Prof.: ‘Anticipatory Compliance Saves No One’

*Continued From Page 1*

this week in the university paper, *The Huntington News*, along with professors Kylie Ariel Bemis, Rahul Bhargava, Richard Daynard, Rachel Rosenbloom, and Laura Edelson. The Op-Ed, titled “We, your professors, believe our universities are worth fighting for,” is critical of university leaders who “have remained silent amid these attacks” and makes a call for standing up for academic freedom.

*Sampan* interviewed To by email about her views on what’s happening and why she participated in the Op-Ed that came out right as 40 student and graduate visas from the school were revoked. She teaches in both Northeastern’s Art and Design department and in the Khoury College of Computer Science.

**Sampan:** Students have for decades come from all over the world — including from countries like China that restrict speech and protest — to study in ... Boston. What kind of message do you think the crackdowns on demonstrations, cancellations of visas for political expression and the

like are sending to these students who perhaps thought this was a place where they could express ideas and opinions without fear of punishment and freely explore research freely?

To: Cynically speaking, I think most of our international students have never been under the illusion that free speech is unrestricted here. I say this both from spending years speaking to my own students about my past activism as well as the research and writing I do that engages social justice. There has always been a well-earned hesitancy that our most precarious students feel — whether it’s due to visa status, federal scholarships, etc. That being said, this is causing a massive chilling effect. Now students are not only concerned about speech and protest, but, yes, what they write, what they say and who it may be safe to say things to, what they research, and whether or not they can safely travel; it’s horrifying and completely counter to the mission and values in our Constitution.

**Sampan:** Some would argue that the seeds for what we’re seeing were planted when universities, including those here in Boston, cracked down on pro-Palestinian protests last year at this time. What are your thoughts on that?

To: I strongly believe the reaction of universities to pro-Palestinian protests laid the groundwork for what we are experiencing now. As we wrote in the article, we all must learn from how this has played out in the public that anticipatory compliance saves no one. It’s abhorrent to me that our reward to students who are engaged with global politics (and) human rights, and are campaigning with empathy and compassion at the forefront of their demands, is to spread misinformation painting them as violent and disruptive and (willing) to enact actual violence upon members of our own communities.

**Sampan:** Are you concerned about your own career and position after having co-written this Op-Ed? On the other hand, what is the risk you see in

not speaking out and taking a stand?

To: Of course! I’m submitting my tenure case literally within the next month. But I also have to live with myself. My career has benefited enormously from brave scholars before me. Every day I see people who are in far more precarious positions than I am in, including students, part-time faculty, faculty who are on visas and green cards, queer and trans members of our community making a stand because they have no choice. How could I possibly make a career of writing about racial injustice and social justice and put my head in the sand? I love this job and I love research, if we don’t speak loudly in defense of our students and colleagues and community, there won’t be a job left to do. As a mixed-race Japanese American woman, I also have an acute memory of what the U.S. government is willing to do to citizens. My family members have living memories of WWII Japanese internment. I might as well use my voice while I still have the privilege of having one....

— A. S.



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Thirty-Six (36) 2 Bedrooms @ \$1,583/month

\*Rents are subject to change in future years. Tenants will pay the cost of utilities: gas (heat and hot water), electric cooking, electricity, water, and sewer. Pets are permitted, subject to restrictions. One complimentary parking space is available for residents.

Waterstone is a brand-new rental apartment community located in a campus-like setting in Dartmouth that will eventually consist of 288 units nestled amongst 60 acres of majestic woodlands. Once fully built, there will be 72 affordable units within this community. All affordable apartments will be rented to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income through this application process. This lottery includes the thirty-six (36) 2BR affordable units coming online in Phase I of this development. Additional 2BR and 3BR units will be made available through a future lottery. The 36 units in Phase I will be located in two story buildings containing sixteen units per building.

#### Maximum Household Income Limits

\$61,350 (1 person), \$70,100 (2 people), \$78,850 (3 people), \$87,600 (4 people)

Public Informational Session: April 17, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to zoom.com/join or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 818 9317 7595

Application Deadline: May 12, 2025 at 2:00 pm

Applications must be completed online, delivered, or postmarked by this date. Applications postmarked by the deadline must be received within 5 business days.

Lottery: May 29, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to zoom.com/join or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 857 2736 5609, Passcode: 276410

Attendance is not required at Info or Lottery sessions. To view the recorded sessions at a later date, please search for **Waterstone** on the SEB Housing YouTube channel.

For Lottery Information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, go to [www.sebhousing.com](http://www.sebhousing.com) or call (617) 782-6900x1 and leave a message or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. For TTY Services dial 711. Free translation available.

Traducción gratuita disponible.



YOU CAN COMPLETE AND SUBMIT A LOTTERY APPLICATION ONLINE HERE:  
<https://form.jotform.com/SEBHousing/Waterstone>



### Affordable Housing Lottery Forty Centre Street

Forty Centre Street

40 Centre Street, Brookline, MA

YOU CAN COMPLETE AND SUBMIT A LOTTERY APPLICATION ONLINE HERE:



<https://form.jotform.com/SEBHousing/FortyCentreStreet>

#### Affordable Rent Amounts

Two Studios - \$2,280; Four 1BR - \$2,442; Three 2BRs - \$2,931, One 3BR - \$3,386

\*Rents are subject to change in future years. Utilities (heating, cooking, hot water, water/sewer) are included in the rent. Limited parking spaces are available on a first-come, first served basis to all residents for a \$325 monthly fee.

Forty Centre Street is a new 40 unit luxury rental property located in the heart of Brookline's vibrant Coolidge Corner. The building will feature Studio, 1BR, 2BR, and 3BR apartments, and amenities such as a workout center, an outdoor deck for congregating on nice days, and an indoor bike rack. The property is conveniently located to Coolidge Corner's many offerings such as Trader Joes, the T, blue bikes, hospitals, renowned restaurants, shopping, and much more. Ten (10) of these units will be made available to households earning no more than 80% of the Area Median Income ("AMI"). Affordable units provide thoughtful layouts and high-end finishes. Units are expected to be ready in June 2025.

#### Maximum Household Income Limits

\$91,200 (1 person), \$104,200 (2 people), \$117,250 (3 people)  
\$130,250 (4 people), \$140,700 (5 people), \$151,100 (6 people)

#### Public Info Session

April 16, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to zoom.com/join or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 818 9317 7595, Passcode: 088159

#### Application Deadline

May 16, 2025 at 2:00 pm Completed Applications must be completed online or delivered by this date.

#### Lottery

May 28, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to zoom.com/join or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 857 2736 5609, Passcode: 276410

Attendance is not required at Info or Lottery sessions. To view the recorded sessions at a later date, please search for **Forty Centre Street** on the SEB Housing YouTube channel.

For Lottery Information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, go to [www.sebhousing.com](http://www.sebhousing.com) or call (617) 782-6900x1 to leave a message or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. For TTY Services dial 711. Free translation available. Traducción gratuita disponible.



YOU CAN COMPLETE AND SUBMIT A LOTTERY APPLICATION ONLINE HERE:  
<https://form.jotform.com/SEBHousing/FortyCentreStreet>



# Singer Nita Slay Talks ‘Cambodian Ties’

Continued From Page 1

your shrine.”

Nita Slay started out singing in church, as a background vocalist, until her youth leaders left and she took the initiative to step into the spotlight. In 2019, on a whim, she released the song “Broken Child” on Instagram.

The song begins: “Momma told me, don’t love don’t trust / If there’s a will, then there’s a way for us / Daddy told me, know yourself, know your worth / There’s only one of you on this earth / I’m a broken child / Crying a prayer sound / But guess what? / I’ve finally realized who I wanted to be / Can you ever please forgive me?”

After releasing the song, she started to gain traction and her musician career path opened up. She now has two albums, “The Great Scorpius” (2021) and “Love Got Jaded” (2020) and several singles and EPs.

Outside of music, she does emcee work and, staying true to her gospel roots, runs a youth ministry. Although she prefers not to be in “mommy mode” at her shows, Nita Slay sometimes brings her three-year-old son to watch her practice and perform for the youth ministry.

She allows her experience singing in church to trickle into her songwriting, but said she doesn’t want to let it limit her.

“I have some metaphors here and there that refer to the Bible,” Slay said. “But I don’t always write with that in mind. It’s more how I deliver and how I sound in a song that translates into gospel that you can hear.”

In late February, Nita Slay was featured at Pao Arts Center in a celebration performance for the Lunar New Year. The event, Return of the Wood Snake, was curated by local musician Kold Kwan. According to Pao Arts Center performance and theater program manager, Ashley Yung, Kwan wanted to “bring in artists that he enjoyed as just



SLAYER: Nita Slay at the Mission Hill Church in Boston.

Photo by Adam Smith/ [www.errorc1301.com](http://www.errorc1301.com)

a person who enjoys music, but also he thought would be really important to bring into Chinatown.”

It was Slay’s first time performing in Chinatown, an experience which she said was amazing.

“The lineup were heavy hitters,” she said. “And the coordinators were very professional and there to help with anything, so I knew I was in good hands.”

Yung described the way that Nita Slay parted the crowd and moved to the center during her performance, bringing her closer to the audience.

“She really looks to engage with the crowd. She reads the room,” Yung said. “She makes sure (the audience) knows

they’re in the same room as her.”

Yung described arts as “essential to the well-being of a community,” which Pao Arts Center works to deliver to the Chinatown community.

“Arts are for the people and everyone has the ability to be an artist,” Yung said. “When people like Nita Slay and other musicians share that art with us, it is really special and connecting and good for the heart.”

Nita Slay said she believes music is “food for the soul.”

“Your storytelling and experiences can change and impact a lot of people who felt like they were alone,” Slay said. “I do think about making music that makes you dance, but it’s usually not my first

pick when I hear a beat.”

She used to rely on a beat to write a song, she said, but now she can begin by focusing on the message she wants to convey. Throughout her evolving musical journey, her connection to her church remains. She’s considering the occasional cover performance there, because that’s how she started out.

“I always tell people that words create worlds,” Nita Slay said. “I’m already super metaphorical in the way that I deliver the gospel, the soul. I feel like it’s such a beautiful formula to making timeless, powerful music.”

**Slay will perform April 11, 7:30 p.m. at Thirsty First, 103 Market St. in Lowell.**

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# ‘SenStory’ Breaks Mental Health Taboos With Performing Arts

*Vermilion Theater’s Wisteria Deng Tells How She Combines Theater and Psychology*

**Text and photo by Virginia Sun**

Elderly Chinatown residents took the stage at the Pao Arts Center last month – some sang karaoke to their favorite classic Chinese songs, a couple of them showed off their jianzi (birdie foot game) skills to the rest of their crowd, while others watched bilingual improv theater sketches in Mandarin and Cantonese.

But behind the music, crafts and performing arts enjoyed by the nearly 200 participants, the March 8 event, “SenStory: Home as a Verb” contained a central theme: How to access collective mental health as a member of the Chinese diaspora, and how to make doing so exciting and engaging.

“SenStory” is the culmination of an inaugural residency collaboration between Vermilion Theater and Pao Arts Center in Chinatown. An Asian and Pacific Islander, women-led nonprofit, Vermilion Theater is based in Boston and aims to uplift voices of the Chinese diaspora by producing multilingual plays and hosting community engagement workshops that facilitate cross-cultural conversations about mental health. Over the past year, Vermilion Theater developed community workshops led by Mandarin-English bilingual, trained professionals specialized in music therapy and other forms of creative healing. Beyond the festival, “SenStory: Home as a Verb” also showcased participants’ art made in previous workshops, as well as produced a guidebook on creative practices. Vermilion Theater’s past productions have toured the East Coast, creating a wealth of comparative knowledge across East Coast Chinatown communities that the arts collective’s members drawn on to create community-driven initiatives.

Chinese diaspora communities in the U.S. often face difficulties in accessing Western mental health resources such

as psychotherapy. Stigma about mental health issues in Chinese culture, language barriers, and a scarcity of culturally sensitive counseling are common barriers. For example, a first-generation Chinese elder facing depression may not feel comfortable in a one-on-one English-language counseling session, especially with a therapist with limited understanding of Chinese culture and its framing of mental health issues. In addition, research shows that Chinese immigrants to the U.S. often have somatic responses to mental health issues, such as psychological conditions that manifest as physical ailments. Counselors trained in Western psychotherapy may not have the best tools to respond to these needs.

To learn more about the performing arts project, Sampan spoke with Wisteria Deng, the founding artistic director of Vermilion Theater and a clinical psychology doctoral candidate at Yale.

**Sampan: What motivated you to form Vermilion Theater and to host “SenStory: Home as a Verb?”**

Deng: I started wondering how to bridge my personal passion of theater and performing arts with my profession of mental health, community psychiatry, and community mental health. I see how incredibly helpful therapy is. However, I only can see around 10 people a week. So the motivation of this project came from wanting to scale up mental health efforts and also push that out of the framework of therapy.

I have family members and friends who are first-generation immigrants. Some of them are losing their mental health, and that’s really a motivation. For people who are not as familiar with English, the language barrier is a huge hurdle to their treatment seeking. That’s why the nonprofit theater work I’ve been doing seeks to bring together both En-

glish and Mandarin. We want to allow folks who don’t speak English to have a safe space – even just to exist – and to connect with others. I think that’s already a huge piece of therapy. And then we try to explore creative expressions, movement, and things like that.

**Sampan: What kind of mental health issues have you seen among the Chinatown community, both first generation immigrants and beyond?**

Deng: There has been a huge shift since Covid. After Covid, I see normalization of depression and loneliness. In Vermilion Theater’s recent run of engagement and workshops, we’ve definitely seen more depression mixed with social anxiety or health anxiety.

**Sampan: How do you choose the format of the show, whether it’s karaoke, a sketch show, or art?**

Deng: We started with thinking about what’s most accessible. For partici-

pants, you don’t need to know anything about mental health or have been in therapy before. So that led us to thinking about the five senses. For the visual sense, participants made paintings, face masks, tote bags, prints. As they make these arts, they chat with each other and connect. With hearing, we do collective song making. And then we also use movement – so gentle stretching, or even just being more aware of their body. So the engagement starts with senses the participants already have with them, and they don’t need to put that in the framing of therapy.

**Sampan: Even the word therapy can contain so much weight for many people of Chinese descent. It’s wonderful to present mental health in such a welcoming and collective environment.**

Deng: I no longer frame it to participants as a therapeutic exercise. I just say exercise or practice. Sometimes I use like games or like, let’s try this together.

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**征求建议书  
RLFMP 街景改善**

Jason Tobin; 617-918-6211;  
Jason.W.Tobin@boston.gov

波士顿经济发展和工业公司 (“EDIC”), 又名波士顿规划和发展局 (“BPDA”), 其首席采购官欣然发布这份题为 “RLFMP 街景改善” (“RFP”) 的征求建议书。IFB 是根据 M.G.L. c. 30B 发布的, 可能会有所修订。此 RFP 包括该项目的要求, 将于 **2025 年 4 月 7 日上午 9:00** 在 BPDA 采购门户网站: [www.bostonplans.org/work-with-us/procurement](http://www.bostonplans.org/work-with-us/procurement) 以数字印刷形式免费提供给所有感兴趣的受访者下载。对此 RFP 的所有回复必须在 **2025 年 4 月 23 日中午 12:00** 之前返回至: Teresa Polhemus, Clerk, Economic Development and Industrial Corporation c/o Real Estate Administration, One City Hall Square, Room 900A/Reception, Boston MA 02210. Teresa Polhemus, Interim Chief Procurement Officer

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# Events Calendar

## 2025 Boston Citizenship Day

Date: Saturday, April 12  
 Time: 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM  
 Address: Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center, 1350 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02120  
 Get information and free legal assistance for your citizenship application from experienced attorneys and volunteers.  
 Admission: free

## The Greenway Carousel

Date: Saturday, April 5  
 Time: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
 Address: 191 Atlantic Avenue, across from Faneuil Hall Marketplace  
 Whether you're looking for family-friendly fun, unique educational experiences, or ways to get involved in the community, the Greenway has got you covered.  
 Event link: <https://www.rosekennedy-greenway.org/events/the-greenway-carousel-35-2025-04->  
 Admission : free

## Spring Week by Highland Street Foundation

Date: April 19-25  
 Free admission during April school vacation week! Art, history, animals, carousels - something for everyone  
 Please click the link for a full schedule of events

<https://www.highlandstreet.org/>

[sites/default/files/program\\_download/2024/Spring-Week-Schedule-of-Events-2025.pdf](https://www.highlandstreet.org/sites/default/files/program_download/2024/Spring-Week-Schedule-of-Events-2025.pdf)

## Haitian Flag day Festival

Date: Saturday , May 17  
 Time: 2pm-6pm  
 Address: Somerville City HALL , 93 Highland Ave ,Somerville MA 02143  
 Come experience a vibrant celebration of Haitian heritage with live music, traditional dance, delicious food, and cultural performances! Join the community as we honor the rich history of the Haitian flag and enjoy a day filled with joy, unity, and culture.  
 Admission: Free

## Move and Groove Festival

Date: Saturday, May 3  
 Time: 12:00 pm- 4:00 pm  
 Address: Mealne A. CAS Recreational Complex  
 Save the date for this family event packed with activities for all ages.  
 For more info: [communityengagement@bostonpublicschool.org](mailto:communityengagement@bostonpublicschool.org)  
 Admission: free

## Hyde Park Free food distribution

Date: Sundays  
 Time: 1:30 pm  
 Address: Mount of Olives Community Center, 1283 Hyde Park Avenue  
 All are welcome, no ID is required.

For more info: [helpingplates.org](https://www.helpingplates.org)

Admission: free

## Youth Workers, Know your rights

Date: Thursday, April 24  
 Time: 5:30 pm 7:00 pm  
 Join this webinar to learn about your rights and how to exercise them.  
 Admission: free, register at: [boston.gov/labor-policy](https://boston.gov/labor-policy)

## Laura Macias - Dia de los Niños

Date: Friday, April 4, 2025  
 Time: 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM  
 Address: Charlestown Branch of the Boston Library, 179 Main St Charlestown, MA 02129  
 Event Link: <https://bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/6797cfb18fc0a3280017b441>  
 Stories and folk tales worldwide will be told in English and Spanish. Includes puppets, songs, and movements for children ages 3-5 years old.  
 Price: free

## 29th Annual Mother's Day Walk For Peace

Date: Sunday, May 11  
 Time: 8:00 am  
 Address: Town Field Park in Dorchester, MA 02122  
 This year's theme is "Cultivating Cycles of Peace. Walk and come to honor the lives of our loved ones who have been murdered.  
 Get more info at: <https://www.mothers-daywalk4peace.org/>

Price: Free

## Laura Macias - Dia de los Niños

Date: Wednesday, April 9, 2025  
 Time: 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM  
 Address: Chinatown Branch of the Boston Public Library 2 Boylston Street  
 Event Link: <https://bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/6797cfb18fc0a3280017b441>  
 Stories and folk tales worldwide will be told in English and Spanish. Includes puppets, songs, and movements for children ages 3-5 years old.  
 Price: free

## Drop-In Gaming Time

Date: Every Friday  
 Time: 12:30-4:30 pm  
 Address: Chinatown Branch of the Boston Public Library 2 Boylston Street  
 Event Link: <https://bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/6774209359163a2f0037a925>  
 To get more information: [mhoward@bpl.org](mailto:mhoward@bpl.org)  
 This event is open to all ages. Children under the age of 12 must have an adult present at the library.  
 Price: Free

## UberEats @ Boston College

Date: Thursday, April 10  
 Time: 11 am - 3 pm  
 Address: Margot Connell Recreation Center, 200 Saint Thomas More Road Boston, MA 02135

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 2 PERSONS - \$104,200 (80%) 5 PERSONS - \$140,700 (80%)  
 3 PERSONS - \$117,250 (80%) 6 PERSONS - \$151,100 (80%)

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#### Public Information Meeting Via Zoom.com

6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Go to Zoom.com and provide the following, when prompted:  
 Meeting ID: 824 6130 9804 Passcode: 692982

#### Application Deadline:

Postmarked on or before April 15, 2025

#### Lottery Via Zoom.com

3:00 p.m., Friday, May 2, 2025

Go to Zoom.com and provide the following, when prompted:  
 Meeting ID: 845 2958 4877 Passcode: 972114

#### APPLICATIONS AND FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS MUST BE MAILED TO:

MCO Housing Services, P.O. Box 372, Harvard, MA 01451  
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 Email: [lotteryinfo@mcohousingservices.com](mailto:lotteryinfo@mcohousingservices.com)

#### APPLICATIONS AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE

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## St. Louis Schoolhouse, Fall River, MA Affordable Housing Lottery

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 Five 1BR 100% AMI Condos for \$233,213 (condo fee: \$329/mo.)  
 Five 2BR 80% AMI Condos for \$212,075 (condo fee: \$278/mo.)  
 Four 2BR 100% AMI Condos for \$262,520 (condo fee: \$369/mo.)

This is a lottery for the eighteen (18) affordable 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom units located within St. Louis Schoolhouse, a renovation of an existing school building in Fall River. Nine (9) of these units will be sold at affordable prices to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI), and Nine (9) of these units will be sold at affordable prices to households with incomes at or below 100% of area median income (AMI). Affordable homes are expected to be ready starting in the Summer of 2025. Units will feature LED recessed lighting with smart wi-fi light switches, mini split AC units, on demand hot water system, a video doorbell system, high end counter tops, contemporary cabinet design, in unit washer and dryer appliances, floating vanities, and more. The community will feature bike storage, security camera system, a mail and storage room, trash chute system, conference room and co-working space, elevator, an elevated outdoor balcony for common use, and 18 parking spaces.

# of Household Members	80% Maximum Income Limit	100% Maximum Income Limit
1	\$62,950	\$78,680
2	\$71,950	\$89,920
3	\$80,950	\$101,160
4	\$89,900	\$112,400

The Maximum Household Asset Limit is \$150,000. Qualified retirement accounts are exempted.

#### Public Info Session

April, 28th, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.com/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 818 9317 7595, Passcode: 088159

#### Application Deadline

May 20th, 2025 at 2:00 pm

Completed Applications and Mortgage Pre-Approvals must be received by this date.

#### Lottery

June 3rd, 2025 at 6:00pm via Zoom

Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.com/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 857 2736 5609, Passcode: 276410

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For lottery information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, please visit: [www.sebhousing.com](http://www.sebhousing.com) or call (617) 782-6900 x2 and leave a message, or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave., Needham, MA 02494. Free translation available. Traducción gratuita disponible.



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## 波士顿 LGBTQ+ 电影节

▶ 4/10—4/12



儿童与家庭节目

## 四月假期周

▶ 4/23—4/26


特别活动

## 艺术盛放

▶ 5/2—5/4



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Still from *The Wedding Banquet* (2025), by Andrew Ahn.

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