

Read about ClassACT's NYC Jeffersonian Dinner!



ClassACT's Jeffersonian Dinner: America's Bloated Prison Population

- **The US has 5% of the world's population, 25% of the incarcerated**
- **1 of every 3 black American men will encounter the criminal justice system in his lifetime**
- **70% of Americans in jail today are there because they lack money to pay bail bonds and fees— even for petty crimes like parking tickets!**

Braving the Northeast's 3rd nor'easter in 2 weeks, 18 classmates—a minister, an art historian and a gallery owner, professors and lawyers, a psychiatrist, a jazz musician and 4 members of the ClassACT Board*—came together in NYC for the **first-ever ClassACT Jeffersonian dinner** hosted by **Bahman Mossavar-Rahmani**, member of the ClassACT Board and chair of the [Human Rights Initiative](#).



Ryan O'Connell, Alan Dean, Kavery Kaul and Marion Dry

A first event for our Human Rights initiative,** the conversation was moderated by ClassACT Founding Board Member **Therese Steiner** with **Steve Milliken**, founder of [JusticeAid](#), setting up the history and issues surrounding the evening's topic "**Bloated Prison Population in America, a Human Rights Crisis?**" Classmates shared diverse points of view, covering **racism, economic injustice, the profound impacts of incarceration on families and communities, political causes and historical origins.**

We shared our own first awareness of injustice and discrimination, and talked about ideas of community and America's longstanding emphasis on individualism. We also touched on questions of education for inmates, rehabilitation, the dangers of thinking in stereotypes, disenfranchisement, and making sure future elections will have adequate bearing on these issues.

Some good news: Several people were able to share information about initiatives that offer hope. For example, **Meredith Palmer** shared the recent news of the [Art for Justice Fund](#), launched when collector Agnes Gund raised \$165 million by selling a Roy Lichtenstein painting, and challenged other collectors to match her \$100 million gift. The Fund is managed by the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and has already awarded \$22 million in grants to 30 organizations aiming to support current and former prisoners and effect policy change, initially in bail and sentencing reform.

Demitri Papolos reported on research that has identified and can treat a form of bipolar disorder in children. The [Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation](#) has made outstanding progress toward the identification of one specific phenotype or symptom called Fear of Harm (FOH), which can lead



Bahman Mossavar-Rahmani, Demitri Papolos and David Meikle

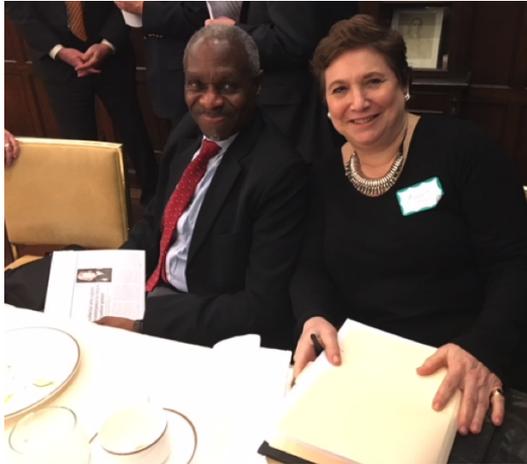
to behaviors associated with self-harm and, significantly, harm to others. This is of special note now as the country faces the role of mental health in identifying those who may harm others in the gun control debate. Further research has shown that children with FOH are exceptionally responsive to a novel treatment. The phenotype has been the subject of recent [media attention](#), but Demitri mentioned in conversation that the Foundation is increasing its efforts to get the word out about FOH, its diagnosis and treatment. If this phenomenon were appropriately addressed, around 1 million people would be kept out of prison, according to Demitri. Feel free to [contact him](#) to learn more.

The Criminalization of Poverty: 21st Century Debtors Prison is the 2018 theme for ClassACT Bridge project JusticeAid. There will be a panel in Washington, D.C. on April 17 hosted by classmate **Seth Waxman**, with Vanita Gupta, Acting Assistant Attorney General and head of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division under President Obama, in conversation with the founders/ executive directors of JusticeAid's 2018 non profit beneficiaries, Alec Karakatsanis of Civil Rights Corps and Gina Clayton of Essie Justice Group. **Panel tickets are free.**

Classmates **Charles Bush** and **Jim Rowe** have joined the host committee for the April 23rd **concert featuring the music of Billie Holiday**.

Support justice now! For **concert tickets** and more information about this year's beneficiaries, click [here](#).

ALSO, JusticeAid is putting together a host committee for an NYC panel on the same theme and a November 13th concert. Contact [Steve Milliken](#) or [Therese Steiner](#) if you are interested in joining the host committees in the planning and outreach efforts surrounding these events.



Jerome Harris and Meredith Palmer



Helen Hershkoff and Steve Milliken

Tuesday's Nor'easter prevented three classmates, including our original moderator, ClassACT Board member **Leigh Hafrey**, classmate **Patti Saris**, Chief United States District Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts and the former Chair of the United States Sentencing Commission, and federal prosecutor, **Zech Chafee** from participating in this event. Based upon the enthusiasm for the NY dinner, we hope to plan a Jeffersonian Dinner in the Boston area in the future and/or a Human Rights related panel at our reunion next fall.

Leigh was out of both power and heat as we gathered; happily, Patti was able to share some **ideas for things classmates who are concerned about our prison system can do**. "I suggest that our classmates **research legislation reform proposals** at the state or federal levels and support them," she wrote. "In addition, classmates should be encouraged to **volunteer at or contribute to philanthropies that help underprivileged kids**, like charter schools or programs that focus on drop-outs or potential gang members." Finally, classmates should be **encouraged to hire people with prison records** or **support programs that help with Reentry training** and housing or drug addiction. "Ideally, we could have a panel at the class reunion." We say, let's!

For more information about specific opportunities, webinars, conferences, a compelling movie, [visit the website!](#)

Here's who was there: **Kavery Kaul, Marion Dry*, Therese Steiner*, Bruce Southworth, Demitri Papalos, Jerome Harris, Meredith Palmer, David Meikle, Alan Dean, Ryan O'Connell, Pamela Ransom, Andrea Kirsh, Ann Fisher, Steve Milliken Helen Hershkoff, Bahman Mossavar-Rahmani* and Sallie Gouverneur***

*ClassACT Board



*Steve Milliken, Marion Dry, Bahman Mossavar-Rahmani and
Therese Steiner*



*Andrea Kirsh, Pamela Ransom and
Bruce Southworth*

****Bahman wrote after the event, "This was truly a broad-based team effort that I personally found inspiring and moving. I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the graciousness and forbearance of my formidable and extraordinary classmates who patiently shared their knowledge, experience and advice: Leigh Hafrey, Patti Saris, Zechariah Chafee, Steve Milliken, Helen Hershkoff, Donna Brorby, Donna Brown, Seth Waxman, Steve Wessler, Gerry Neuman, Marion Dry, Therese Steiner, Sallie Gouverneur and Jonathan Sprague. Alan Dean and Andrea Kirsh were incredibly generous in offering logistical support."**

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