

YV REVIEW



Community revival in
working-class Philly

A small town in Maine wades
into the data center debate

Exposing the historical
roots of socialism

New York City's wasteful
spending on homeless services

DISCOVERING, DEVELOPING, AND DEPLOYING INFLUENTIAL VOICES FOR FREEDOM.



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WELCOME FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

Dear Reader,

Last issue, I told you about the shift we were making at Young Voices — investing in the people who carry ideas, not just the ideas themselves. This time, I want to show you what that's actually looked like on the ground in our programs.

In May, our whole staff gathered in Boston for a strategic summit. We took our flagship programs apart, bolt by bolt, and rebuilt them for the media environment contributors are actually working in today. The biggest change: We killed the webinar model. We wanted to spend less time lumping everyone onto a Zoom call for one-size-fits-all media trainings. Instead, every contributor is now paired with a staff member who works with them one-on-one, regularly.

In just the two months since we onboarded our newest class, we've held more than 40 of these consultations. That's real time, spent talking through career trajectories, workshopping story ideas, and coaching contributors on how to build their brand and visibility. It's slower than a webinar. It's also a lot more useful — it's how we help contributors develop the kind of original stories the media market is hungry for right now. You'll see that play out firsthand in the pages ahead.

Speaking of the new class — we had over 70 applicants this cycle and accepted just 12. We got picky on purpose. We were looking for contributors who can build direct audiences, not just place a byline. Early results are good. Several times a week, this cohort is putting out commentary on X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. We're racking up impressions in the millions and meeting diverse audiences where they actually spend their time.

Meanwhile, we're keeping up our output in legacy media. Since April, our contributors have been published and syndicated across major outlets hundreds of times, reaching just north of 59 million viewers through articles and broadcast appearances combined.

Our reasoning: Why choose between the op-ed page and the algorithm when you can build talent that can work both?

At Young Voices, we're giving our talent the kind of attention that makes that possible.

The stories in this issue are proof of what that looks like in practice.

Thank you for your support!



AARON ANDREWS
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS
YOUNG VOICES



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

‘NEW FISH’ AND ‘OLD FISH’ REVIVE AN ICONIC SECTION OF PHILLY

FISHTOWN’S COMEBACK SHOWS THAT A COMMUNITY’S DECLINE ISN’T PERMANENT



Noah Gould

Noah C. Gould is the Alumni & Student Programs Manager at the Acton Institute and a Contributor at Young Voices since 2023. His writing has appeared in outlets such as National Review, Newsweek, the Detroit Free Press, and the Washington Free Beacon.

Philadelphia —

Fishtown, once a poster child of working-class decline, is booming. Top-rated restaurants have opened in former factories, and more than a dozen trendy coffee shops dot the map. Gentrification comes with downsides, but Fishtowners tell a feel-good story about a neighborhood hit hard by economic shifts that is enjoying a comeback.

Much has changed. Today, the area reflects the resources and talents of “Old Fish,” the immigrants and their descendants who built the community, and “New Fish,” the arrivals who have transformed the place.

Charles Murray used Fishtown as his archetype for the decline of the working class in his 2012 book, “Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960–2010.” The median family income in ZIP Code 19125 (which includes Fishtown and adjacent East Kensington neighborhoods) was \$41,900 in 2000, and only 8% of adults held college degrees. Kensington shows what Fishtown could have become over the next quarter-century. The area has the largest open-air drug market on the East Coast, which Gov. Josh Shapiro called nearly “a billion-dollar enterprise.”

Fishtown took a different trajectory, trending toward the adjacent Northern Liberties area. Median income for the two neighborhoods combined rose to \$133,300 by 2022. The neighborhood revival isn’t only thanks to economics. What distinguishes Fishtown is that many longtime residents stayed even as property values soared. The area has one of the highest participation rates citywide in the Longtime Owner Occupants Program, which limits property-tax rate increases.

Maggie O’Brien, 69, who founded the Fishtown Neighbors Association, has lived here for four decades. In the old days, “everybody would know a family on the block that could use a hand, like they could use a Thanksgiving basket or some presents for their kids. Everybody knew somebody, but now that’s changed.”

The stereotype of the millennial or Generation Z professional with at least one dog and a high-paying job is accurate, according to Ashlei Tracey, 32, a former president of the Fishtown Neighbors Association. She sees more young people getting involved, including herself, a serial joiner who has lived in the area for five years. Fishtown Beer Runners meets every Thursday to run a few miles and end at a pub for beer and conversation. "Over time that has evolved into a real family," says Johanna Goode, 42, one of the group's leaders.

Ms. Tracey says, "There's a bunch of rich yuppie people here now, and we can actually get the city to do some of the things that [residents] have been trying to do for 20-plus years." Last year, Fire Engine 6 finally returned to the station at 2601 Belgrade St., a longtime goal of residents. Almost every park in the area has a friends association in charge of gardening and cleanup. These community institutions address specific problems while fostering a sense of belonging.

Churches help bridge divides between Old Fish and New Fish. Bedrock Church, a Baptist congregation that gathers in a mixed-use warehouse, largely draws newcomers. Pastor Drew Guensch estimates that 10% of regular attendees are longtime residents: "We've seen more and more people that are old Fishtown that have begun to participate, and it's kind of always our dream that we would be a place where they won't always feel like they're opposed to each other."

If one building embodies Old Fish, it is Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church, the brownstone edifice in the center of town and a symbol of the Irish and Polish immigrants who came here, starting in the 19th century. Weekly attendance suffered during the pandemic, but the congregation is seeing an uptick in young families, says the Rev. Alfred Bradley. A new energy is noticeable. The church bell, recently restored with a gift from a new parishioner, rings out across the neighborhood.

Joe Beck, 43, who grew up in Fishtown and moved back in 2008, is raising his own children here. "I was kind of hoping for changes in this direction," he says. Mr. Beck welcomes the new energy, but understands that some people might have reservations.

"We run the risk of things changing really rapidly and I think some people fear that and that's fair," he adds. But the current community "reminds me of the vibe of when I was a kid. It's just families that want the best for their children. They want them to be involved with friends their age and want them to be involved in their neighborhood."



An Easter egg hunt at Penn Treaty Park in Fishtown along the Delaware River

NOAH GOULD

IN HIS OWN WORDS

After publishing his piece on community revival in Philadelphia, Noah Gould reflects on the reporting behind the story, the response from the neighborhood, and how it fits into his broader work on faith and civil society

What was the argument you wanted to get across in your piece?

This article is part of a larger project on what it takes to revive community institutions — churches, clubs, social associations. Fishtown has become a byword for neighborhood decline, so I wanted to shed light on an underreported side of the story.

This was an originally reported piece. What was your process like?

It was built entirely on on-the-ground interviews. I had a few scheduled going in, then made calls, knocked on doors, and played telephone between residents, asking each person who I should talk to next. Neighbors in Fishtown were incredibly generous with their time and contacts, which helped me build a much fuller picture of the neighborhood today.

What kind of response did you get after it was published?

Overwhelmingly positive from the community, people felt this was a story that hadn't been told enough, especially in a publication that size, and I got a lot of kind notes from residents. On social media, the reaction was mostly surprise: a few people pushed back with "Really, Fishtown? Are you sure?" but many others said it was a good reminder that a community's decline isn't permanent; revival is possible.

Did Young Voices play a role in developing or placing this piece?

Yes. There was a lot more reporting behind this than what made it to the page. My early drafts ran around 1,500 words, but the outlet wanted something closer to 900. The Young Voices editorial team was a big help in identifying what mattered most and trimming it down without losing what made the story work.

What lessons should someone outside Philadelphia take from this story?

Maintaining institutions takes real, ongoing work from people on the ground. There's also an economic dimension — jobs that let people commute into the city, and new businesses like restaurants and coffee shops drawing people back in. It's really a story about longstanding cultural anchors, like churches, combining with new economic energy.

How does this piece fit into your broader thinking about faith and society?

There are really two parts to it. First, churches play a unique role in bringing different kinds of people together and offering a clear sense of meaning — the ones thriving right now are those with a clear theological focus and mission. Second, that connects to a broader point about what a flourishing society needs: freedom alone isn't enough. People need the freedom to start businesses, start families, pursue what matters to them — but they also need moral direction for how to use that freedom, and institutions like churches play a crucial role in building that foundation.

What's next for your coverage?

I'm still traveling the country talking to different communities — there are stories like Fishtown's everywhere. I'm working on a book, with the help of Young Voices, about the state of community in America: what's missing, and how to rebuild it.

Where can people follow your work?

You can follow me on X at @NoahcGould1 and at the Acton Institute.

The Boston Globe

IS FEAR OF AI STIFLING RURAL MAINE'S ECONOMIC REBIRTH?

MAINE'S DATA CENTER DEBATE HITS A SMALL TOWN HARD



Jack Verrill

Jack Verrill has been a Young Voices Senior Contributor since he joined the program in 2026. He is a sophomore at the University of Michigan studying Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, writing on politics and public policy, with a focus on original reporting and the intersection of technology and economic opportunity.

The economy of Jay, Maine, imploded in 2020, when a pulp digester in the town's signature paper mill caught fire. After multiple rounds of layoffs, the Androscoggin Mill closed for good in 2023, eliminating 230 jobs and 12 percent of Jay's tax revenue. After 130 years of being a paper town defined by "the mill and the church," as one resident told The Boston Globe, Jay was without an economic identity.

It looked like the town might have found a new one in the form of a \$550 million data center project at the site of the former Androscoggin Mill. But on June 11, the project was put on hold. Tony McDonald, a Maine-based commercial realtor working alongside Sentinel Data Centers to build the project, told me it was due to Sentinel's concern that there would be further anti-data center legislation in Maine.

The controversy over the Jay data center has been swallowed up by a larger conversation about AI and the power of politics to stop it, killing a strong and possibly economically revitalizing project.

The data center was gaining political traction before this latest setback. Governor Janet Mills recently vetoed legislation that called for a moratorium on new data center construction in the state, opening the door for the Jay project. Promising an expanded tax base and 125 to 150 permanent jobs, the data center stood to buoy Jay's flailing economy.

According to regulatory intelligence firm Labyrinth, Maine's permitting requirements are among the strictest in the country. The Jay project cleared all of them, assuring officials that the facility would use less than 1 percent of the water formerly needed for the Androscoggin Mill and operate without changes to the power grid. This project is not a hyperscale center like the massive ones operated by Google, Amazon, and Microsoft.

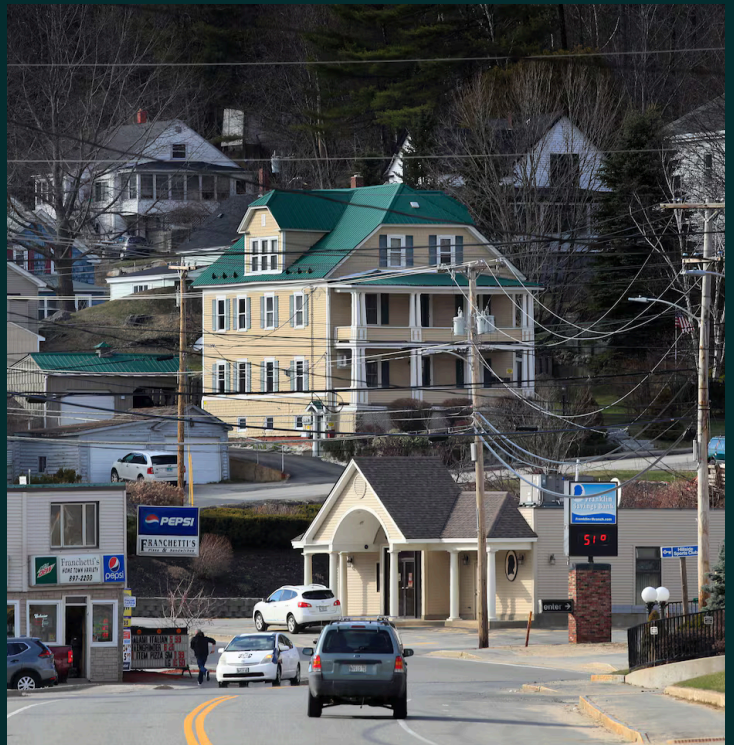
Yet opposition persists. Democratic state representative Melanie Sachs of Freeport, chief architect of the data center moratorium, said in an interview that the Jay project was based on "speculative job estimates" that revolved around a secretive process. "We don't have any transparency around what's going on," she said. "There could be data centers popping up all across the state that the legislature doesn't have much of a clue about." And this specific data center, she claims, was introduced hastily and without proper due diligence.

The Jay project did not require local approval under existing land-use regulations. The project was not requesting public money, or building on public land. McDonald voluntarily presented Sentinel's proposal to Jay's Select Board in order to ameliorate any concerns community leaders had. The Board then sent a letter of support to the state Legislature urging the project be exempt from the moratorium.

This calls into question what the controversy is about in the first place. There's the political angle — Maine was set to be the first state to establish a moratorium on data center construction, and the Legislature's failure to gain an exemption for Jay ultimately caused the governor's veto.

But it seems to be more than that. Sachs said the disagreement is not between parties but between "a coalition of people that have a healthy suspicion of AI, versus those who don't." In May, Graham Platner, the Democratic Senate Candidate in Maine, voiced support for slowing data center development, calling AI technology "utterly terrifying."

What gets lost in that conversation are the people of Jay. The town currently borders an eligible Opportunity Zone, identified by the federal government as economically devastated and in need of investment. This is the norm for much of rural Maine. Yet Jay had been an oasis of relative prosperity, as one longtime resident said, "we weren't rich, but we were stable." That was until the mill closed, the jobs left, and the tax base shuddered. Jay may be included as an Opportunity Zone after the next census.



Perhaps the data center does not offer Jay complete revitalization, nor do its tentative job numbers make it an ideal economic engine for the former paper town. But it gives that town a fighting shot at revitalization.

Conservative estimates place the property tax revenue alone at \$1.8 million annually. The project's assessed value is worth more than every home in Jay combined. "I don't like AI, but if that's what it takes, I'm for it," another resident told me last month.

In this rural town, uneasiness lives alongside hope, and a lingering feeling that for those who still remain in Jay, the clock is ticking.

JACK VERRILL

IN HIS OWN WORDS

After covering a proposed data center in Maine, Jack Verrill reflects on what it means for our national debate.

What made you want to cover this issue? What do you want people to know about data centers broadly?

I can understand why people are fearful of AI; it's a different technology than what we've seen before. However, I think this focus on data centers can be pretty myopic and overblown. There are a lot of falsehoods and exaggerations about water and land use. The proposed data center I covered in Maine, for example, is actually pretty small; it doesn't even require any changes in zoning. They're getting swept into a national debate over AI that they don't really belong in. Second, I wanted to start a conversation about the role of data centers in rural renewal. Data centers bring land use, property tax revenue, and a real opportunity for towns that lost factories and jobs decades ago but still have the infrastructure to support something like this.

Do you have a personal connection to this debate in Maine?

I grew up in Maine, and there are plenty of towns just like Jay. I've seen plenty of towns just like it — visibly worse off than they were 30 years ago, with a manufacturing base that's been hollowed out. That economic decline is something I'm sensitive to, so this wasn't an abstract policy story for me.

Who did you talk to for the piece?

I spoke with Melanie Sachs, a state legislator who supported a statewide AI data center moratorium. She was very intelligent, but ultimately her reasoning came down to simply disliking AI, which I thought was a bit disingenuous — the vote wasn't about AI as a technology, it was about a specific data center project. I also spoke with Tony McDonald, the Maine-based developer working with Sentinel Data Centers, the company behind the project. And I talked to several residents of Jay on background — none of them were AI evangelists, but people who'd watched their town decline for years and were open to any economic opportunity. Getting those three different perspectives really shaped the piece.

Did Young Voices play a role in helping you develop or place this piece?

Definitely. Since becoming a senior contributor, the team has really encouraged me to do more original reporting — something I'd only dabbled in for my school paper, never for a professional outlet. Once I wrote the piece, Young Voices helped me refine the draft, and then they pitched it to the Boston Globe. From there, they handled the back-and-forth with the Globe's editorial process, which I couldn't have navigated on my own as a college student with no professional media experience.

What kind of response did you get after it was published?

People I know in Maine were excited to see me in the Globe, since it's a big deal there. I also got a fair amount of email, some critical, but mostly supportive, and more engagement than usual on social media, with people I knew from Maine and from college reaching out about it.

Where do you want to take your media work next?

This fits well with where I want to go, doing more original reporting and more tech-focused work, though not exclusively. AI is a hot topic and something I'm personally interested in, so this piece helped me learn the subject while getting a foothold in a competitive space. I see it as a strong first step toward doing more original tech reporting.

Where can people follow your work?

You can read all my published work at jackverrill.com. You can also follow my work on X at [@jack_verrill](https://twitter.com/jack_verrill)

RealClearPolitics

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT 'DEMOCRATIC' SOCIALISM—AND WHAT ISN'T

TRACING DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM BACK TO ITS ROOTS — AND WHY THAT HISTORY MATTERS



Holly Jean Soto

Holly Jean is a member of our newest contributor class. She is an economics and liberty communicator and content creator, writing on political and economic issues, with a focus on democratic socialism, free markets, and making the case for liberty accessible to everyday audiences.

Democratic socialism is having a political moment.

Fresh off the victories of three socialist-backed candidates in New York's Democratic primaries, the movement is already setting its sights beyond the state, with democratic socialist Melat Kiros recently winning her primary in Colorado.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Socialists of America has grown from roughly 8,000 members in 2016 to more than 100,000 members today. As the movement continues to grow, so too has the debate surrounding it.

President Trump has repeatedly accused democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani of being a communist – a charge Mamdani has repeatedly and unequivocally rejected.

Much of the media has also rejected the comparison. CNN's Kaitlan Collins argued that Trump was incorrectly conflating democratic socialism with communism: "Socialism, much less democratic socialism, is not communism," she said. Similar arguments have been echoed by journalists and supporters who maintain that democratic socialism and communism are fundamentally different.

They're right that they are not the same thing. But that isn't the question we should be asking.

The more important question is this: Do democratic socialist politicians – and the growing number of young voters supporting them – fully understand where democratic socialism came from and how deeply its ideas are rooted in the Marxist tradition?

Regardless of how it is marketed on TikTok or by politicians, economics begins with definitions. Socialism is an economic system that seeks to replace private ownership of the means of production with social or collective ownership. The defining feature of socialism is not simply redistribution – it is ownership. Rather than allowing individuals to own and control businesses, factories, or industries, socialism argues they should increasingly be owned or directed by society or “the people” as a whole. In practice, that almost always requires a much larger role for the state in directing economic life. Democratic socialism does not redefine that economic objective. It proposes a different way of pursuing it.

Mamdani’s platform illustrates this broader direction. Rather than relying primarily on private markets to provide housing, he has called for a major expansion of publicly owned, permanently affordable housing and has proposed transferring some properties owned by negligent landlords into community or public ownership. He has also advocated expanding the government’s role in providing goods and services, including city-owned grocery stores. While these proposals do not abolish private property altogether, they reflect the same underlying principle: shifting more responsibility for owning, directing, or providing economic resources from private individuals and markets to collective or government institutions. Instead of advocating a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, democratic socialists seek to move society toward socialist goals through democratic institutions.

The defining feature of democratic socialism is not a different economic destination, but a different political strategy. Rather than calling for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, democratic socialists seek to convince voters, run candidates for office, pass legislation, and gradually transform the economy through democratic institutions, believing that socialism can be achieved through the ballot box instead of a revolution. In other words, socialism is the destination. Democracy is the method. The word democratic describes how the transition occurs – not the economic system being pursued.

Today’s democratic socialist movement illustrates this approach in practice. Rather than calling for revolution, candidates campaign on policies that gradually expand the role of government in the economy – such as government-owned grocery stores, expanded public housing, rent freezes, and other forms of public provision. The goal is to persuade voters that government should take on an increasingly larger role in providing and directing economic life. This is exactly why the word democratic matters: it describes the means of achieving socialist goals, not a different economic destination.

Democratic socialists today often differ from traditional socialists in important ways. Many support reforming capitalism rather than overthrowing it, taxing and redistributing private wealth rather than immediately abolishing private property. They reject authoritarian governments and insist that any economic transformation should occur through free elections, democratic institutions, and the protection of civil liberties.

But those differences should not obscure what they still share. Both begin with the belief that the market produces unjust outcomes, that wealth should be redistributed through political power, and that more of the economy should move away from private ownership and toward social or public control. Both ultimately seek to reduce the role of capitalism in organizing economic life – even if they disagree about how quickly that should happen or how much private enterprise should remain.

That is why democratic socialism is best understood not as a separate economic system, but as a democratic strategy for pursuing socialist objectives.

Modern democratic socialists frequently reject any comparison to communism. Bernie Sanders, for example, has repeatedly argued that democratic socialism is not about abolishing capitalism or having government own every business. Likewise, most democratic socialists today reject Soviet-style dictatorship and complete state ownership of the economy.

But rejecting communism's methods is not the same as rejecting socialism's intellectual origins. Democratic socialism did not emerge independently. It developed within the broader communist tradition that traces back to Karl Marx, whose ideas later shaped Lenin's understanding of socialism.

Within Marxist-Leninist theory, socialism was never presented as an alternative to communism – it was presented as the transition. Lenin famously stated that “the goal of socialism is communism,” reflecting his belief that socialism represented the first stage on the path toward a fully communist society. In this view, socialism was a transitional period in which the state, acting in the name of the working class, would increasingly direct economic life, abolish capitalist ownership, and lay the foundation for what Marx described as the higher stage of communism – a classless and ultimately stateless society.

Whether modern democratic socialists embrace that final destination is a separate question. The historical point is that, within the Marxist tradition, socialism and communism were never conceived as competing ideologies. Socialism was understood as the pathway to communism, not its rejection. As Frédéric Bastiat famously observed, protectionism, socialism, and communism are “the same plant in three different stages of growth.” His point was that they share the same seed, the same roots, and the same nature. They may look different above the surface, but beneath the soil they draw life from the same source. Only the stage of growth has changed.

It is true that being a democratic socialist is different from being a communist. But too often, the conversation ends there – as if adding the word democratic completely separates democratic socialism from the broader socialist tradition that preceded it.

Democratic socialists reject Marx's call for violent revolution and generally reject the goal of establishing a one-party communist state. But many continue to advocate ideas that emerged from the same intellectual tradition: expanding collective control over economic life, redistributing wealth through political power, viewing private ownership as something that should increasingly serve social goals, and enlarging the government's role in directing economic outcomes.

Understanding those historical roots doesn't require agreeing with Marx. It simply requires recognizing that these ideas did not emerge in isolation. They developed from the broader socialist tradition that traces back to Marx's critique of capitalism. Young voters deserve to understand not only what these ideas promise, but also where they came from and how they have developed over time.

Because once the principle is accepted that government should increasingly replace private economic decision-making with collective control, the debate is no longer whether the government should direct more of the economy. It becomes how much.

Democratic socialism and communism are not two ideas that developed independently of one another. They share a common intellectual foundation and a common historical lineage. So while many politicians are quick to reject the label “communist,” that should not obscure the deeper historical reality: These two ideologies are far more closely related than many politicians – and many voters – might realize.

HOLLY JEAN SOTO

IN HER OWN WORDS

After publishing her piece in RealClearPolitics on the relationship between democratic socialism and communism, Holly Jean reflects on the piece, her strategy for reaching new audiences, and where she wants to take her work next.

What argument did you want to get across in your piece?

I kept seeing the same back-and-forth in the media. One side says democratic socialism is communism; the other says it has nothing to do with it. I wanted to point out that we're asking the wrong question. The real question isn't whether democratic socialism is communism, but whether the two are related at all. The piece breaks down how democratic socialism is still socialism, just a democratic path to socialist ends, and traces that back to its roots in Marx. As Bastiat put it, protectionism, socialism, and communism are the same plant at different stages of growth. Lenin said the goal of socialism is communism, and the only difference between them is time. Americans deserve to know where these ideas actually come from, not just the surface-level promises.

Who did you want to reach with your article?

Young Americans who aren't usually involved in these debates. That's part of why I joined Young Voices to begin with: the goal isn't just to get something published on a website; it's to turn it into content that reaches people where they actually are, especially younger audiences who are getting their information from social media rather than traditional outlets.

Why was it important to amplify this piece on social media?

It starts with the same question: why are these ideas so attractive to younger generations in the first place? From there, we take pieces of the article and turn them into short vertical videos, 60 seconds to two minutes, that meet people where they are, on Instagram and similar platforms, and challenge them to think about these ideas differently without being preachy about it.

What was the response after it was published?

A lot of friends told me they'd never had it explained so clearly — these ideas are usually discussed at a pretty academic level that doesn't reach the average person, and being direct and accessible is something I'm intentional about. Of course there were also people who'd already made up their minds and didn't want to be challenged, but they were never really the audience I was trying to reach.

Did Young Voices play a role in helping you develop or place this piece?

They helped edit it and get it placed in RealClearPolitics, but just as important, they helped me think through the strategy for turning it into content that reaches people outside the liberty movement, not just an audience that already agrees, but people who've genuinely never encountered these arguments before.

Where do you see this fitting into your career going forward?

Growing my audience on social media is the big goal. Changing minds on these issues means meeting people on Instagram, TikTok, and X, not just in traditional media — and doing it in a way that invites people to think differently rather than putting them on the defensive. I did my first podcast last week, and I want to keep doing interviews and getting into conversations and organizations outside the liberty movement.

Where can people follow your work?

You can follow me on Instagram: @thehollyjeansoto.



Think Again

320
posts

2M
followers

4
following

Instagram



INSIDE NEW YORK'S HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

HOW A YOUNG VOICES COMMENTATOR USED SHORT-FORM VIDEO TO REACH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE



Maggie Anders

Maggie is one of the liberty movement's sharpest communicators. As the Young Voices Commentator, she produces timely commentary, appears on TV, radio, and online broadcasts, and shares her social media expertise to develop the next generation of pro-freedom communicators.

Young Voices has always helped communicators influence public debate through newspapers, television, and radio. Today, we're increasingly helping them build audiences where millions of people now consume news every day: social media.

Working alongside *Think Again*—an Instagram platform with **2 million followers**—Young Voices Commentator Maggie Anders produced a series of original, on-the-ground interviews examining New York City's homelessness crisis. Rather than simply commenting on the issue from a studio or newsroom, Maggie spoke directly with people living in homeless encampments, creating compelling short-form videos designed specifically for digital audiences.

The results demonstrate the power of this approach. Across the series, Maggie's videos have been **viewed more than 360,000 times**, generating thousands of likes, comments, and shares while introducing new audiences to ideas they are unlikely to encounter through traditional media alone.

For Young Voices, this is exactly what our digital-first strategy is designed to accomplish. We're not replacing newspapers, television, or radio—we're expanding beyond them. By combining original reporting, compelling storytelling, and strategic partnerships with leading digital publishers, we're helping our contributors reach the next generation of news consumers wherever they are.



MAGGIE ANDERS

IN HER OWN WORDS

After publishing a series of videos on homelessness and city spending in New York, Maggie Anders reflects on the reporting behind the project, what surprised her most, and how it fits into her broader work.

What was the argument you wanted to get across through this series of videos?

This first came onto my radar while watching cities do essentially nothing for the population of chronically homeless people; not people who lack access to housing, but people who, even if you gave them a bed, don't want it. My focus sharpened after the string of subway attacks in New York, including the Penn Station stabbing, committed by a man with a long arrest record police already knew well. Despite New York continuously increasing spending on homelessness, the population keeps growing, and the root problem never gets solved.

Why did you decide to go interview people on the street yourself?

The opportunity came through a partner organization called Street Smart, which runs a platform called Think Again. They asked if I wanted to go speak with people living in a 12-block encampment that had drawn citywide attention after months of complaints. A lot of journalists are comfortable working from statistics other people have already reported, but one of the biggest missing pieces is actually talking to people who are permanently homeless — asking why the services offered to them have failed to get them somewhere safer. What I took away is that these encampments function almost like a parallel society operating outside the rules the rest of us live by, and people who've lived in that environment for a long time are shaped by it in ways that are hard to fully register from the outside.

How does this series fit into your broader coverage?

I focus a lot on the inefficiency of government spending and how central planning often makes problems worse rather than better. I think the homelessness crisis reflects a bigger tension in America — we're a country built on individual liberty and free enterprise, but our cities are deteriorating around us, and I don't think that has to be the cost of doing business.

Why was it important that this story be told through video content for social media?

The first video cracked well over 200,000 views, and people are actually engaging with the problem in the comments — you can talk back with them directly. Traditional journalism is still hugely important and can elevate these issues in its own way, but I think there's a real marriage between traditional and digital journalism rather than a conflict between them. Vertical video is just a way to reach audiences who might otherwise be resistant to this message.

Where can people follow your work?

You can follow me on Instagram, where my handle is maggiemoda.ig, and on X @maggiemoda.



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MAGGIE'S INSTAGRAM
SERIES WITH THINK AGAIN**

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