

THE NEW HEROES

STUDENT VIDEO HANDOUT

Delancey Street in San Francisco, CA, USA. featuring Mimi Silbert.

“Every day is like staring Delancey Street all over again. They can see the heights to which they can rise and every level. It’s just unbelievable and it is inspirational. And it therefore says to me I have no right to not fight as hard as they do.”

--Mimi Silbert

SUMMARY:

Delancey Street teaches people who have spent their lives in prison and on the streets how to become self-sustaining citizens; the organization’s industries—restaurant, moving company, gardening company, retail store—provide job training and an income stream. This is not therapy; it is life skills training.

This is a story about transition from incarceration and despair to new lives. People who have spent years in prison come to Delancey Street to change their lives—learning job skills, life skills, personal responsibility, how to get along in the world. The greater goal is social change—turning society’s throwaways into contributing members of society.

Mimi Silbert named the program after the Delancey Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan where immigrants, like her own parents, came to make a new life for themselves in this country. How are the two situations (moving to a new country and getting out of jail) similar and different?

1. Is Delancey Street a “Halfway House?” Why or why not?
2. Can the “scales be tipped back for good”? What do you think about the idea that if you do more good later in life you can “outweigh” the bad you did earlier?
3. Delancey Street has started over 20 business training schools. Starting out from a single house, Mimi Silbert has built a \$20-million-a-year empire with locations in New York, New Mexico, North Carolina and Los Angeles. She has never accepted a penny of public funds. Why not?
4. Silbert has spent her career cultivating a “university of the streets”. She calls it a “Harvard for losers” where the students are former pimps and prostitutes, junkies and drug dealers, and armed robbers.