

WHY NYC HOSPITALS KEEP CLOSING • P 6

# THE INDYPENDENT

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*A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE*



ANDREW STERN

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## the reader's voice



### THE INDY IS SOFT ON BRATTON

I was happy to see *The Independent* run an article that took a closer look at the return of Bill Bratton to the NYPD (“Police Reform’s Next Step,” January/February *Independent*). However, I was disappointed as I read what were essentially some of the same talking points of mainstream media and the cautiously optimistic spin coming from some quarters of New York City.

For example, when Alex Vitale refers to the pushback that Bratton faced from community groups in Los Angeles, he refers to their concerns as “accusations” while largely taking at face value the “support of minority leaders” there. The notion that “leaders” support Bratton should be challenged by the policing movement — and *The Independent*. It also begs the

question of whether these leaders also support Bratton’s longstanding commitment to the “broken windows” theory of policing that people who commit minor “quality-of-life” offenses are the most likely ones to eventually commit serious offenses and his emphasis on predictive policing — philosophies that have disproportionately targeted communities of color for as long as I’ve been alive.

In less than 100 days Bratton has managed to take the stage out from under the feet of activists by declaring our problems “solved.” I’m sure that Vitale is not fooled, but in order to take back that stage and to take the fight to Bratton, we need to be clear about what we’re up against and the fight that will be needed to keep New York from becoming Bratton’s town once again.

— JOSMAR TRUJILLO,  
*via email*

### REAL CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The authors of your article on homelessness (“Homeless Folks Have Real Solutions to Housing Crisis,” February/March *Independent*) wrote, “the bottom-line cause of homelessness is the high cost of housing.” That is only partially right. Other causes are free-trade treaties that decimated job growth and income that previously kept up with productivity gains. There’s also the decimation of social welfare safety nets in fa-

vor of cutting taxes for the 1% and their multinational conglomerate monopolies, as well as the bloated budget for imperialist war mongering and Constitution shredding.

— KEVIN SCHMIDT,  
*from indypendent.org*

### KEYSTONE XL HELL

It is my opinion that the Keystone XL pipeline (“Learning Lessons for Next Keystone XL Battle,” February/March *Independent*) is an invasion by a foreign nation onto U.S. territory and as such should be repelled by whatever means, including the National Guard. Kick their dirty oil out of our country, and kick out the politicians who have backed this dirty oil out while you are at it.

— SHIRLEY PETTIS,  
*from indypendent.org*

### A TRAITOR TO MEN

Michael Kimmel is a traitor to men (“White Men’s Rage,” February/March *Independent*). He deserves scorn for fronting for the world’s largest and most officially coddled anti-male hate movement. The notion that his kind of man could ever be strong, appealing and sensible is laughable.

— ANONYMOUS  
*from indypendent.org*

### POOR, WHITE AND MALE

As a low-income urban white guy, I’m still waiting for any political

faction to admit that I exist, let alone write an article about me (“White Men’s Rage,” February/March *Independent*). Low-income urban white people are 2 percent of the population by the way. We are never allowed to talk about anything, because the issues that affect us are assumed to be “black” issues.

— JOHN NOVAK,  
*from facebook.com/ TheIndypendent*

### AGIT-FOLK SONGS COMIN’ BACK!

Thank you, Eli Smith, for shining a light on the past and present of folk music in America (“Turn, Turn, Turn: A New Era of Folk Music Emerges,” February/March *Independent*). With the ghouls working overtime to damage lives and damage the planet, the direct message from the heart that folk music delivers is crucial.

— DAN HANRAHAN,  
*from indypendent.org*

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TIMOTHY KRAUSE

**HAPPY MAY DAY:** Thousands of New Yorkers will march down Broadway again this year on May 1 in support of worker and immigrant rights.

**FRI APRIL 4**

10am and 3pm • Free  
**MARCH: AIRPORT WORKERS DEMAND GOOD JOBS:** 12,000 service workers at NYC's three airports are demanding a living wage. They and their supporters will mark the 46th anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination defending striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn., with rallies and a march from JFK to LaGuardia. The JFK rally begins at 10 am. A second rally will be held at LaGuardia at 3pm.

**SAT APRIL 5**

10–4pm • Free  
**RECYCLING: DISPOSE OF YOUR UNWANTED ELECTRONICS.** Acceptable electronics include computers, monitors, printers, scanners, keyboards, cables, cell phones and video game equipment. Events will be held throughout April in locations in all five boroughs. For full list of locations & dates, visit the LES Ecology Center website. Greenwich Village  
 6th Ave between Bleecker and Houston  
 212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

**WED APRIL 9**

7pm • Free

**WORKSHOP: REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE.** Get an overview of reporter's privilege, how to distinguish a confidential source and the history behind state shield laws. Brooklyn Public Library  
 10 Grand Army Plaza  
 718-230-2491 • brooklynpubliclibrary.org

**WED APRIL 9**

7:30pm • \$6/\$10/\$15 sliding scale  
**TALES OF THE 1% FILM SERIES: TOM JEFFERSON, SALLY HEMMING & MARQUIS DE SADE.** In this 57-minute mockumentary, the author of the *Declaration of Independence* befriends the author of *Justine* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Later, de Sade visits Jefferson's Virginia plantation and is horrified by what he sees. Brecht Forum  
 388 Atlantic Ave, Bklyn  
 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

**THU APRIL 10**

**BOOK LAUNCH: THE MUSLIMS ARE COMING!** Arun Kundnani reads from and discusses his new book on Islamophobia, extremism and the domestic war on terror. Alwan for the Arts

16 Beaver St, 4th Fl  
 646-732 3261 • alwanforthearts.org

**FRI APRIL 11**

6:30pm • Free  
**SCREENING: VIDAS SECAS (BARREN LIVES).** Directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, this 1963 film drama shows the desperate struggle for life of skilled but landless peasants in the drought-ridden northeast of Brazil. It is considered an early masterpiece of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement that focused on the economic and political conditions of the poor. PSC/CUNY Union Hall  
 61 Broadway, 16th Fl  
 212-354-1252 • psc-cuny.org

**SAT APRIL 12**

8pm • \$5-\$10  
**PERFORMANCE: PETE SEEGER CELEBRATION SING-ALONG.** Celebrate the life and music of Pete Seeger with Peoples' Voice Café performers. This is a fully participatory event, come to sing. Peoples' Voice Café  
 40 E 35th St  
 212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

**SUN APRIL 13**

12:30pm • Free  
**MEET-UP: RADICAL EDUCATORS.** An open group of educators from various backgrounds who meet and discuss critical texts, educational organizing and other dimensions of their work. Bluestockings Bookstore & Cafe  
 172 Allen St  
 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

**FRI APRIL 18—SUN APRIL 20**

Various times • \$15–\$75  
**MUSIC: 6TH ANNUAL BROOKLYN FOLK FESTIVAL.** This three-day festival includes 30 bands, vocal and instrumental workshops, a family-friendly square dance, film screenings, the famous Banjo Toss contest and more! The Bell House  
 149 7th St, btwn 2nd & 3rd Ave, Bklyn  
 718-395-3214 • brooklynfolkfest.com

**MON APRIL 21**

7pm • Free  
**FORUM: WHISTLEBLOWERS & SURVEILLANCE — SNOWDEN, YOU & ME.** Sponsored by Brooklyn for Peace and World Can't Wait, panelists include Faiza N. Ali (Arab American Association of New York), Carl Dix (Stop Mass Incarceration Network) and Debra Sweet (World Can't Wait). Brooklyn Commons  
 388 Atlantic Ave  
 718-624-5921 • bfp@brooklynpeace.org

**THU APRIL 24**

6:30pm • Free  
**PHOTOGRAPHY: A WORLDVIEW FROM GUYANA.** Award-winning photographers

Nikki Kahn and Keisha Scarville will share their ongoing work to tell Guyana's stories and counter stereotypes about the former British colony and its wide-reaching diaspora. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture  
 135th St and Lenox Ave  
 212-491-2200 • nypl.org

**SAT APRIL 26**

5–9pm • Free  
**FULL DISCLOSURE CAMPAIGN: NYC KICKOFF EVENT.** Veterans For Peace is fighting to keep alive an anti-war perspective on the American war in Vietnam as the military plans to sanitize and mythologize that conflict. Event includes guest speakers, spoken word performances and a puppet show. Judson Memorial Church  
 55 Washington Sq South  
 stopthesewars.org

**THU MAY 1**

12–6pm • Free  
**RALLIES & MARCHES: CELEBRATE MAY DAY.** May Day has seen a revival in the United States since 2006 and is now a day to celebrate the struggles of both workers and immigrants. This year, the May 1st Coalition will rally from 12 to 5:30pm at Union Square before marching down Broadway to Lower Manhattan. Meanwhile, a labor union-sponsored rally will be held at 5pm at City Hall. The two groups will march together for the final leg of the trip past Zuccotti Park and the Wall Street bull. May1.info

**SAVE THE DATE — SAT MAY 17**  
**GET YOUR GROOVE ON AND DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY WITH THE INDY. WE'RE THROWING A BENEFIT DANCE PARTY AT THE STARR STREET STUDIOS AT 207 STARR ST IN BUSHWICK.**  
**FEATURED PERFORMER: DJ STYLUS**  
**ADMISSION: \$10 + CASH BAR**  
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# BE THE MEDIA!

**HAVE YOU WANTED TO TRY YOUR HAND AT JOURNALISM BUT YOU'RE NOT SURE WHERE TO START?**

THE INDYPENDENT WILL BE HOSTING A COMMUNITY REPORTING WORKSHOP SATURDAY, MAY 10 FROM 1–5PM. WE WILL COVER THE BASICS OF JOURNALISM, INCLUDING LEDE WRITING, INTERVIEWING, RESEARCH AND STORY DEVELOPMENT. LIMITED SPACES ARE AVAILABLE. TO RECEIVE AN APPLICATION, PLEASE EMAIL US AT CONTACT@INDYPENDENT.ORG. SLIDING SCALE \$10-\$25.



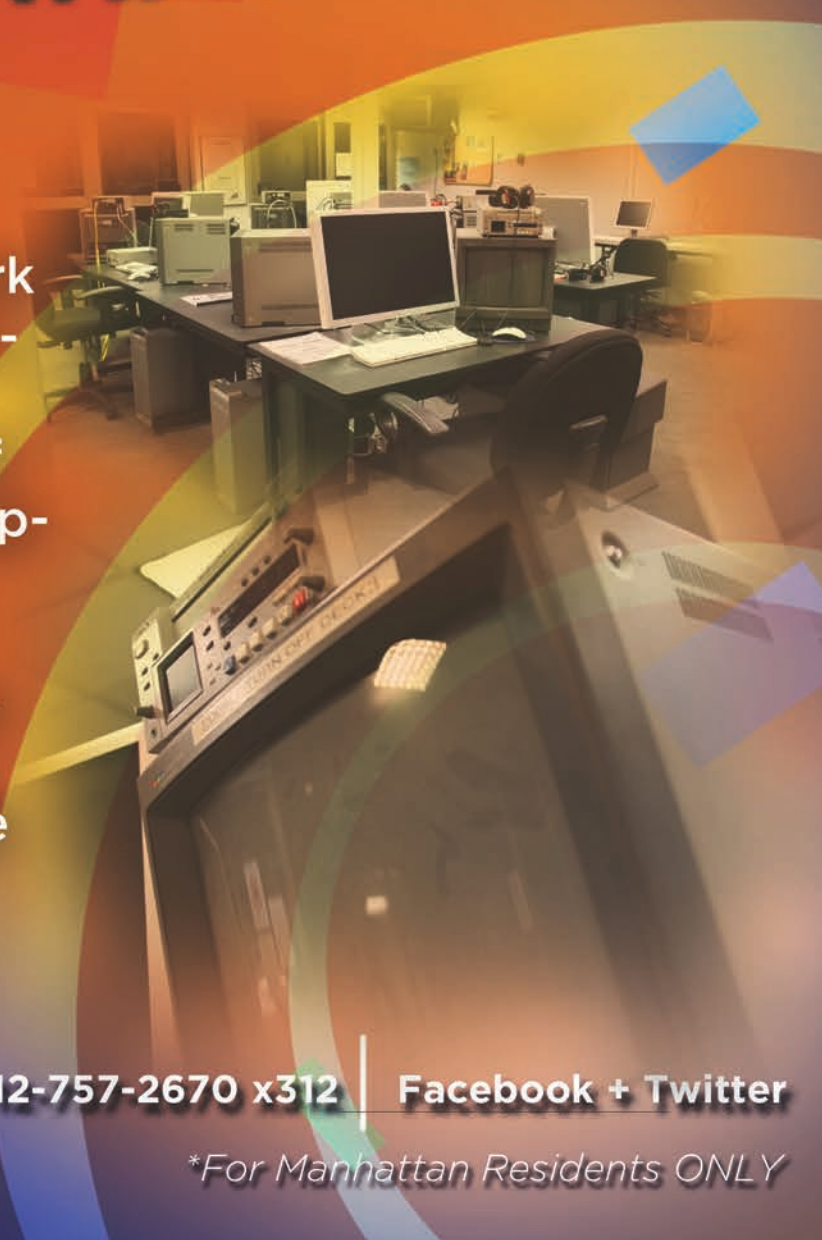
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# When Hope Springs Anew

BY JOHN TARLETON

Late on the afternoon of March 20, Kate Temple-West gathered together several small children to hold hands beneath the barren branches of an apple tree.

It was the first day of spring and Children's Magical Garden was open for business at the corner of Stanton and Norfolk on the Lower East Side. Temple-West, the garden's longtime director, had already helped some children plant clover as well as brightly colored tulips and violas. The wind had an icy sting to it, but neither she nor the children were discouraged.

"Wake up apple tree," they sang out in unison. "Wake up!"

"Wake up apple tree, wake up!"

"Wake up apple tree, wake up to the sun!"

Across the way, Emily Weichers prepared small seed packets of mint, fennel and arugula while she watched out of the corner of her eye as her son Tristan, 6, dug for worms. The seeds were to be planted in dirt-filled egg cartons that gardeners would place on their kitchen window sills until the end of April.

"Even if you live in a small New York City apartment, you can still be a part of gardening," said Weichers. She stumbled across this green space two years ago while walking her son to school and is still amazed at her good fortune. "My son has eaten apples and peaches from the trees here. I never thought

that would happen on the Lower East Side. It's what makes the neighborhood liveable."

That could soon change.

Last May, real estate developer Serge Hoyda staked his claim to a parcel of the garden he purchased in 2003 for \$180,000 by having a fence installed. It effectively cut the garden in half and deprived it of its raised vegetable beds, chicken coop and meditation circle. City Council member Margaret Chin and Community Board 3 came to the aid of the kids by making sure that the rest of the garden was placed under the aegis of the Parks Department's Green Thumb program and received permanent protection.

In November, Hoyda submitted a plan to the Department of Buildings proposing to build a six-story building with a penthouse and a gym that would tower over the garden. And in January, he flipped the property for a cool \$3.3 million to the Yonkers-based Horizon Group whose owners told the *Villager* they want to go forward with building on the disputed lot for the benefit of their own children.

Children's Magical Garden traces its roots back to the early 1980s, when hundreds of community gardens began to sprout up across New York. In neighborhoods like the Lower East Side that had practically been abandoned by the city government, residents cleared garbage-strewn lots and turned blight into beau-



TIMOTHY KRAUSE

**GREEN THUMB:** Kate Temple-West (center) of Children's Magical Garden with two young gardeners.

ty. With several neighborhood schools located nearby, the lot at Norfolk and Stanton became a magnet for children and their families.

When New York boomed again in the 1990s, the Giuliani administration moved to hand over the gardens to private developers. Protests and lawsuits followed and hundreds of gardens were preserved from bulldozers.

A booming real estate market continues to make the gardens a tempting target for private developers and presents some intriguing questions: Who should this land belong to? The people who work it and through their collective efforts bring value to their communities? Or, to real estate speculators who invoke claims of private ownership to make off with the wealth produced by others?

In the case of Serge Hoyda, the members of Children's Magical Garden still hope they can

prevail. On March 10, their pro-bono lawyers filed suit in the State Supreme Court claiming the fenced-off parcel of land was theirs by right of "adverse possession," a New York State law that under certain circumstances allows one party to claim another's property if they use it "openly, notoriously and exclusively" for 10 years.

Meanwhile, Kate Temple-West is looking forward to another growing season. She's hoping to acquire enough topsoil to start some new vegetable beds. With the part of the garden that gets the most sunlight behind a fence, she's set her sights on plants that will do well in the shade — fig trees, raspberries, blackberries, elderberries and mint.

"The kids get excited about any little thing that comes up through the ground," she said.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### THU, APR 17 • 7:30PM DISCUSSING STRATEGY: SOCIALISM CAMPAIGN IN NEW YORK?

With Gloria Mattera, Dan la Botz and Howie Hawkins, moderated by Matt Hoke  
Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

### WED, APR 27 • 7-9:30PM BRECHT FORUM SPRING PARTY

Come celebrate the spring thaw with friends, music and drinks by donation!  
Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

### THU, MAY 1 • 7:30PM SPECIAL MAY DAY FORUM

Women and Revolution: The Women's Movement and Marxism in the 1970s  
With Lise Vogel and Hester Eisenstein  
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#reclaimEarthDay



# NYC's Vanishing Hospitals

BY PETER RUGH

New York City hospitals are dying out. They take up whole blocks, sometimes more, in a city where every square foot has a price tag. Space is limited and condos for a select, wealthy few are more profitable than treatment centers whose emergency room doors are open to everyone.

Fifteen New York City hospitals have closed down since 2003. In the most high-profile of the recent shutdowns, St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center was demolished in 2012. Where the hospital stood for more than a century and a half on 12th Street and Seventh Avenue in the West Village, developers at Rudin Management Company and Global Holdings have replaced inpatient care units with terraced, two-bedroom apartments. The new site also now contains a private garden, underground parking, a 25-meter-long swimming pool and a golf simulator.

Three blocks north, where St. Vincent's operated a cancer treatment facility, another development has sprung up. Amenities, according to the *Gothamist*, include "Feng Shui guidance," "a residential dog walker," "on-site personal trainers and group exercise fitness classes, beauty and spa services," "at-home certified massages" and "regular deliveries of organic cold-pressed juices and cleanses to your doorstep."

Fearing that their hospital could be next, a vocal coalition of patients and caregivers in Brooklyn has been resisting efforts by the State University of New York (SUNY) to close Long Island College Hospital (LICH). Similar efforts are also under way to save the nearly bankrupt Interfaith Medical Center in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

"My son was born at Long Island College Hospital 28 years ago," said LICH defender Maria Roca, wondering where she and others will turn if there is an emergency and its doors are closed. "I've been a patient and my mom, who is now in her 90s and has Alzheimer's, her geriatrician is at LICH."

Located on a high embankment along

the East River in Brooklyn's gentrified Cobble Hill neighborhood, the hospital is a developer's dream. One can imagine a yuppie languidly watching the sunset with an unobstructed view of Manhattan's skyline from a pricy loft where LICH currently stands. But the hospital also serves the adjacent communities of Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens and Red Hook.

Patients from the surrounding area, who would have to travel much farther to reach a hospital if LICH shuts down, have been a key part of the Save LICH Coalition. Working with hospital staff and elected officials, they are hoping for a last-minute miracle to keep the facility open.

## DE BLASIO'S ROLE

"LICH is going to go the way of St. Vincent's," Bill de Blasio warned, four months before he was elected New York's mayor, "unless the community steps in and forces the SUNY board [of trustees] to do the right thing and provide the information we need." De Blasio held the office of public advocate at the time and was seeking the names of parties who had expressed interest in purchasing the hospital. "Most of them are health care providers," de Blasio said, "one is a developer. We don't know who they are, we don't know the details of the proposals. For elected officials, for the community to work together to save LICH, we need that information."

De Blasio was arrested in front of SUNY's midtown offices last July together with about a dozen LICH care providers and patients. The act of civil disobedience helped vault him from the bottom to the top of the polls in a crowded Democratic primary race and bolstered LICH's cause. However, a



**STANDING OUT:** Then-mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio was arrested last July at a protest to save Long Island College Hospital.



**TRYING TO BEAT THE ODDS:** Sharonnie Perry (at center in white scarf) and fellow community activists rally to preserve Interfaith Medical Center on January 19.

deal championed by the new mayor in tandem with Gov. Andrew Cuomo, announced February 20, leaves the hospital's fate uncertain. Under the agreement reached between labor unions, SUNY and elected leaders, LICH could be sold off as early this May.

Nonetheless, New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and local community groups in the Save LICH Coalition hailed the arrangement, describing it in a joint press release as "the best chance of LICH remaining a hospital."

## TERMS OF THE DEAL

The deal gives coalition members and the public advocate's office a minority vote on a technical committee deciding who will purchase the hospital and establishes a point system whereby preference will be given to potential buyers that will keep providing health services. But it also frees SUNY from a restraining order that had prevented it from divesting itself of the hospital.

The public advocate's office and community groups won the order from Kings County Court in July after SUNY administrators began diverting ambulances and shutting the hospital down. Many saw the governor's hidden hand in the attempted shutdown, because he had turned a deaf ear to protests for bailout funds and because he appoints members to the SUNY Board of Trustees.

Two weeks after the deal was brokered in February, SUNY announced layoffs of 600 of LICH's 1,400 employees.

The bidding process mandated by the settlement saw nine groups submit proposals by a March 22 deadline to purchase LICH and redevelop it. The amounts being offered ranged from \$210 to \$251 million. Each of the nine proposals envisions creating a combination of affordable and market-rate housing, commercial space and a medical facility of some kind, including five that would allow LICH to continue as a full-service hospital. Under the terms of the settlement SUNY has the largest say over the future of the hospital. It is expected to announce its decision in early April.

## WHY HOSPITALS ARE FLATLINING

There are a number of factors leading to the closing of New York's hospitals. First, medical inflation has skyrocketed, soaring at a rate of about 7 percent annually from 2000 to 2008. Simultaneously, Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement formulas have been reduced, as a result of a federal law passed by a Republican-led Congress and signed by former President Bill Clinton in

1997. State support for hospitals has also been heavily cut since that time.

While government austerity policies have played a key role in sending hospitals that serve too many poor, working-class and elderly patients spiraling into bankruptcy, the vagaries of private health care economics haven't helped either.

Prestigious Manhattan-based hospital systems with ties to university medical centers like New York Presbyterian, Mount Sinai and NYU Langone Medical Center routinely land at the top of *U.S. News & World Report's* Honor Roll of Best Hospitals. They can extract better reimbursement rates from private insurers who don't want to be cut out of these hospitals and risk losing their most affluent policy holders. Smaller outer-borough hospitals lack the market power to do the same.

"It's about profit," said Sean Petty, a member of the New York State Nurses Association's governing board. "Medicaid and Medicare are being cut, forcing hospitals that cater to those patients to close. At the same time we're seeing expanded services at hospitals that treat patients who have insurances that pay very well."

## \$8 BILLION FOR DWINDLING HOSPITAL BEDS

In February New York State received \$8 billion in Medicaid funds from the federal government. Gov. Cuomo initially hailed the assistance as "the biggest step forward towards a positive conclusion for our communities, particularly in Brooklyn, that have suffered from diminishing health care services." But, in another letdown for those struggling to keep LICH and other community hospitals open, none of those funds will be put toward bailout.

*Crain's New York*, a publication that caters to the city's business community, offered the frankest assessment of the deal, noting that funds will go toward Medicaid redesign initiatives that will reduce the number of hospital beds in favor of less costly outpatient services.

"The \$8 billion grant will actually chip away at the beloved hospitals so many community groups have battled to protect in recent years," reports *Crain's*. "The blunt reality of the new federal funding is that community hospitals throughout the city will lose beds. Many will be a sliver of their former selves. ... Access to more complex medical services will require travel to another neighborhood — or another borough."

Continued on page 8



# Remembering St. Vincent's

BY GARY SCHOICHEL

I came back from out of town one day in the mid-1980s to find my son with a black eye, a real shiner, caused by a basketball hit by a baseball bat into the left side of his face.

As we walked to St. Vincent's Hospital, people stared at his swollen black-and-blue cheek and at the man who must have done that to that poor child. Located in the West Village, St. Vincent's was our neighborhood hospital. To the north was Roosevelt, to the east were Cabrini and Beth Israel and to the south was Beekman Downtown, but we could walk to St. Vincent's from our Chelsea apartment and that made all the difference.

At the hospital he was immediately taken in — it was St. Vincent's policy to see children as soon as they arrived — and I was quickly asked if I had done that. I explained what had happened but was glad they asked, thinking, "St. Vincent's protects children. Good."

St. Vincent's had a long history. Established in 1849 by the Roman Catholic Sisters of

**IT WAS OUR NEIGHBORHOOD HOSPITAL, AND THAT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.**

Charity with the specific purpose of helping the poor, it was the third-oldest hospital in New York City and the first to establish an ambulance service. It helped the city

through some of its worst disasters, treating victims of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. It served as the first-response hospital for the 9/11 attacks, taking in more than 800 survivors.

More than that, St. Vincent's was at the epicenter of the 30-year battle against AIDS. When the pandemic began to spread, it was St. Vincent's that created a special ward to care for those who would die. At the time there was no living. Whether that ward was to isolate — there was general ignorance about AIDS and its transmission — or to make treatment easier, I don't know. But it was a hospice with art-filled walls and kind patient care.

Twice, I spent a few days in the hospital for hernia surgeries. We, St. Vincent's intake and I, had a disagreement about the method to be used for the operations. I was on Medicaid, and it was in the hospital's financial interest to keep me as long as they could for the reimbursement. Once that was dealt with I was a patient to be cared for like any other. In my days there I wandered the wards meet-

ing people, some new and some I knew from my neighborhood. They included the guy who sold me pot, who was there because the cops had cracked his kneecap. He gave me a nice joint to smoke in the stairwell. You could do that.

Years afterward, a close friend went to the St. Vincent's emergency room on Thanksgiving night, fell asleep and woke up two and a half months later still in the hospital. He had contracted a spinal infection that mirrored meningitis but wasn't. He was well taken care of until he went to a nursing home. That was in 2010, right as the doors of St. Vincent's were closing for good.

St. Vincent's isn't the only hospital that has closed. There have been 15 since 2003 and another two are on the brink: Long Island College Hospital and Interfaith Medical Center, both in Brooklyn. None of the powers-that-be really want to save them, because they serve patients without insurance and without clout.

St. Vincent's was demolished in 2012. Today, we see luxury housing being built where

it once stood. Now, whichever hospital the neighborhood's residents go to, it is neither in nor of the neighborhood. The Catholic Church didn't single out St.

Vincent's; it's been closing hospitals, as well as schools, all over. There are no Catholic general hospitals left in the city. Maybe the monies being paid out for abused children wiped out the resources needed to keep them open.

Others will tell you that Rudin Management, the builder of the new housing in St. Vincent's footprint, is coincidentally former City Council Speaker Christine Quinn's largest campaign contributor and she didn't do all she could do to save the hospital. Or it just might be total incompetence on the part of the church's financial management. Who knows?

What I know, and what our communities know, is that health care has taken a beating in Greenwich Village and Chelsea and that citywide, the assault continues.

*Gary Schoichel is a photographer and journalist in the labor movement and has been living in Chelsea for almost 50 years.*



JIM SECULA



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## Hospital Closings

Continued from page 6

“Will it mean some hospital beds are reduced?” said Cuomo, contradicting previous remarks he made about the funds. “Yes, because that is the point of the exercise. You will have a decrease in beds.”

There is already a shortage of beds in Brooklyn. At LICH last summer, before a judge ordered the hospital’s administrators to cease diverting ambulances, one paramedic compared the crisis spawned by the turning away of patients to that caused by Hurricane Sandy. Meanwhile, a report last year from the public advocate’s office showed that Bedford-Stuyvesant’s Interfaith Medical Center — bankrupt and, like LICH, facing closure — was operating at 106 percent of its capacity. For every 500 Brooklynites there is one hospital bed. For residents of Manhattan there

are three.

Despite the already skewed distribution of services, top-of-the line health care is expanding in Manhattan. Thanks to a \$100 million donation last spring from billionaire industrialist David Koch, New York Presbyterian plans to establish a new outpatient wing on Riverside Drive. Right in line with the politics of the patron — and those of his brother, Charles — the hospital wing, which will bear the Koch name, will be a nonunion facility.

“Right-wing, anti-union profiteers like David Koch should not be meddling with health care in New York City,” remarked Letitia James, the city’s new public advocate.

### COOPERATIVE MODEL

At a rally outside Interfaith in January, Sharonnie Perry, with the medical center’s community advisory board, wondered

aloud where the funds to save Bed-Stuy’s hospital would come from. She jokingly charged James with the task of finding Interfaith their own wealthy benefactor. One hasn’t been swift to arrive. Instead, the Nurses Association, partnering with activists like Perry, are developing a plan that would see the boards of directors at Brooklyn’s struggling hospitals replaced by an elected leadership of staff, patients and local residents.

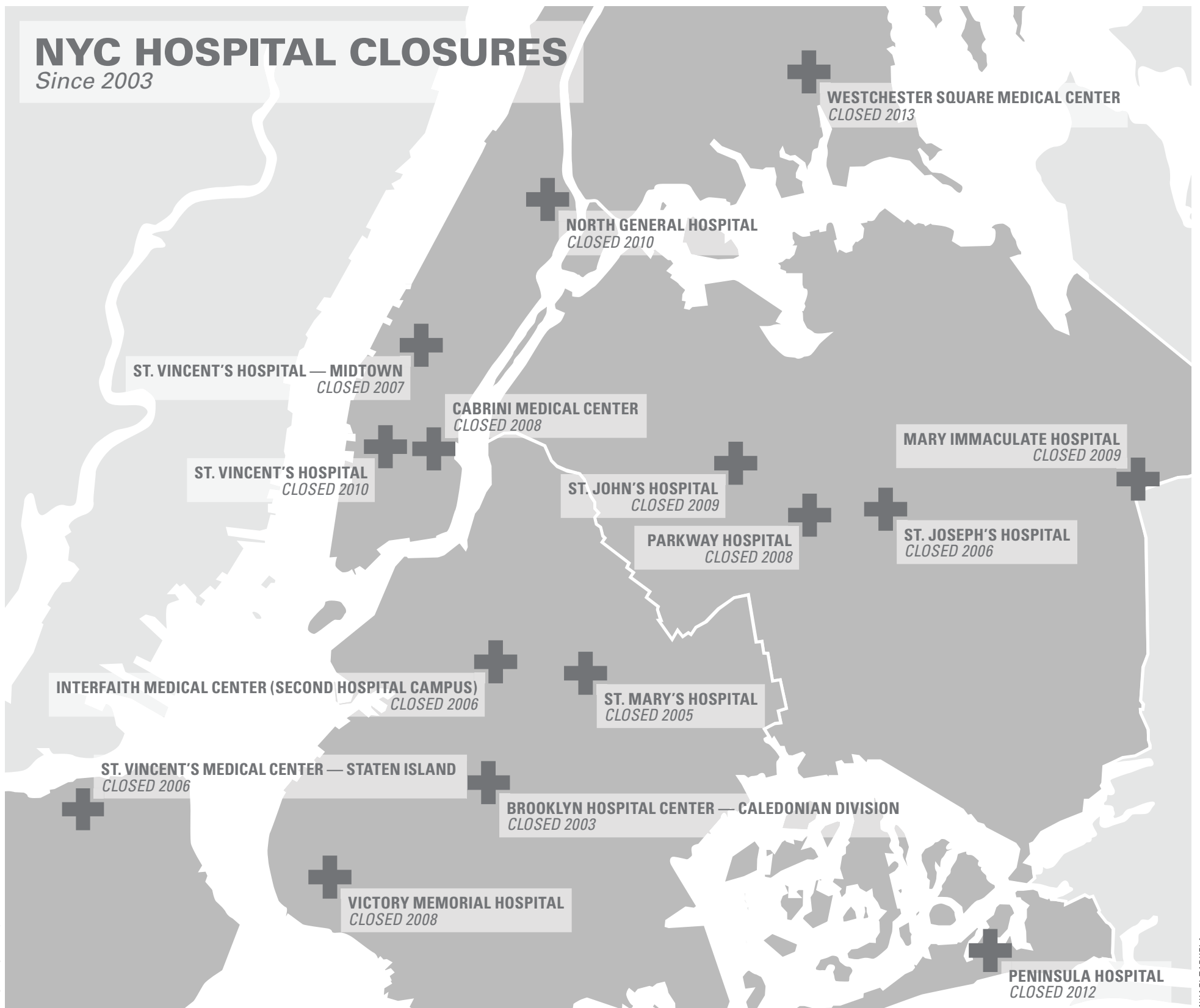
“The current health care system isn’t working for our communities,” reads an initial proposal, which is still being fine-tuned by NYSNA in conjunction with the grassroots coalition that came together in the fight to preserve LICH and Interfaith. “Decisions about how resources are allocated and what kinds of services we get are made on the basis of costs and revenues. We have no direct say in these decisions.”

If implemented, the plan would insti-

tute a cooperative model at Brooklyn’s 14 public and community hospitals, similar to that of existing worker-run co-ops, whose governing boards often interface with the communities they serve. The plan could put increased power to decide how funds are spent in the hands of stakeholders rather than government and industry bureaucrats.

“We’re getting ready to turn things around,” said Perry.

Bill de Blasio’s defense of LICH helped catapult him into the mayor’s office, indicating the political power that the health care unions have built up together with the patients they serve. But it remains to be seen if the coalition they have built can achieve what they are ultimately after: the preservation of the city’s health services. Until then, New York’s hospitals will keep landing in the lap of real-estate corporations.





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## The Veterans For Peace Full Disclosure Campaign

The Full Disclosure campaign is a Veterans For Peace effort to speak truth to power and keep alive the antiwar perspective on the American War in Viet Nam. It is a clear alternative to the Department of Defense's efforts to sanitize and mythologize the U.S. role in the war, legitimizing the continuation of further unnecessary and destructive wars.

President Obama announced a plan, starting in 2012, for a 13-year commemoration funded at \$65 million: "As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War ... we pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who ... pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans." It is what the President and the Department of Defense don't say that's significant.

Rather than conducting an honest evaluation to learn from the U.S. intervention in Viet Nam, the DoD is promoting an *ex post facto* justification of the war without acknowledging the terrible

destruction and damage done to the Vietnamese people and land. Neither does the campaign confront the lasting impact of this conflict on U.S. soldiers and their families—from loss of life and physical disabilities and illnesses to the transmission of birth defects caused by Agent Orange to their progeny. The government does not mention the millions of Vietnamese, including women and children, who were captured, tortured, displaced, and killed. There is no representation of the heroic U.S. soldiers who resisted the war, nor any real acknowledgment of domestic protest. And the project does not pay tribute to the voices and postwar reconciliation activities of many antiwar veterans.

Come to Judson Church on April 26 to hear the truth about Viet Nam and the connections to Iraq and Afghanistan from those who were there.

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# The Common Core and its Discontents

## NEW TOP-DOWN NATIONAL CURRICULUM SPURS GROWING PARENT-STUDENT REVOLT

BY OWEN DAVIS

Preparation for standardized tests given at the end of third grade would begin at the start of the second.

Hearing that baffling announcement, Brooklyn parent Janine Sopp knew something was amiss. It was 2011, and her daughter's school had just received a "C" from Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Department of Education (DOE). Another year of low scores could result in dire sanctions: teacher layoffs, a new administration, even closure. So the school, rationally, would begin test prep 18 months before kids would fill in their first bubbles.

Sopp transferred her daughter to the progressive PS 146, or Brooklyn New School, but even there the millstone of yearly testing hung heavily from the school's neck. Sopp began meeting with a group of parents to discuss opting their kids out. "That much focus on test scores," Sopp says of her daughter, who has a reading disability, "would erode what made her brilliant."

Sopp sent a letter to the principal explaining that Kya would be sitting out during the six-day testing period. The school responded graciously: Kya spent the week as an aide in a kindergarten class, reading to students. Heartened, her mother continued speaking with parents and helping build Change the Stakes, a New York-based anti-standardized testing group that emerged from meetings Sopp and other parents held in 2011.

Last year, Kya and five others opted out at PS 146. This April, when New York's exam period for grades 3-8 begins, 80 percent of the school's 300 test-age students will join her.

PS 146 students will make up part of the largest opt-out movement in modern education history. In cities from Seattle to Denver to New York, students will be pushing aside high-stakes tests in a repudiation of policies that pressure teachers to post high marks for the sake of their jobs and schools to increase scores or risk being closed. They aim to reverse the march of standardized testing and provoke a reappraisal of the ever-heightening stakes attached to test scores.

Fueling the fire is the onset of the Common Core State Standards, a set of educational benchmarks forged in nonprofit committees, promoted with gobs of philanthropic cash and guaranteed widespread adoption by the Obama administration's Race to the Top program. The standards' rapid and top-down implementation has parents and educators across the political spectrum up in arms.

This confluence of policies has brought Sopp innumerable allies. "I've never seen a body of parents so determined to stop this testing," she said.

### BIRTH OF THE TESTING REGIME

When Jesse Hagopian and other teachers organized a standardized test boycott at Gar-

field High School in Seattle last spring, the reasoning was clear: "Standardized testing is the lifeblood of the whole corporate reform movement," said Hagopian. Many in the opt-out community cite that successful boycott as inspiration to participate in what Hagopian hopes will be "a revolt against the initiatives of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top."

Passed in 2002, the No Child Left Behind act laid the groundwork for the federal school accountability regime. The bill requires standardized testing in grades 3-8 nationwide and forces consistently low-scoring schools to undergo mass layoffs or outright closure. Obama's Race to the Top program, structured as a competitive grant, pressured states to attach test results to teacher evaluations, raising the stakes of assessments considerably.

Both initiatives function on what some, like Tim Slekar, dean of education at the Madison, Wisconsin-based Edgewood College, call the failing schools narrative: Since public education is broken, the reasoning goes, states must close "failing schools," open new ones (usually privately-run, publicly-funded charter schools) and lay off teachers deemed ineffective — all on the basis of test scores.

After pulling his own children from tests, Slekar helped found United Opt Out, a test resistance organization that provides opt-out manuals for every state in the union. Though reform policies are often sold on the language of equity, says Slekar, "accountability has done nothing but disrupt neighborhoods."

In the wake of No Child Left Behind, thousands of public schools have been closed, notably in cities like Chicago and Philadelphia, where 49 and 22 schools were shuttered last year, respectively. Those closings came in tandem with massive layoffs: 2,100 employees in Chicago last year, and nearly 4,000 in Philadelphia.

Most states now employ teacher evaluations based in part on yearly assessments. As a result, Slekar says, "we've seen punitive measures that have reduced extracurriculars and reduced deep learning in music and arts." In the years following, No Child Left Behind test preparation and administration have grown to consume up to a fifth of the school year, according to an American Federation of Teachers study. Arts education has declined for all students and a range of research finds that high-stakes testing has narrowed curricula.



ROB LAQUINTA

But it's another policy that promises to swell the numbers of test resisters this spring: the onset of newer, tougher Common Core standards and the tests aligned to them.

### ENTER COMMON CORE

Few people other than Glenn Beck have been more active in stirring the pot on Common Core than Mark Naison, professor of African-American Studies and History at Fordham University.

Naison became aware of the Common Core in the midst of New York's first foray into Common Core-aligned tests last year, when he says, "largely white and suburban parents" became upset about the testing aligned to the standards. Naison, who previously fought school closings in communities of color, quickly became a Common Core critic.

Along the way he helped found the anti-Common Core Badass Teachers Association, whose 40,000 members across 50 states range from old-school racial justice progressives to fuming Tea Partiers.

"Common Core is like the nightmare of both the right and the left," Naison says, "government and corporate control together, each time undermining the ordinary citizen's input into education policy." Many who are wary of the Common Core acknowledge the importance of strong national education standards, like those in Finland and Singapore. It's the nature of the Common Core's implemen-

tation that has them crying foul.

The idea for these standards hatched in a 2008 policy paper by David Coleman, now mastermind of the SAT overhaul. Bill and Melinda Gates were smitten with his recommendations, and their foundation began lavishing what became over \$150 million in grants to organizations developing the standards.

Race to the Top tied funding to states' adoption of new standards, and in short order 45 states had committed to the Common Core, all with very little in the way of public discussion. "There have been no trials, testing, debate or discussion," says Naison. "It's a profoundly undemocratic initiative."

Common Core representatives confirm that no trial runs of the standards have taken place, though they emphasize that four rounds of comment periods from teachers and parents took place during development.

Despite outcry elsewhere, businesses and investors haven't hesitated to line up behind the Common Core. "The adoption of common standards" wrote Joanne Weiss, chief of staff in the DOE, in 2011, "means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale." That's music to the ears of companies like testing behemoth Pearson, which recently paid \$7 million in fines for illegally using its nonprofit to develop Common Core curriculum products for its corporate parent.

Parents' concerns hit closer to home,



though. At root, new standards promise to ratchet up testing pressures. According to Nancy Cauthen, a Manhattan parent and Change the Stakes member, parents increasingly report students bringing home vexing new assignments and experiencing unprecedented test anxiety. “Even among parents who are divided on the Common Core,” Cauthen says, “more parents are seeing the damaging effects of high pressure around the tests.”

PS 146 parent Elizabeth Elsass, whose third-grade son Atticus will be opting out for the first time this April, bristles most at the amount of time spent testing: “As a parent I find it almost abusive.” After months of prep, practice tests and benchmark assessments, New York students in grades 3-8 will spend at least six days taking tests starting in April. More states adopting new Common Core assessments expect aggregate testing time to increase, some reaching as high as ten hours.

According to guidelines that de Blasio’s DOE recently released, “the principle should respect the parents’ decision” in opt-out cases. Students would face no direct consequences, though they may be disadvantaged when applying to selective high schools and gifted programs that use test scores in admissions. And although no schools in New York have been punished for test refusal, some principals, afraid for their funding, have reportedly pressured opt-out students to change their minds.

Testing aside, parents and educators fear that the standards are developmentally inappropriate, especially in younger grades. The standards cite a range of established research, but as Lesley University early childhood education professor Nancy Carlsson-Paige has noted, of the 135 individuals in Common Core development teams, none were K-3 teachers.

“The Common Core contradicts decades’ worth of child development theory and research that helps us understand how young children learn,” Carlsson-Paige says. She worries that the test-driven focus on concrete standards “will be responsible for influencing pedagogy toward more direct instruction, much less experiential, multidimensional learning in early grades,” by crowding out hands-on learning and play and consequently hampering imagination and curiosity.

“Kindergartens today don’t look like they did a few years ago,” Carlsson-Paige says. “Classrooms for young kids have really become much more factories for learning standards than the kind of multidimensional learning we know works.”

More broadly, there’s not much to indicate that introducing newer, higher standards as a stand-alone policy necessarily reduces learning gaps or makes students any better at reading and math. In a paper sometimes cited (ill-advisedly) by Common Core advocates, Joshua Goodman of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government found that in every state studied, “changes in the quality of standards have little impact on overall student achievement.”

That hasn’t stopped states from bringing the Common Core to the vast majority of the nation’s 50 million public school pupils. Within this whole, the ranks of families opting out are miniscule, but their movement carries more water politically than their numbers would suggest.

Parents in Long Island, rallying around a 15,000-strong Long Island Opt Out Facebook group, have pushed State Senator Dean Skelos to co-sign a call for a two-year Common Core moratorium. “After having spent months lis-

tening to parents, teachers, administrators and educational professionals at public hearings,” GOP majority leader Skelos announced, he had “grave concerns over this flawed rollout” of the standards.

Test resistance is already taking shape elsewhere. Teachers in two Chicago schools boycotted state exams this year, with backing from the progressive Chicago Teachers Union. District authorities in Worcester, Mass., recently affirmed the right of parents to opt their kids out of Core-aligned tests.

Everyone involved in the opt-out movement sees a bumper crop in store. According to Cauthen, the Common Core “is absolutely fueling the opt-out movement.” Change the Stakes predicts at least three times more opt-outs in New York City this year compared to last, a total that may approach a thousand students. Slekar foresees something larger: an “Education Spring.”



**THEIR CHOICE:** Parents opting their children out of 2014 New York State tests, from a Change the Stakes YouTube video.

#### WHITE SUBURBAN MOMS

There’s an apparent wrinkle in the coalition, though.

Facing pushback on the Common Core, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan snickered last fall that it was only “white suburban moms,” afraid of unflattering test results, who composed the Common Core rebellion.

Were it just a flub, the comment wouldn’t have sparked the firestorm it did. But it contained a kernel of truth that made some deeply uncomfortable.

The anti-testing contingent spans the political spectrum. Mostly white Tea Partiers who cast the Common Core as big-government overreach have pushed deep-red states like Georgia and Indiana to delay implementation or withdraw from Core-aligned test coalitions. The progressive flank of the movement also skews white, though. Change the Stakes’ Cauthen notes that opt-

out parents in New York tend to come from the professional class, concomitant with a whiter demographic. Schools with opt-out activity, though diverse, also skew white.

Could it be that Arne Duncan, who once mused that the Common Core was “among the most important things to happen to public education in America since *Brown vs. Board of Education*,” put a pie in the face of the opt-out movement?

Karran Harper Royal is no fan of the standards-based reform movement. An advocate for children with disabilities and New Orleans public school parent for more than 20 years, she’s seen her struggling district transform after Hurricane Katrina into a fractured system of school choice where 91 percent of children attend privately-managed charters.

Royal has seen “two different school experiences” in the course of her two sons’ educational careers. “I was able to see the quality of the work and the quality of material cov-

er this sentiment. “I’m black, I’m Latino,” he says. “If you’re going to work with me, you need to consider me your equal.” The Tea Party, with its spurts of racism and overt hatred toward a black president, makes for a bit too odd a bedfellow.

And test-based sanctions have been rattling schools in communities of color for years. When low test scores doom a school to closure, it’s overwhelmingly black and Latino kids who are sent packing. The students of Chicago schools closed last summer were 87 percent black, compared to 43 percent of the whole district. As Vilson says, the testing “became a tool by which you could castigate people, castigate entire neighborhoods.”

In the era of accountability, black and Latino students have lost far more arts and music than their white peers. According to Americans for Arts, less than a third of black and Latino children now receive a full arts education, and the number is slipping.

What Duncan’s “gaffe” indicates is that, with public education systems in communities of color already in upheaval, the standards-based reform machine must now lurch toward middle- and upper-middle class enclaves.

If the Common Core aims “to continue to prove the failing schools narrative” in previously impervious communities, as Slekar supposes, it’s already working. Test scores have cratered in states that already implemented Common Core exams. New York saw its Common Core trial run last year sink scores by about 30 points, just as education officials like Commissioner John King predicted.

This is the “train wreck” that education reform champion Jeb Bush anticipated in 2012. “My guess is there’s going to be a lot of people running for cover,” he warned. The American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, noted last year that Common Core advocates “expect the results to mobilize suburban and middle-class parents to the cause of education reform.”

Common Core resistance reflects an awareness of the metastasis of standards-based reforms into broader swaths of the American school system. “The changes in public education beginning to touch suburban communities, white or black” says Royal, “have touched us already in urban communities.”

Opt-out parents like Brooklyn New School parent Elsass, who is white, acknowledges this dynamic. “We’re somewhat insulated from what’s happening at other schools,” she says, citing Brooklyn campuses where arts have been eclipsed by test-focused instruction. “It’s pushing us down a bad road for education.”

There is a silver lining, though. According to Slekar, Common Core resistance has opened dialog between cities and their vanilla suburbs. More affluent parents, Slekar says, “have finally burst out of their bubbles and see the harm that’s being done in the cities.” Royal considers it “good entrée for them into the whole problem of what public education has become.”

In this light, Jose Vilson sets his sights beyond the Common Core battle. “If there is a resolution to the Common Core,” he wonders, “do all the other things — the racism, classism, sexism that are pervasive throughout a lot of communities — go away? Will you keep fighting for those people that are marginalized by these situations?”

For more, see [timeoutfromtesting.org](http://timeoutfromtesting.org) and [changethestakes.wordpress.com](http://changethestakes.wordpress.com).

CHANGE THE STAKES



# IN DEFENSE OF THEIR LAND & WATER

BY MICHAEL PREMO & ANDREW STERN



These photos are part of a larger body of work by Michael Premo and Andrew Stern that will appear in an exhibition entitled "Water Warriors." It will be hosted by Starr Street Studios and The Independent during Bushwick Open Studios, opening May 30. Stay tuned for the forthcoming documentary. For more, see [artsinbushwick.org](http://artsinbushwick.org) and [starrstreetstudios.com](http://starrstreetstudios.com).

**BAD VIBRATIONS:** SWN "thumper" trucks travel along Rte 126 near Laketon, New Brunswick. To explore for natural gas locked underground, the trucks set off seismic vibrations that are then refracted by the rock below and recorded by geophones that line the roadside. The few regional highways here provided an efficient thoroughfare for SWN to collect data on the amount of natural gas in the area.

**CHEMICALS:** Water and chemicals bubble up from a punctured aquifer off Rte 126 near Rogersville. An elderly man noticed that a swamp had sprung up from nowhere on his land, and that the water was coming from beneath a tree with a metal plate marking one of SWN's exploration lines. It is believed that the aquifer was exposed to contamination as a result of the testing, although SWN denies that testing is unsafe.

**BURNING BRIGHT:** In response to a court ruling that banned protest near SWN worksites, land protectors barricaded Rte 126, blocking police vehicles and burning tires and shale gas exploration equipment.

**WATERWAY:** The Richibucto River is one of many waterways that define Canada's Maritime provinces.

**A WAY OF LIFE:** Cyril Polchies' lobster traps. Fracking for gas and other extreme energy projects pose a risk to subsistence and commercial fishing in an area with limited economic opportunities.

**WOODSMAN:** French-speaking lumberjack Aldore Chaisson has been part of the fight to prevent fracking since last summer.

**WITH A HEART:** Mi'kmaq land protector Velma Clair.



**LOGGED ON:** Elsipogtog land defenders sit by the fire in their encampment alongside Rte 126. The camp was set up to stop SWN's "thumper" trucks.

**VIGILANT:** Mi'kmaq land protector Candi Simon during a confrontation with police.

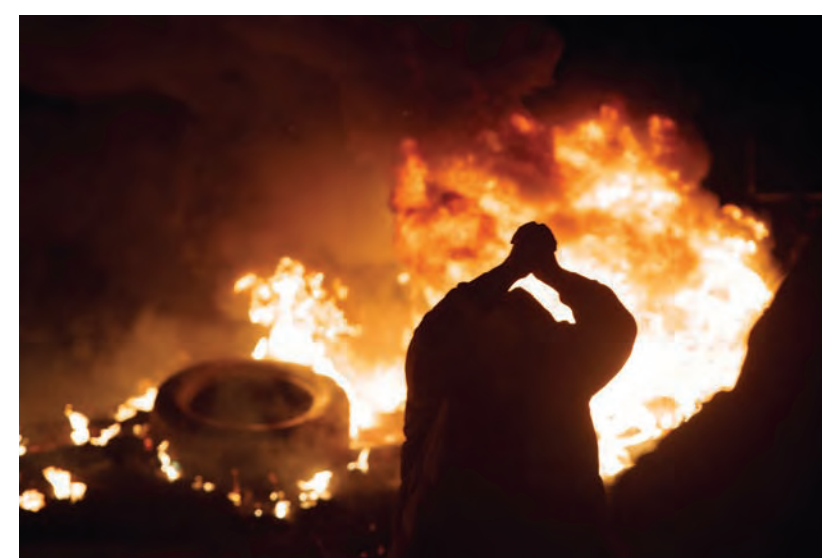
**IDENTITY:** A Mi'kmaq warrior brandishes the Grand Council Flag of the Mi'kmaq Nation.

**ENCAMPMENT:** A tipi in an encampment alongside Rte 134 in Rexton, New Brunswick.



**STANDOFF:** Indigenous and English- and French-speaking land protectors square off with police in a daily attempt to stop SWN's trucks.

**GOODBYE, FOR NOW:** SWN workers remove seismic testing equipment along Rte 126 as land defenders observe. SWN halted its operations and pulled out of the area on December 6.



NEW BRUNSWICK, Canada — What would you do if the land and water you depended on for your way of life was put at risk by a powerful energy corporation? As the use of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to extract energy resources spreads around the world, rural communities are increasingly forced to confront that question.

In the eastern Canadian province of New Brunswick, an indigenous community and non-native locals have dared to challenge the wildly lucrative oil and gas boom sweeping North America. Last October, anti-fracking protesters clashed with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Led by members of the Mi'kmaq Elsipogtog First Nation, the protesters set up a road blockade preventing natural gas exploration in the area by the Texas-based energy firm SWN. When the police raided their



protest encampment, the melee resulted in more than 40 arrests, a storm of tear gas and the burning of six police cars. The battle made headlines across Canada. In December, SWN announced it was suspending operations in New Brunswick until 2015. Fracking involves drilling deep into the earth and injecting millions of gallons of water and a toxic soup of chemicals in order to release reserves of oil and gas. It is a practice that often leaves the surrounding water and land badly polluted. With this in mind, Elsipogtog community members have vowed to resist any future fracking operations and expect that their fight with SWN is far from over. The struggle in Elsipogtog is part of a growing movement of indigenous resistance against extreme energy projects across Canada and is linked to similar struggles in the United States.



# Wind, Waves and Liquefied Natural Gas

BY JOHN TARLETON

New York is believed to contain vast reserves of natural gas in the Marcellus Shale formation that runs through the southern and central parts of the state. However, a powerful grassroots movement has blocked oil and gas companies from drilling in the Marcellus by pressuring the last two governors to uphold a moratorium against fracking.

Despite this success, fracking opponents are increasingly concerned that the build-out of natural gas infrastructure across the state could make future drilling in New York more lucrative and difficult to stop.

One key project in the pipeline, as it were, is "Port Ambrose," a liquefied natural gas (LNG) port to be constructed off the coast of Long Beach, Long Island near the entrance to New York Harbor. The facility would be able to handle 400 million cubic feet of gas a day, or around 3 percent of the total production from the Marcellus Shale, according to Bruce Ferguson of Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy.

Port Ambrose's corporate sponsor is Liberty Natural Gas LLC, which is owned by a Cayman Islands-based investment fund that is managed by a Toronto affiliate. Liberty insists the port will only handle imported natural gas. Its critics scoff at the claim, pointing out that the price of natural gas is three to six times higher in international markets than in the United States.

If the port is built, says Eric Weltman, senior organizer at Food & Water Watch, "Liberty could turn around the next day and say, 'Hey we want to do this for export,'" and face few regulatory hurdles in

getting its license revised.

Historically, the U.S. government has tightly restricted natural gas exports for fear of causing higher prices for domestic consumers and manufacturers. With U.S.-based production booming, that policy is weakening. And amid worsening relations with Russia, many conservatives are urging the Obama administration to give its unconditional backing to opening more LNG export terminals. They see an opportunity to lessen European dependence on Russian natural gas, a goal Weltman finds short-sighted.

"Wrecking our climate and polluting our water is not the way to help people in Europe," he noted.

Weltman told *The Independent* that Liberty's application to the federal Maritime Administration has stalled because the company has not provided the necessary information for the government to issue an environmental impact statement. However, he says the best chance of stopping Port Ambrose lies in pressuring either Gov. Andrew Cuomo or Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey to exercise their power to veto it in their positions as governors of "adjacent states" to the project.

"You have a confluence of a vast anti-fracking movement with people who are concerned about the coastline," Weltman said.

In 2011, Gov. Christie vetoed plans for an LNG deepwater port that Liberty sought to build off the coast of Asbury Park, NJ, citing "unacceptable risks to the state's residents, natural resources, economy and security."

For more information, see [nyagainstfracking.org](http://nyagainstfracking.org)

# Romanian Rendezvous

BY JIM WICKENS

**"DO YOU THINK THEY'RE ABOUT TO have sex?" one of the group whispers. I'm in the central Romanian region of Transylvania, crouched in the bushes with a bunch of activists in balaclavas, taking turns speculating about why a car has crept to a halt close to where we are hiding out. "No, it must be the cops, you can see the light from the mobile phone," another one says. Time to move on.**

It has been over an hour since the group started trashing equipment owned by the Romanian gas exploration company Prospectiuni, playing an edgy game of cat and mouse as we struggle to stay one step ahead of the security teams and police vehicles that are now sweeping the hilltops looking for us.

Another light appears around the bend in the road and the shout goes through the team to hide. I throw myself down, stretched out once again in the cool damp grass of a Transylvanian meadow. It's going to be a long night.

In recent months the sleepy Saxon communities and protected forests of Sibiu County in Transylvania have become an unlikely front in a new battle pitting gas exploration companies, the Romanian government and international investment firms against a small band of environmental activists. The activists, who have come here from across Romania, are working side by side with local farmers to resist gas and oil exploration that they claim is taking place illegally on their land.

The Romanian gas company Romgaz long ago announced plans to explore the low-lying hills of Transylvania for conventional as well as unconventional sources of gas and oil. While Romania lifted its moratorium on fracking in March 2013, nobody gave it another thought until the exploration began in earnest in November. At that time, seismic trucks — used to set off artificial earthquakes, which in turn allow oil or gas underground to be detected — growled into the muddy tracks of villages, accompanied by cohorts of security guards and busloads of workers.

Residents here told me that they awoke to ribbons being laid out across their lands and even attached to their garden fences. The simple strips of fabric belied a sinister intent: They were markers for the companies to lay cables and plant the explosives for seismic tests.

## 'WE LIVE FROM THIS LAND'

Driving into the remote communities where the seismic tests are taking place feels like entering an occupied territory. When I arrive in one village, I watch as a team of workers prepares a hole with dynamite a few yards from the village soccer pitch. Up on the street above, private security jeeps can be seen parked at the crossroads, black-uniformed men following and filming our every move.

Community activist Hans Hedrich, my guide for the day, and I follow the ribbons out of the village toward the intermittent booming sounds of controlled explosions

echoing around the valleys. Away from the security guards, a lady speaks up. "They are thieves," she hisses. Her neighbor comes over begging for answers. "We've heard the land will be poisoned, is this true? We live from this land. We don't have salaries!"

At the top of a hill I find a giant geological lab on wheels, antennae dangling on top and men poring over electrical equipment inside. A small portly man introduces himself. He is Gheorghe Daianu, a seismologist and director of operations for the exploration company Prospectiuni, which has been subcontracted for \$55 million to carry out tests in the region.

He condemns the protests against his work, calling opponents of gas exploration "neo-fascists" and insisting that the company has permission to be on every parcel of land where the tests are taking place. He says his claim can be backed up with paperwork before he orders us to leave the area.

I head to the nearby village of Mosna, where farmer Willy Schuster and his wife Lavinia have invited me to stay at their home while I cover a protest planned against the exploration activities.

Chickens cluck, the fire roars and cheese is made in the kitchen as a dozen activists begin to arrive from across the country, updating Facebook accounts and charging their cameras for the following day. This would be the first protest against gas exploration in Transylvania, they explain, urging me to get an early night's sleep. But first I have another appointment.

Bundled into a rusty van under cover of darkness, I find myself sitting among a dozen men and women in balaclavas. The driver turns to greet me. "Don't worry about our getaway vehicle — it's super quick. Only 350,000 kilometers [217,500 miles] on the clock!" She laughs out loud as the rusty door slams shut and we trundle away into the frosty darkness.

Minutes later, I am escorted out onto the roadside, scurrying into the undergrowth with half a dozen activists armed with pliers and wire cutters. As soon as the headlights fade round the bend, the team begins working, snipping the orange seismic wires and disfiguring every electrical converter and generator box they come across.

Every so often a shout goes up, and the team dives for cover as the sweeping headlights of suspected security vehicles appear from the nearby road. Part army, part anarchy, the group spends the evening in a whirlwind of adrenaline-fueled scrambling and clawing through scratchy thorn bushes, woodland clearings and boggy streams. Needless to say, a lot of equipment gets busted.

## 'I AM TERRIFIED FOR MY CHILDREN'

At 7 o'clock the next morning I am sitting drinking coffee with Willy in his farmhouse kitchen when a convoy of gas trucks rolls past his window en route to his fields. He runs out the door chasing after them, apoplectic with rage.







JIM WICKENS

**UNWIRED:** A Romanian anti-fracking activist hauls away wires that were installed to conduct seismic tests.

I arrive on the scene just in time to see workers from the exploration company filing out of their company coach and spreading out across his snowy fields. Willy screams them away, impounding a company pickup and refusing to let it go until the police come to file a criminal complaint.

As the morning unfolds, streams of security trucks are chased, kicked and turned away from Willy's land. "I am terrified for my children," he says, waving a flimsy branch at the assembled security forces facing him down on the muddy track. "I am fighting for their future."

A man more accustomed to milking cows than fighting multinationals, he is nonetheless standing up to the gas companies. Many more are beginning to follow the example of this accidental hero who is rapidly becoming a thorn in the side of the country's energy ambitions.

Southern Transylvania's rolling hills are one of several new fronts opening up in Romania's search for homegrown deposits of natural gas and oil. Victor Ponta, the Romanian prime minister, made a bold argument for energy extraction in June. "Do we want to have gas? — First of all to stop importing from Russia — do we want to have it cheap and do we want to make the Romanian industry competitive and, of course, to have lower expenses for the people? Then we must have gas."

His stance opened the door for fossil fuel companies to expand across the hills of Europe's second-poorest nation. But Ponta's government is facing an unexpectedly difficult battle in realizing its domestic resource ambitions. In recent months the controversial Canadian-owned gold mine in Rosia Montana was put on hold, following a series of protests that have brought tens of thousands of Romanians into the streets. And in one of the latest — and continuing — public showdowns, Chevron's gas exploration in the remote village of Pungesti was temporarily halted by residents deeply fearful of the damage that they believe fracking may bring.

**UNLIKELY SUPPORT**

With almost 4 million peasant farmers in Romania reliant on clean air, water and soil for their livelihood, support for natural resource protection campaigns is growing in the most unlikely of places, among the conservative communities in the country's rural heartland.

Faced with an increasingly galvanized opposition, the government is preparing to fight back. A "Law of Expropriation" will potentially allow multinational companies to take over privately-owned land if it is felt the developments are "in the national interest." It failed to pass the lower house of the Romanian Parliament in December, but the government is trying to amend it. At present, the law is focused primarily on mining, but observers say it is widely expected to be extended to energy development projects in the near future.

Community activists claim that half a dozen laws are being breached by Prospectiuni's gas exploration, including permit requirements, regulations regarding testing near homes and trespassing laws. "The real problem here is that village people simply don't know their rights," says Hedrich.

Prospectiuni and Romgaz both turned down an opportunity to comment on claims of illegality, but in a statement on Prospectiuni's website the CEO states: "Occasionally we still make mistakes, but they are not ill-intentioned, however we try to have active environmental permits and town planning certificates."

By late afternoon, under the lee of a 600-year-old medieval church, volunteers are dishing out potato soup, cakes and hot tea. Elderly ladies in headscarves and traditional dress are rubbing shoulders with pierced activists and men in balaclavas. It's an intriguing mix. The crowd marches out to rip out more seismic wires in full view of the policemen who stand watching from the side of the road. Residents too scared to talk the day before now stand outside their houses, cheering and applauding the protesters in delight.

"Honestly, I feel sorry for them," one of the police officers tells me, as they stand aside and allow the protesters to rip out a mile of bright orange cabling, dragging it through the dust on their way back to the village. "What the company is doing here, well, it's just wrong." Then he moves his head closer to mine. "Actually, it's illegal," he whispers.

*Jim Wickens is an investigative journalist covering environmental issues around the world. You can follow him on Twitter at @Jim\_Wickens. An earlier version of this article appeared in The Ecologist.*

# truth

## Chelsea Manning, US Army Prisoner of Conscience



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**“They stood in front of our apartments and said they were going to kill us and rape our daughters,” recalls a retired kindergarten teacher.**

# Venezuela Backlash

## PROTESTERS' TACTICS CAUSE SUPPORT TO WANE

BY EWAN ROBERTSON

MÉRIDA, Venezuela — “Lights out! Whoever doesn't turn out their lights will have their apartment stoned!”

The cry rang out at 9pm, and residents of a set of apartment blocks near the center of Mérida, a provincial capital in the Venezuelan Andes, shuttered down for the night.

The scene was described to this reporter by Alba Ruiz, a retired kindergarten teacher in her mid-50s who spoke of her daily ritual during the self-imposed occupation her residence was subjected to.

What she described as living in a “state of war” began in early February when militant opponents of Venezuela's socialist government constructed barricades around the apartment complex called *El Campito* and on the main avenue nearby. The barricades continue for several kilometers down Las Americas Avenue, completely cutting off several medical centers and the city's main bus terminal.

Built with torn-up bus stops, street lamps, corrugated iron sheets and barbed wire, the barricades are part of a strategy to try to shut down cities and force the resignation of President Nicolás Maduro just one year after he succeeded Hugo Chávez. At night, the barricades are often alight with burning rubbish and tires, whose toxic fumes drift into nearby buildings. Red-clad dolls, which appear to represent *Chavistas*, as government supporters are known, hang from several barricades, swaying in the wind as a warning.

### STRANDED BEHIND THE BARRICADES

Life behind the barricades was especially difficult for Ruiz, a government supporter who lives alone with her teenage daughter. Apart from the uncomfortable presence of around 10 masked activists bunking in the lobby of her building, where they main-

tained a supply of Molotov cocktails and other materials, the two women had to endure constant verbal threats.

Things got worse when Ruiz's next door neighbor wrote a series of tweets criticizing the masked men's activities. The tweets were discovered by someone in the group of militants and local residents who supported them, and they published the messages on a poster next to the building's elevator, along with the neighbor's name and photo.

“Then they stood out in front of our apartments and said that they were going to kill us, that they were going to kill our children and that they were going to rape our daughters,” said Ruiz.

The incident was the last straw for the retired teacher, who, along with up to half of the families in her building, fled *El Campito*. She currently stays with her elderly mother in a part of the city unaffected by the barricades and hasn't yet returned home.

The political unrest started in early February after leaders of the hard-line opposition, Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado, called on supporters to “light up the streets of Venezuela with struggle” in a campaign called *La Salida* (“The Exit”).

Many moderate opposition supporters also joined peaceful protests to demand that the government solve the problems of high crime, irritating shortages in some basic foodstuffs and a 56 percent inflation rate in the oil-rich nation of 30 million people.

Nightly riots in the wealthy east of Caracas, the nation's capital, and street barricades in some of Venezuela's cities intensified, causing damage to lives, property and services. In the upper- and middle-



**BARRICADES:** Opponents of Venezuela's socialist government stand guard at a street barricade in the provincial capital of Mérida.

class zones affected by barricades public transportation was shut down, schools closed, medical centers blocked off and food and fuel deliveries impeded, making life difficult for local residents whatever their political affiliation.

Meanwhile images of Molotov cocktail-wielding masked militants clashing with National Guard officers were splashed across the screens of foreign TV viewers.

With few exceptions the urban poor and rural *campesinos* that form the government's political base did not join the protests. These sectors have benefited from social programs, new mechanisms of political participation and an improved standard of living under the administration of Hugo Chávez. They appear to want to give his successor time to solve existing problems, and as the country's majority continue to support the government.

After more than a month of unrest, 33 people had been killed, 461 wounded and 1854 arrested, the majority of whom were later freed or released on bail conditions. Those killed include opposition activists, government supporters, other civilians and several national guardsmen.

By late March, attendance at protests appeared to be ebbing, while the zones affected by the street barricades had shrunk. Leopoldo López remained jailed and under investigation for instigating violent acts.

### THE OPPOSITION'S MOTIVES

Why did the hard-line opposition call for street actions in the first place? Some have argued that the strategy represents an attempt to overthrow President Maduro or wear the government down to prevent it from being able to solve existing economic problems and thus maintain popular support.

Others suspect the strategy has more to do with the opposition's internal politics, and is an attempt by the radicals to seize the leadership of the opposition, torpedoing the dialogue that was occurring between the government and the moderate wing after the government coalition won December's local elections by a 10 percent margin.

Meanwhile, those who argue that the protests are simply a national outpouring of discontent have to explain why the unrest has not spread beyond the opposition's traditional upper- and middle-class base, and that those arguably most affected by crime

and shortages have stayed with Maduro.

When I spoke to masked activists on a barricade not far from *El Campito* as the protests were gaining momentum, they were clear that the aim of their struggle was to force the government out of office. “We're sunk in misery and corruption, so we want Maduro's resignation now, that's why we're here,” said one.

Another told me that they were fighting a “war of attrition” to wear down the government. “Either we get tired first, or they get tired first,” said the man, who was in his twenties. Dressed in ordinary T-shirts and jeans, the barricade activists maintain contact with one another through smartphones and appear ready to upload any incriminating information to social networks.

The men looked at me suspiciously, rocks in hand. Behind them, their barricade was maintained with burning tires and wire strung across the road to prevent motorists from passing. On a street nearby, a colleague of mine had been threatened at gunpoint a few days earlier after photographing the activities of another group of militant opposition activists.

The men at the barricade said they were students and that their enemies were the National Guard and allegedly armed pro-government groups, who they said attacked them and tried to remove their roadblocks.

Residents from *El Campito* told me that no pro-government vigilante groups had appeared to attack the barricades near the residence. However, other city residents say that clashes have occurred between opposition militants and pro-government groups in other parts of the city.

The four deaths that have so far occurred in Mérida during the conflict have been on or around the barricades. The first two were a middle-aged woman who hit a wire trap with her motorbike and a pro-government female student who was shot while trying to clear a barricade from a road near her home.

On March 22 a state telecommunications worker died during clashes between police and barricade militants, in which both officers and civilians were also wounded. It is not clear exactly what happened. Footage has emerged showing opposition militants firing a rifle and other arms from behind the barricades, while the local opposition may-or said that pro-government armed civilians



**TAKING THE STREETS:** Government supporters march in the capital Caracas.



# Caribbean Reparations

BY DON ROJAS

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent and the Grenadines — It was almost surreal, improbable just a few years ago: a room filled with presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers from the 15-nation Caribbean Community (CARICOM), all listening with rapt attention, several nodding in agreement, as Dr. Hilary Beckles, one of the region's most distinguished academics, gave a report on the recent work of CARICOM's Reparations Commission, established last July. Yes, "reparations," meaning compensation for the crimes of slavery and indigenous genocide at the hands of former European colonizers.

The scene played out in the conference room of the Buccament Bay Resort on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent on March 10. The occasion: the 25th Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community. Contrary to what a casual observer might conclude, this was not some gathering of radical black nationalists demanding reparations from white society.

There was applause at the end of Professor Beckles' report. Not a single dissenting voice was heard from a group of leaders whose politics ranged from conservative through liberal to progressive, all of whom find themselves

in U.S. imperialism's so-called "backyard." Without exception, all are currently on good terms with Washington and all represent countries that were former colonies of one or another European slave-trading power.

## ENORMOUS MORAL AUTHORITY

The economies of CARICOM member states total about \$78 billion in GDP, which would place the region 65th in the world if it were a single country. Clearly, this is a region that can't claim much in the way of economic clout, yet after having suffered over 400 years of slavery and colonialism at the hands of European powers, mainly Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, its demands for reparations possess enormous moral authority.

The transatlantic slave trade brought over 10 million captured Africans to work as chattel slaves in sugar and cotton plantations throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. It was the largest forced migration in human history. Today, CARICOM nations have a population of 16 million, and the diaspora in the United States, Canada and Europe totals about 4-5 million people.

At the St. Vincent meeting the CARICOM leaders unanimously adopted a 10-point plan that would seek a formal apology for slavery, debt cancellation from former colonizers and reparation payments to address the persisting "psychological trauma" from the days of plantation slavery. The document identifies "the persistent racial victimization of the descendants of slavery and genocide as the root cause of Caribbean nations' suffering today."

The plan also calls for assistance to boost the region's technological capacity and strengthen its public health, educational and cultural institutions. It even calls for the creation of a "repatriation program," including legal and diplomatic assistance from European governments to potentially resettle members of the Rastafarian spiritual movement in Africa. Repatriation to Africa has been a central tenet of Rastafari for decades and their followers have



**EMERGING:** The *Redemption Song* monument stands at the entrance to Emancipation Park in Kingston, Jamaica.

consistently advocated reparations.

If the European powers fail to publicly apologize and refuse to come to the negotiating table, the CARICOM nations plan to file a lawsuit against them at the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

European reactions to the CARICOM demands have so far been mixed. In recent weeks, there have been several relatively balanced reports in major British newspapers like the *London Times*, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*, and a high-level Swedish official said that his government welcomes the opportunity to have a reparations dialogue with CARICOM.

But a British Foreign Office official shot down the CARICOM plan, saying, "The U.K. has been clear that we deplore the human suffering caused by slavery and the slave trade, however, we do not see reparations as the answer."

Meanwhile, the Oscar-winning film *12 Years a Slave* has opened up new conversations in the CARICOM countries, as well as in the large Caribbean migrant communities in Britain, Canada and the United States. Not too long ago, these conversations about reparations would have been considered unrealistic, even Pollyannaish.

Many now buy the argument that the current conditions of underdevelopment in the Caribbean are a direct and lasting legacy of the slave trade and descendants of enslaved Africans should be compensated for contemporary injustices rather than historical suffering.

## WEALTH STILL IN WHITE HANDS

Today, the white descendants of European colonizers, who represent a small minority of Caribbean citizens, own most of the English-speaking islands' wealth. The majority of the largest businesses in the region are owned by families who amassed huge fortunes from plantation slavery and later, when slavery was abolished, from the compensation paid to them by the British government for the loss of their human property (see sidebar).

The CARICOM reparations movement faces plenty of hurdles in challenging Europe. As Dr. Adrian Fraser, historian and retired head of the University of the West Indies Open Campus in St. Vincent, said of the reparations claim, "I am not sure that there is going to be any success down the road, because it is a question of power. We don't have the power."

Dr. Fraser's relative pessimism notwithstanding, the CARICOM governments are forging ahead, establishing national reparations commissions and reaching out to allies around the world, including African-American activists in the United States. Their campaign is an assertive move of resistance. And while the question of whether money will change hands remains, CARICOM's claim is already challenging the imbalance of power in our postcolonial world.

*Don Rojas previously served as press secretary to Prime Minister Maurice Bishop of Grenada, executive director of Free Speech TV and general manager of WBAI.*

## THE ORIGINAL REPARATIONS

While Caribbean nations struggle to make Europe recognize their claim for reparations, similar compensation has already been paid out once before: to British slave-owners being forced to give up their "private property" upon the abolition of slavery in 1833.

The British government paid out £20 million — translating to almost \$27.5 billion today, and totaling 40 percent of that government's spending in 1834 — to more than 46,000 people.

Slave-owners that received compensation included the ancestors of prominent Brits such as Prime Minister David Cameron, authors George Orwell and Graham Greene, poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and former minister Douglas Hogg. Freed slaves, meanwhile, received nothing.

— Alina Mogilyanskaya

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## Venezuela

Continued from page 16

were also at the scene.

Two days later, a national guardsman was shot and another officer wounded while security forces attempted to dismantle a barricade on Las Americas Avenue.

### DESPERATION

Perhaps due to the actions of security forces, or declining public support, the number of barricades in Mérida gradually decreased during March. As a result, the militants on the remaining barricades appear to have become more desperate. Buses and taxis have been taken hostage to force the suspension of public transport services, and a food delivery truck and at least one bus were torched recently near a city supermarket.

During a recent peaceful opposition march in Mérida, Malina Pino, a local city councilor for the opposition, told me that the barricades were acts of “self-defense” against attacks from authorities and pro-government vigilante groups and that any violence by barricade militants was caused by “infiltrators.”

“Hopefully the world can understand that we’re fighting for democracy, that we’re peaceful, that we want respect for human rights and that a government that presents itself as left-wing is violating human rights,” she said.

Authorities have rejected the opposition’s accusations that efforts to control the unrest have represented the “repression of peaceful protests.” They say that of 20,000 National Guard officers deployed to maintain order since the unrest began, the ombudsman has received 60 denunciations of abuses by state security forces, which are being investigated. At least 15 members of the security forces have been arrested for alleged abuses and excessive use of force so far.

Meanwhile government supporters argue that radical opposition activists are responsible for most of the violence. “I’m marching against the violence that extremist sectors of the opposition have unleashed over the past

two weeks,” artist America Rodriguez told me during a pro-government march of some 2,000 people in central Mérida.

She continued, “There’s a very strong media campaign, nationally and internationally, to make people abroad think that it’s the government that’s doing all this when in reality it’s a sector of the opposition. I’m not saying that it’s all of them, but a very radical sector of the opposition is causing great damage. Many people have been killed already due to this violence.”

The future course of events is hard to predict. A key question is whether the opposition will eventually agree to sit down in a dialogue with the government in order to resolve the conflict.

### GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The government’s strategy so far seems to be to “hold and divide” by highlighting what it calls the radical opposition’s “fascist” violence and hoping that this sector gets tired

## A RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL FOUND THAT ONLY 13 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION SUPPORTS THE BARRICADES AS A FORM OF PROTEST.

of their struggle. They may be betting on the right side of public opinion, as a recent opinion poll found that only 13 percent of the population supports the barricades as a form of protest.

Another reason for the strategy could be the state’s limited capacity to confront this type of civil insurrection. There are rumors that the local National Guard unit in Mérida lacks the anti-riot gear and necessary jail space to deal with the situation, and that needed reinforcements from the central government have not come.

However, the government’s “soft” stance appears to be changing. Two opposition mayors accused of supporting street barricades have been arrested, and one of them has been accused of “rebellion.” The minister of interior affairs announced on March 24 that only four cities in Venezuela still had a hardcore “foco” of barricades, and that “special military and public order operations” would be required to remove them.

Meanwhile President Maduro has repeatedly invited opposition politicians and students to attend peace talks, which have already been held with business, religious and a few moderate opposition figures. The president has said that these talks can be in private, “without conditions, without an agenda,” in an attempt to coax the opposition to the table.

The bulk of the opposition leadership remains reluctant, maybe fearing that such a move would be unpopular with their now-radicalized support base, or perhaps hoping that the momentum of protests can be maintained, forcing the government to make political concessions. The conditions the opposition is currently setting to enter talks include freedom for Leopoldo López, an end to shortages and an opportunity to speak to the country on a national presidential broadcast.

“As long as there is a crisis in Venezuela, there will be street protests. Venezuelans will keep going onto the street to demand a bet-

ter country,” declared Henrique Capriles, the main opposition leader, on March 19. The hard-line opposition meanwhile completely rejects dialogue or cooperation

with the government, which they refer to as “the regime.”

It also remains to be seen what effect international pressure will have on the situation. On March 7 divisions in the region were revealed when 29 states from Latin America and the Caribbean supported an Organization of American States resolution supporting the government’s dialogue efforts. The only countries to oppose the statement were the United States, Canada and Panama, which back the Venezuelan opposition in the dispute.

Meanwhile in Mérida, Alba Ruiz hopes that the conflict will be resolved so that she can go back to her life in *El Campito* and the apartment that she worked hard to own. She and several other residents want the National Guard to come and take down the barricades by force. “We have to go back, because it’s all that we have. Even our cat is nervous.”

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# 'It's About Sharing'

INTERVIEW BY  
MESSIAH RHODES

**T**he Peace Poets are educators who take their work into the classroom, to the streets and on stage around the world. The group is a five-member, 10-year-old hip-hop collective based in the South Bronx, and their rhymes grapple with some of the most urgent political issues of our time: institutionalized racism, police brutality, immigrant rights, war and more.

I recently shot the music video for their new single, "Water Got No Enemy," off their soon-to-be-released album *State of the Art*. We filmed in front of the Bronx's 47th Precinct — the home base of the NYPD officer who, in 2012, fatally shot unarmed black teenager Ramarley Graham — and featured Frank Graham, Ramarley's father. In the video opening, he says, "We are demanding justice." Richard Haste, the officer who shot Graham, still hasn't been held accountable for the killing.

I sat down with the Peace Poets — artists Emmanuel "The Last Emcee" Candelario, Frantz "Ram3" Jerome, Frank "Frankie 4" Antonio López, Luke "Despierto" Nephew and Abraham "A-B-E" Velazquez — to dig deeper into their South Bronx origins, their musical and educational work and their upcoming album, *State of the Art*.

**MESSIAH RHODES:** Where do you see yourselves in the world of hip-hop?

**FRANKIE 4:** We keep the historical power of hip-hop to unify very close not only to our performance and musical work, but also our work using hip-hop for education. We're using hip-hop and creative writing as tools of empowerment, to give folks a platform to speak up about what's going on in their community. Let it be about social justice or what's going on in your hood, your personal story or you just making a name for yourself, proclaiming to the world your identity and your experience. I think that reflects our music, a lot of which is definitely political, but it's also about the personal and that being political itself.

**MR:** What are the social and political issues that are most important to you?

**DESPIERTO:** The marginalization of young people. We are working against institutional racism by engaging with youth, and that is very connected with fighting police brutality. The other issues that have been important

to us over the past 10 years are incarceration, solitary confinement, war in general and immigrant rights. What we do is about connecting with people. When it comes to war, we've worked in Palestine, Liberia, Colombia and Mexico — I would consider that a war zone too — and with people affected by armed conflict in other places.

What I always try to remember is how real the conflict is here. How real the war is here. It's all about framing: if we just consider war as dropping bombs, we decrease the significance of the conflict that is happening right here, in this community in the Bronx.

**MR:** What kinds of issues are you seeing in your work with young people, and how are you combating them?

**FRANKIE 4:** A lot of what comes out while working with young people is around self-image and identity issues. Young people are told, and we are all told, not to love ourselves, that we are not enough. When we share a space with the young people, it's a lot about sharing and communal participation, which is where we get to see ourselves in a valuable light. There's not a lot of spaces for that, in this society that tells you that what makes you valuable is this item, this car, these clothes. So those spaces where all you have is your word and your story, your experience, that inherently comes out with self-love.

**MR:** And what's most valuable about this work to you as a group?

**FRANKIE 4:** In light of what is valued in this society, especially mainstream hip-hop, we have different values. We consider ourselves extremely wealthy, in spirit, in community — people got our backs all over the world. That in itself is a gift and it's something you can't put a price tag on. At the same time, working toward being sustainable and being able to do the work we love and our spirits are called to do. In a way, to provide for ourselves and the ones we love.

**MR:** You'll soon be releasing your new album, *State of the Art*. What's the direction you are going with it?

**THE LAST EMCEE:** In this world if you're not on the billboards, you don't exist as a musician. We have been making music for a long time. One of the illusions or misconceptions we had before was if we just make a good product it will go to the top, it will receive affirmation and cred-



**ON THE MOVE:** The South Bronx-based Peace Poets from top to bottom: Frank "Frankie 4" Antonio López, Frantz "Ram3" Jerome, Abraham "A-B-E" Velazquez, Emmanuel "The Last Emcee" Candelario and Luke "Despierto" Nephew.

ibility. Now when we are making this album, we are really thinking about how to be not only artists but also ambassadors, advocates of our own art. Any great artist is someone who has empathy and taps into people's shared experiences. That's why "Water Got No Enemy" is about the criminalization of young people of color: specifically about Ramarley Graham, but also about any young person who has been murdered or stopped and frisked by the cops. We see something that connects to a lot of people there.

**MR:** How did the Peace Poets form?

**THE LAST EMCEE:** The Peace Poets formed in a few different places. Frank, myself and Abe went to high school together. Frank met Franz at the Ghetto Film School, where he introduced us and we formed a group called the Cypher Matrix. From there we joined a youth organization called the Brotherhood/SisterSol and started a collective called the Lyrical Circle. We spent many of those years getting politicized; before then we were just rapping nonsense. We eventually went off to college, and there I met Luke. He came to a session at Lyrical Circle and then stayed and became one of us. By 2007 or 2008, the group had changed, so we had a meeting and changed the name to the Peace Poets.

**MR:** Would you consider yourself working-class artists?

**A-B-E:** We are super working-class.

**THE LAST EMCEE:** Emphasis on the working, little emphasis on the class.

**RAM3:** The blue collar is the cape.

**A-B-E:** If I can lyrically break it down, from a single on the album called "No More Mondays":

"Five part-time jobs at the same time, I make 9 to 5 look like part time." We are doing work that is urgent and necessary, and we do it because our spirits are called to it. We are not doing it for money or for compensation. Some of us in the group don't have a salary considered minimum wage, we're just surviving. Those are choices we make. What the Peace Poets have been doing is going out to Haiti, out to Palestine, out to where no one wants to go, to help out — that's where we need to be and what we need to do. The money is not the focus.

**MR:** How do you share the labor of being in a collective together?

**A-B-E:** We do a little bit of everything. I guess that's what's special about our crew. I'm an artist, rapper, beatboxer and also educator. We're artists but we also work for the group juggling web design, promotion, PR, marketing, getting gigs, conferences, protests. We combine all of our individual input as educators, organizers and emcees to make it happen.

**MR:** What's next for the Peace Poets?

**FRANKIE 4:** Through the community organization Brotherhood/SisterSol, we are doing a youth community journalism exchange program where two folks from New York go to Brazil for 10 days and work with different youth and media organizations within the Rio de Janeiro area. Then in August two young people from Brazil will come to New York. Looking forward to that.

For more about the Peace Poets, see [thepeacepoets.com](http://thepeacepoets.com).





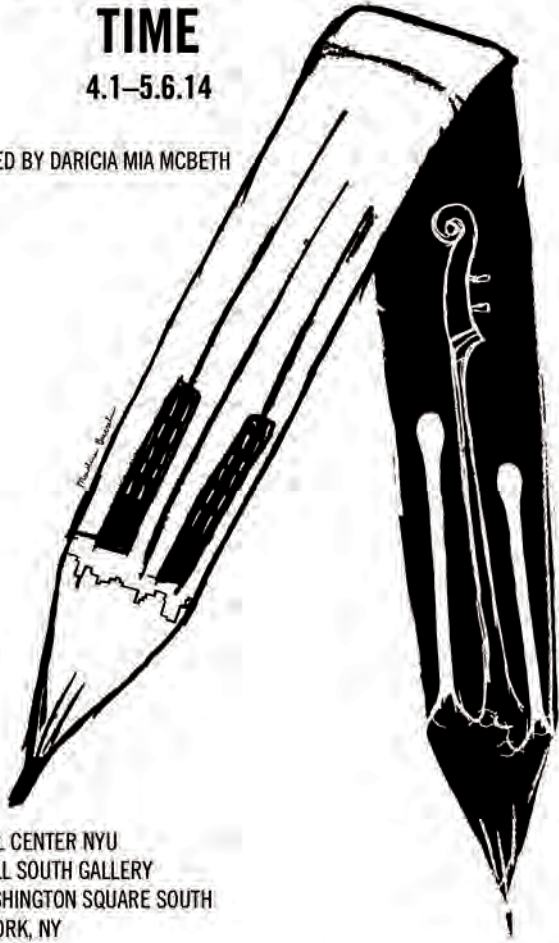
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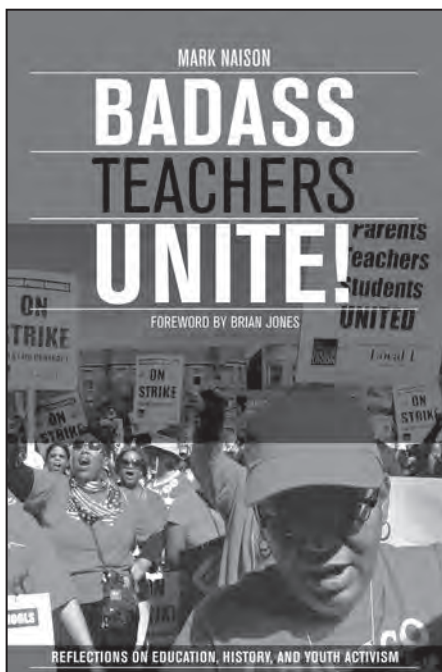


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Mark Naison,  
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by Brian Jones

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—Henry Louis Taylor Jr., director, UB Center for Urban Studies,  
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www.haymarketbooks.org

## TELEVISION

# House of Cards Hurts So Good

POWER POLITICS: Kevin Spacey plays the ruthless politician Francis Underwood in *House of Cards*.

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

The first time I met Frank, he was strangling a dog to death. “There are two kinds of pain,” he drawled. “The sort of pain that makes you strong, or useless pain. The sort of pain that’s only suffering.” In his grip, the dog died. And this is why I love Frank: he will stare you in the face while killing and say something smart.

My 14th episode of *House of Cards* was loading on Netflix and by now Frank Underwood and I were intimate friends. It’s an awkward relationship. He’s a fictional Machiavellian Democratic congressman, played by Kevin Spacey, who uses people’s weaknesses as stepping stones in his rise to power. His wife Claire, played by a statuesque Robin Wright, heads a nonprofit and gives orders with a voice as icy as Antarctic wind. Together, this power couple moves through the halls of Washington, D.C., like a pair of sharks. But once in a while, Underwood looks at me and breaks the fourth wall, that imaginary divide between performer and audience, to explain his actions and guide me deeper into his maze.

Most narratives have a cathartic pleasure, an emotion purged through a conflict the protagonist is engaged in, a fear exorcised by his or her triumph. So what is the pleasure of *House of Cards*, now in its second season, drawing nearly 5 million viewers and a cult following in the nation’s capital? Real-life politicians act out scenes from the series in online homage, imitating Spacey’s menacing Southern drawl. Conservative and progressive groups both reference it with glee. The reason is simple. Underwood taps into our inner authoritarian desires; he lets us experience, briefly, the joy of being cruel.

### PALACE INTRIGUE

The show is a modern version of the palace intrigue, a genre of tragedy older than Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Set in a somber D.C. lit with blues and grays, *House of Cards* begins with Underwood as the House majority whip who helps presidential candidate Garrett Walker get elected

in exchange for the post of secretary of state. When Walker takes office and denies him the position, Underwood begins his drive for power. Cringing, we watch in sick fascination as he breaks every rule of morality in the pursuit of vengeance. The closer Underwood gets, the longer the trail of ruined lives behind him.

Binge-watching the series, my eyes dry as marbles, I saw Underwood looming larger and larger as he lied, cheated and killed his way to the vice presidency. Set against a neo-noir backdrop of dark rooms, dark rainy nights and the beige halls of the West Wing, the actors strike iconic poses of power and addiction, cruelty and submission. The camera frames each scene like a classical painting. We see Underwood shaking hands with those he just betrayed, doling out addictive doses of prestige and handing a man a razor to kill himself.

Again and again, he maneuvers himself back to the top as the political terrain shifts beneath him. And that’s the joy of it: in him, we champion competent evil. Usually villains embody illicit desire; they kill, steal, rape, plunder and manipulate others with a sparkle in their eyes. Yet however fascinating they are, they cross a line that disturbs us and we want them to die at the hero’s hands. But in *House of Cards*, the villain is the hero. Crossing ethical lines drives the plot forward and the tension higher. The question at the core is, will evil be rewarded?

At this point the question can’t be answered. The suspension of disbelief snapped. Since the logic of the show demanded the tension intensify as the increasing violence of Underwood’s secret life overlapped with his public role, it may have been inevitable that he became a caricature of evil. He’s not remotely human, but rather a stock-in-trade serial killer whose uniqueness comes from being the vice president. It’s an adolescent view of evil that, as Hannah Arendt showed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, misses its far more destructive form. In watching Underwood, essentially a dandy psychopath

whose personality is both reptilian and flamboyant, we focus on a character instead of a system. And we miss the bigger picture of how institutional logic, social roles and self-justification create state-sponsored terror. We maintain our blindness to how normal people lead institutions like our military into war, or worse.

### DEADLY CHARM

Another reason the question of whether evil will be rewarded is irrelevant is that it already has. Even if Netflix renews *House of Cards* for another season and at the end, Underwood is cornered and caught, we will have voyeuristically been pleased with his crimes. We have 26 episodes from two seasons to watch over and over, savoring his deadly charm, how he throws a reporter under an oncoming train or leaves a man to die from carbon monoxide poisoning as he lies drunk and unconscious in a car with the engine running.

His evil is rewarding to us because it purges us of a fear rising in America, the fear of our own powerlessness. As the economy stumbles from quarter to quarter, as a great divide splits the nation into the many poor and the wealthy few, as Russia claims Crimea and China claims whole swaths of sea, as Washington stands paralyzed and Wall Street surges, a great pessimism has swept over us. It has been reflected in the apocalyptic movies and dark, grim shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*, which throw their characters, our stand-ins, into a frenzied state of helplessness.

And onto the scene comes Francis Underwood, our hero, our gangsta, a man empty of ideological content who has no agenda and no goal except his own glory. He transforms the anxious desire for power into a fascinating spectacle of its fulfillment. And that’s why *House of Cards* is a sign of a renewed American optimism. In its fictional universe, unlike in our real lives, we finally win — even though the victory leaves blood on our hands.





MAIKO SEMBOKUYA

## Jogging Our Memories

*Savage Portrayals: Race, Media and the Central Park Jogger Story*  
BY NATALIE BYFIELD  
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014

It was April 19, 1989. A 28-year-old white woman who lived on the Upper East Side and worked as a Wall Street investment banker was raped, beaten and left for dead while jogging that evening in northern Central Park. Within hours the police arrested four black and one Hispanic teen in what is still known as “the Central Park Jogger Case.”

Confessions, illicitly procured, were ruled admissible at trial by a judge picked out of order precisely because he was known to favor prosecutors. No other credible evidence was introduced. A cooperative media vilified the children, ages 14 and 15, who were found guilty in 1991 and sentenced to prison. The case itself became a national template for trying teenagers as adults.

Ten years later a career criminal — one who raped women just days before in the same section of the same park — confessed to the assault. DNA evidence showed he was the perpetrator. The young men, now adults and out of prison, are still fighting the city for a financial settlement, something the Bloomberg administration resisted mightily and which Mayor de Blasio has not weighed in on yet.

At the time of the attack, Natalie Byfield was a young scribbler at the *New York Daily News*, assigned to the Harlem hospital treating the comatose jogger. She’s followed the case ever since, from reporter to journalism professor to St. John’s University sociologist. Her study, *Savage Portrayals: Race, Media and the Central Park Jogger Story* is both a history of the case and a damn-

ing indictment of police-media collusion in framing a story.

“To me,” she writes, “the story was then, as it is now, a classical case study in how news — and consequently reality — is constructed by media. It is also a great example of how language operates: how, as a system of knowledge, language reflects as well as reproduces that stratification and disparities in any society.”

What language? Ritually referring to the attackers as “savage,” “animalistic,” “wilding,” “a wolf-pack,” and “mutant” only reinforces the notion of attackers as “the other.”

Doing content analysis of two years of coverage, including her own, Byfield shows how the story was slanted, “not contextualized as a story about the rape culture in our society ... [but] of a white woman brutalized by ‘savage black and Latino boys.’”

Readers who might be troubled by the media’s use of crude racial stereotypes were urged not to waste their sympathy on the defendants even by an African-American liberal such as Bob Herbert. Then a columnist for the *Daily News*, Herbert mocked the boys’ appearance at a 1990 pre-trial hearing.

“Some grown-ups had tried to dress them like divinity students or something, but it didn’t work,” Herbert intoned before going on to describe one of the defendants as a “wimpish pipsqueak” and another as being “tall and awkward” and whose pretense of youthful innocence and appropriate dress “fell apart as soon as you looked at his ankles. His socks were the color of pistachio ice cream.”

Against all that, the kids never had a chance.

So why did this happen? Part of it is a codependent relationship the media have with institutional sources — and sources are at the heart of what passes for objectivity. The police are a news-savvy source and crime is a major feature of the “if it bleeds,

it leads” news world. Unless there is definitive proof that the police are implicated in malfeasance, they get a pass. Sources with contradictory information, such as social workers, religious or black community leaders or defense lawyers, are seen as less reliable.

Conversely, the police, as holders of a monopoly on legitimate violence, need to maintain a good image. Says Byfield, “that image could determine the resources they receive. The police agencies need to effectively use producers of cultural products to articulate their own significance in society.”

Then there are class, race and gender issues. Byfield notes that whereas community newspapers run a police blotter column outlining a range of law-breaking in the paper’s catchment area, the large commercial media focus on the lurid and atypical, and attacks by men of color on white women, though rare, is a centuries-old trope. It’s “the other” attacking the fair heart of civilization that becomes the news.

As Byfield writes, “The story: White woman jogging in black section of park raped and nearly beaten to death by black and Latino boys on a rampage” is a twofer, “that is, while women crossing racial boundaries are in grave danger [northern Central Park, before the gentrification of Harlem, was considered a no-go zone for whites in the public imagination], blacks have a propensity to rape white women.” She calls the coverage, filed long before the trial or any objective look at real evidence, “a modern-day cautionary tale based on an old cultural narrative from the days of traditional racism.”

The book demonstrates press critic A.J. Liebling’s apt observation that “people everywhere confuse what they read in newspapers with news.” We are the poorer for that confusion.

— MICHAEL HIRSCH

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## Scenes of 'Worship'

*Worship*

BY EDUARDO MACHADO

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL DOMITROVICH

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

THROUGH APRIL 13

Why do so many of us keep coming back to people who constantly minimize and invalidate us? *Worship*, Eduardo Machado's one-act mini-epic about the theater world, has about as many answers as it has characters. We see the madness unleashed by romantic jealousy, the heartbreak of career success distributed unevenly among friends and lovers. As the driving force, though, we see a deliciously over-the-top cult of personality around a larger-than-life playwright, Estelle, who has mentored a whole cohort of theater professionals over the course of her career, and the play begins with her imminent death from advanced Alzheimer's bringing them together again.

What follows is an absorbing assemblage of flashback, character study and hypnotic Greek choruses that really makes us wish we could meet Estelle and some of her acolytes personally, however exasperating all of them can be. You don't really need to get all of the play's in-jokes about the theater world to appreciate what it is saying about cliquish groups, cults of personality and the interpersonal nonsense they perpetuate.

Crystal Field is delightful as the leader of the group. Her slow, grandiose waver as she makes pronouncements about how famed playwright Henrik Ibsen secretly hated women, how evil must always enter from stage left and how you'll



**RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS TIME:** *Worship* explores a deliciously over-the-top cult of personality around a larger-than-life playwright.

never create great art whoring yourself out to such-and-such bourgeois foundation will remind you of every pompous humanities professor you've ever rolled your eyes at. Taken on its own, the performance was believable. I might have liked to see more of her moments of true tenderness and vulnerability, the intimacy with her protégés that hooked them when they were young and hungry for approval and that kept them coming back for more highs (and more hangovers).

As for the students, the character of Otto (an affectingly wound-up Hugh Sinclair) is established early as the black sheep of the group. He never quite manages to swallow all of the Kool-Aid the others are drinking, but, in his own poignant and paradoxical way, he might be the most devoted follower of all. Heather Velazquez plays Laura, the one who made it bigger than anyone else (including Estelle — oh dread!), and radiates sensual mag-

netism and uncompromising youthful passion. Of all the pathological enmeshings portrayed in the show, these three characters seem to suffer the most (though, of course, the students must bear a bigger burden than their dear leader; could it really be otherwise?). It's worth mentioning that, while the show focuses on these three and the dynamics between them, the rest of the performers carry off some wonderfully subtle shifts in age and attitude. In a flashback where most of them are meeting Estelle for the first time, the way they sit and move makes them absolutely convincing as eager, untested twentysomethings.

The set, mostly a suite of basic shapes in black and white, is gorgeous. Laura, who we find out early on killed herself out of despair from a combination of pressures, lights frequently atop a ghostly platform, shrouded by a gauze of white curtain, and shares the great messages of these characters' collective saga.

This is how Laura conceives of Estelle. This is what Estelle taught Laura personally. This, again, is a warning against the group's various follies, which ultimately helped push her over the edge. Meanwhile, two large, movable walls covered in pleated white cloth are used to suggest changes in the setting, and long papery strips hang like a forest on both sides of the stage, sometimes fluttering with a chilly wind in outdoor scenes. It is stark and sumptuous at the same time, hinting at how the characters allow themselves to be consumed by suffering because the exquisite, warming beauty of their art is worth it.

A nice touch, if it was intentional, was the subtle cues in the dialogue about how social attitudes evolve and become more nuanced, along with these specific characters' evolving concept of themselves. In this group of artists, multiple characters are bisexual or at least questioning their sexuality. However, it's strik-

ing to observe the character development: We see a particular character speaking of bisexuality as something that some people can't handle (but that, presumably, she can) — and later, in a flashback scene, appearing highly skeptical that that orientation exists at all.

*Worship* can be a heavy, even depressing play. It will remind many viewers of their less pleasant interpersonal experiences. What impressed me most was the overall effect that settled in once it was over: the quiet urgency with which the play seems to insist that it's still worth it to make something memorable; it's still worth dealing with the posers and ass-kissers, the know-it-alls and users (some of whom we can avoid, but never all). I still wanted to keep making things that people after me could remember, even after this sobering reminder. See how you feel.

— DAVID MEADOW

## APRIL THEATER LISTINGS

### THE SIGNAL SEASON OF DUMMY HOY

WRITTEN BY ALLEN MEYER & MICHAEL NOWAK  
DIRECTED BY MARLEE KOENIGSBERG

PRESENTED BY NEW YORK DEAF THEATRE

Over a 14-year career, William "Dummy" Hoy became major league baseball's first deaf superstar. This comedic play speculates on the challenges "Dummy" faces as a member of the Oshkosh Baseball Team during his first minor league season in 1886. With a stern manager, a play-by-the-rules umpire, an all-too-curious newspaper reporter and a rowdy team of ballplayers, "Dummy" struggles to be understood both on and off the field as he wrestles with his past and fights to play the game he loves.

April 3–13

Tue–Sat, 8pm; Sat, 2pm; Sun, 1pm

THE GENE FRANKEL THEATRE

24 Bond St

Tickets: \$15–\$20

[nydeaftheatre.com](http://nydeaftheatre.com)

### THE INTERNATIONAL

WRITTEN BY TIM RUDDY

DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER RANDOLPH

PRESENTED BY ORIGIN THEATRE COMPANY

Three characters bear witness to an unnamed war in Eastern Europe: Dave, an aspiring artist and truck driver living in Los Angeles who watches the war on television; Hans, a well-meaning international peacekeeper from Holland who finds himself drawn into a battle that is not his own; and Irene, a bright, passionate farmwoman who watches her idyllic village life shattered by the encroaching conflict. Through a remarkable turn of events they discover, despite the differences in their circumstances, a shocking commonality.

April 3–May 4

Wed–Sat, 8pm; Sun, 3pm

THE CELL

338 W 23rd St

Tickets: \$35

[origintheatre.org](http://origintheatre.org)

### GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE SHOTZ!

PRESENTED BY AMIOS

Every month, Amios presents six brand-new short plays on a theme. For April's edition, it's a feminism-inspired evening, where each play must include the line "Don't tell me what to do," have something destroyed and pass the Bechdel Test (there will be two named women who talk to each other about something other than a man). Featuring the guest company Uku-lele Orchestra of Great Brooklyn.

April 7

7pm and 8:30pm

THE KRAINE THEATER

85 E 4th St

Tickets: \$10

[amiosnyc.org](http://amiosnyc.org)

### THE TOWER

BY ADAM SCOTT MAZER

DIRECTED BY PHILIP GATES

PRESENTED BY ANTIMATTER COLLECTIVE

A psychedelic journey into the history and mythology of the Donner Party, a group of snow-bound pioneers who notoriously resorted to cannibalism to survive the brutal winter of 1846–47. Historical narrative collides with hallucinatory imagery to create a shifting landscape filled with the whispers of the past and the roar of the future. A vision of adolescent America: frostbitten, bloodstained, ravenous.

April 12–26

Wed–Sun, 8pm

STANDARD TOYKRAFT

722 Metropolitan Ave, 3rd Fl, Bklyn

Tickets: \$15

[antimattercollective.org](http://antimattercollective.org)

— Listings provided by ROBERT GONYO and the GO SEE A SHOW! podcast, [goseeshowpodcast.com](http://goseeshowpodcast.com).



## Art and the Movement

Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties

BROOKLYN MUSEUM  
THROUGH JULY 6, 2014



Philip Guston, *City Limits* (1969).

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Philip Guston — the famed American painter — is best known for his big, pink canvases of sloppy, truncated bodies. What's less known is that by the time he started on this kind of work, he'd already been painting for nearly 40 years, having achieved considerable success with strictly abstract, non-representational images. Speaking about the 1960s, Guston said, "I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The war, what was happening in America, the brutality of the world." It was in the late '60s that Guston created an infamous suite of paintings showing cartoonish, hooded Klansmen going about their lives against a bruised, bombed-out American landscape. It was news of the civil rights struggle that caused Guston to turn away from abstraction and toward the style that would ultimately define his career.

The Brooklyn Museum's "Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties" includes Guston's 1969 *City Limits* (with three Klansmen riding in a jalopy). "Witness" is the latest of the museum's socially conscious survey exhibitions, but compared with other recent shows (on subjects like wartime photography and LGBTQ history), it takes more of a sidelong, elliptical view of its era. The exhibition is about the civil rights move-

ment through the eyes of artists: It's history not as it was made so much as how it was felt.

Near *City Limits* is another large, cartoon-y canvas: May Stevens' *Big Daddy Paper Doll* (1970), in which the artist's own racist dad is imagined as the pale, fleshy embodiment of America at its reactionary worst. Stevens' naked father is portrayed, paper doll-style, alongside some appropriate outfits (a policeman's uniform, a butcher's bloody smock); the work is bitter but tender, animated by rage but not by hate.

Elsewhere, Bob Thompson's vibrant *Homage to Nina Simone* (1965) finds the legendary musician and civil rights activist presiding over a psychedelic idyll: a picnic for people of all colors (including cherry red, electric blue and lemon yellow). It's a piece that dares to imagine a utopia after all the struggle. Faith Ringgold's *Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger* (1969) starts with a simple American flag design, but there are breaks and disturbances, with the word "DIE" peeking out from behind the stars. Ringgold's painting was in response to the U.S. flag that had recently been planted on the moon's surface: a symbol of how the government was ignoring its own (Black) people.

To create his *Lawdy Mama* (1969) Barkley L. Hendricks used centuries-old European techniques to depict a stoic, beautiful Black woman: The work is classically pleasing while presenting a mix of elements that, even 45 years on, still feels contextually risky. Other exhibition highlights include Romare Bearden's all-encompassing mid-1960s collages, Sam Gilliam's luminous painted homage to Martin Luther King, Jr. (*Red April*, 1970), and Charles W. White's ex-

pertly rendered social-realist drawings.

One can imagine that in the late 1960s, it would have been hard for U.S. artists not to respond to the civil rights movement. With the daily news conveyed in such stark terms — a ceaseless, wrenching refrain of "white" and "black" — it's only logical that this graphic turmoil would find its way into works of art. One of my favorite paintings in the show is Virginia Jaramillo's *Divide* (1964): just a smoky, crackling, white form against a black background, it conveys a mournful, elemental conflict in a charred and barren place. Jaramillo made the painting as a young mother of a mixed-race family, living in the impoverished L.A. neighborhood of Watts (the 1965 Watts riots convinced her that there was no future for her family in America, so they left). Leon Polk Smith's abstract *Black Anthem* (1960) shows a pedestal-like black mass, playfully but assuredly overtaking two errant white blobs. At face value, the piece has nothing to do with civil rights; looked at in context, there's no way it could possibly be about anything else.

While seeing how the 1960s civil rights movement served as a vital, life-changing rallying point for all manner of artists and thinkers, it's strange to think that these people were operating against pervasive, accepted social forces, and stranger still to realize that many of those forces are still the order of the day. In 2014, not only have problems of wealth disparity, mass incarceration and systemic violence not gone away, they still play out largely along racial lines, too. Despite what the Constitution says, equal rights for all Americans are still not — and have never been — a given. In that context, the basic political inefficacy and (often literal) abstraction of art-making can feel frustrating. But exhibitions like this help show the value of art as history: More than anything (or at least anything I can think of), art shows us what history felt like. Looking isn't everything, but it's better to look than not to look. There's a huge difference between witnessing and averting one's eyes. It's like black and white.

— MIKE NEWTON



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama* (1969).

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

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Crystal Field, Executive Director

Presents

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by

Eduardo Machado

Directed by

Michael Domitrovitch

Set Design by Mark Marcante  
Lighting Design by Alexander Bartenieff  
Costume Design by Michael Bevins  
Sound Design by Elizabeth Rhodes

Featuring: Crystal Field\*, Quinlan Corbett\*,  
Lori Fischer\*, Sharon Ullrick\*, Hugh Sinclair\*,  
Heather Velazquez & Tatyana Yassukovich\*

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