

#208: AUGUST 2015

THE INDYPENDENT

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MIKAEL TARKELA



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READER'S VOICE

Exploring Race and Whiteness

The article on “white anxiety” (*July Independent*) was brilliant in multiple dimensions: providing larger context for all of us on the Dolezal phenomenon, connecting us to our racial inventions, talking about the emotional landscape and naming flavors to fears, wending through palpable history and describing the personal. So many constructs in one article — a sophisticated meal. Burn it down.

— THE PERSIAN HALF

This article does not deal enough with the oblivious white, the white who is “just being me,” while operating as a cog in the racist system, who does not think of self as white for days at a time. I also fear that there is too much optimism here about the coming of a minority-white United States. South Carolina had a Black majority in 1861; then there’s South Africa under apartheid. The question is power, not statistics.

— LARRY YATES

I wish that the basic concepts the author hit in this article could be taught in high school or middle school or even earlier. Building solid multiracial worker solidarity requires a lot of work and that requires folks to have some basic understanding of how “white race” and “racialism” were constructed to serve historically rooted economic purposes. Showing Up for Racial Justice (showingupfor-racialjustice.org) is a relatively new formation that explores some of this within white communities.

— MUHAMMED MALIK

Blame Blacks for Church Massacre

Here’s my theory regarding Dylann Roof and the Charleston church shooting. It wouldn’t happen without all the illegal drugs, and if thousands of Blacks did not willingly engage in distributing and selling illegal drugs to young people such as Roof. A lot of violent crime (murder, rape) goes with easy access to buying illegal drugs which cause a lot of total insanity. I don’t hate minorities. But I do hate drug dealers.

— ANONYMOUS

Editor’s note: We do not endorse the opinions in the letter above.

I’ve Rejoined the NAACP

The slaughter of nine African-Americans while attending a Bible study meeting in Charleston, South Carolina’s historic African Methodist-Episcopal church has caused people of good will to search for a meaningful response that would demonstrate white people’s solidarity with their long-suffering Black brothers and sisters as well as offer a reasonable hope for ongoing resistance to institutional racism. Here, I want to propose that you join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an action I have taken after letting my membership lapse some 50 years ago.

The NAACP is a truly national organization whose half-million members are organized into 2,200 chapters in 49 states and the District of Columbia. One of the areas of central concern of this fine institution has been the demand for equal treatment of Black people by the criminal justice

system. In our courts, legislative bodies and the arenas that mold public opinion, the NAACP is there. Not just in our nation’s capital or this country’s media centers, but in the Deep South and small towns and cities everywhere in the United States. This fact was brought home when in Ferguson, Staten Island and Cleveland, the sites of three of the most hideous recent murders, the local branches of the NAACP played important roles in presenting to the world the tragedies of the families of the deceased and their communities.

— GERALD MEYER

Inspired by Spain

My reaction to “Spain’s Democratic Uprising” (*July Independent*) is that it’s about time for the fat cats to belly-up to the table and start paying their way. I hope this movement spreads.

— JELLIE

Sketchy Trade Deals

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (“Why the U.S. Is Pivoting to Asia,” *July Independent*) is one more move to extend full spectrum global control. Now at the same time the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is being forced on the populations of Europe. In the end only China, Russia and India may remain independent. These countries have a sense of unique nationalism based on history and they have atomic weapons!

— ITAIA MUXAIC

15TH ANNIVERSARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

THE INDEPENDENT WILL CELEBRATE ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY THIS FALL. WHETHER YOU ARE A FORMER VOLUNTEER OR A LOYAL READER, WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS AND STORIES AND ADD THEM TO THE ARCHIVE WE WILL BE BUILDING ON OUR WEBSITE. TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE, EMAIL US AT ORALHISTORY@INDEPENDENT.ORG OR CALL 212-904-1282 AND LEAVE A MESSAGE.

THROUGH AUG 21

10am–1pm • Free
GREEN WEEKSVILLE. Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday until August 21, the Weeksville Heritage Center will offer a free workshop on urban gardening to children and seniors. Participants will be instructed in designing, building and cultivating a garden.
 Weeksville Heritage Center
 158 Buffalo Ave, Bklyn
 718-756-5250 • weekssvillesociety.org

WED AUG 12

6:30pm • Free
DISCUSSION: NYC'S TORTURE CHAMBER: THE CASE FOR SHUTTING DOWN RIKERS. Join in a discussion with Akeem Browder, brother of Kalief Browder, and Lichi D'Amelio of the International Socialist Organization, to address the injustices, brutality and daily abuse of teenagers in NYC criminal justice system. Kalief Browder was wrongfully jailed on Rikers Island for three years, two in solitary confinement, during which he was institutionalized and beaten to death for a crime he refused to plead guilty to.
 Sinergia Inc.
 2082 Lexington Ave, 4th Fl
 nycsocialist.org

SAT AUG 15–FRI AUG 21

Various times • Free
CELEBRATION: MOCADA SOUL OF BROOKLYN FESTIVAL. The 6th Annual Soul of Brooklyn Festival opens Saturday at Von King Park in Bed-Stuy. Events include jazz on the lawn, art making, DIY vendors, food and more. The entire week's events are listed at mocada.org.
 Various locations
 718-230-0492 • mocada.org

SUN AUG 16

12–4pm • Free
EVENT: BOOGIE ON THE BOULEVARD. The center lanes of the

Grand Concourse from 161st to 167th Street will close to traffic and open to performances, activities, music, programs and more by Bronx-based organizations.
 The Bronx Museum
 1040 Grand Concourse
 718-681-600 • bronxmuseum.org

SUN AUG 16

12–6pm • Free
EVENT: THE 17TH ANNUAL CHILLIN' & GRILLIN'. This annual community event presented by the Audre Lorde Project celebrates the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, trans* and gender non-conforming people of color and allies.
 Prospect Park Picnic House, 5th St & Prospect Park W, Bklyn
 718-596-0342 • alp.org

FRI AUG 21

7–9pm • Free
WORKSHOP: ON SQUATTING. One way to address the city's housing crisis is through taking direct action. The workshop will focus on the techniques and tactics for taking over and squatting abandoned buildings in NYC.
 The Base
 1302 Myrtle Ave, Bklyn
 thebasebk.org

SAT AUG 22

8pm • \$10–\$20, sliding scale
BENEFIT CONCERT: DAVE LIPPMAN & THE LIPP BAND. Acclaimed singer-songwriter-satirist Dave Lippman and the Lipp Band will celebrate 50 years of music for justice with a retrospective concert featuring hit songs from Lippman's long and boisterous career. Proceeds will go to *The Independent* and the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.
 Brooklyn Commons
 388 Atlantic Ave

MON AUG 24**7pm • Free**

DISCUSSION: BOOTS RILEY: TELL HOMELAND SECURITY-WE ARE THE BOMB. Poet, rapper, activist and educator Boots Riley is launching his book of stories and photographs covering two decades in the music industry, including his continuing struggle for human liberation and his being surveilled by intelligence agencies which was exposed by WikiLeaks. Riley is best known as the lead vocalist of The Coup and Street Sweeper Social Club.
 PowerHouse Arena
 37 Main St, Bklyn
 718-666-3049 • powerhousearena.com

SUN AUG 30

12–6pm • Free
EVENT: 5TH ANNUAL BED-STUY PRIDE. This event celebrates the lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, trans* and gender non-conforming community of Bed-Stuy and central Brooklyn. The event will include performances, workshops, vendors, music and more. Presented by the Safe OUTside the System Collective (SOS), a project which is devoted to challenging hate and violence through community based strategies. For inquiries contact sos@alp.org
 Von King Park, Tompkins btw Lafayette & Greene Sts, Bklyn
 718-596-0342 • alp.org

THUR SEPT 10–SAT SEPT 12

8pm • \$15
PERFORMANCE: KOOSIL-JA/ DANCEKUMIKO: I AM CAPITALISM. The artist, koosil-ja, along with Geoff Matters, will do a performance contemplating the psyche of capitalism and its control over the body as they exorcise it through video, text, light and sound.
 The Kitchen
 512 W 19th St
 212-255-5793 • thekitchen.org

SUN SEPT 13

12–4pm • Free
WORKSHOP: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS SCREENPRINTING & TENANTS' RIGHTS. In conjunction with the exhibition "In Search of One City: Sensing (In) equality," artists will guide participants in silk-screening posters based on images from the guide to tenants rights. In addition to artists and organizers, a housing rights attorney will be present to answer tenants questions.
 The Old Stone House
 336 3rd St, Bklyn
 718-768-3195 • theoldstonehouse.org

SAT SEPT 19

7pm • Free
DISCUSSION: NOAM CHOMSKY: ON POWER AND IDEOLOGY. MIT professor and author Noam Chomsky will discuss the relationship between U.S. foreign and domestic policy. RSVP required.
 The New School, John L. Tishman Auditorium
 63 Fifth Ave
 212-229-5615 • events.newschool.edu



LIGHT BRIGADIER FLICKR

BROOKLYN SOUL FESTIVAL:

Tunde Olaniran will perform on Aug. 15, the first day of the MoCada Soul Festival to be held in Brooklyn's Von King Park.

BOOTS! Poet, rapper, activist and educator Boots Riley will appear in Brooklyn on Aug. 24 for the launch of his new book.

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PREVENT POLICE KILLINGS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN

MORE PROSECUTIONS WON'T ADDRESS UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

BY HEIDI BOGHOSIAN

America has awakened in the past year to the epidemic of police killings of unarmed civilians, many of whom are African-American. The list of names grows longer by the week — Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Rekia Boyd, John Crawford and Sandra Bland to name just a few. Each time one of these criminal acts is committed, a cry goes up to prosecute the police officer responsible and bring justice to the victim.

Yet, in most cases the official investigation goes nowhere and killer cops are spared prosecution, much less jail time. This is often due to the close working relationship that exists between district attorneys and the police on whom they depend to gather evidence and witnesses to present their cases. The fact that many district attorneys have close personal or family ties to law enforcement or have seen their careers boosted by support from politically powerful police unions only heightens their reluctance to put a police officer on trial.

On July 8, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order making New York the first state to take away the power of district attorneys to protect police officers implicated in the killings of unarmed civilians. Under Cuomo's executive order, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman will oversee these kinds of cases. The order lasts for one year and could be extended again next year.

Surrounded by black clergy, lawmakers and family members of civilians who have been killed by law enforcement, Cuomo argued it was necessary to address "the crisis in confidence" in the criminal justice system caused by police killings of unarmed civilians. He also boasted that his approach could provide a model for nationwide action.

Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, the Staten Island man whose death last year from an illegal police chokehold was recorded on a cell phone video that went viral but did not lead to an indictment, hailed the measure as "a step in the right direction." The District Attorneys Association of the State of New York reacted angrily, calling Cuomo's actions "gravely flawed."

It's unclear how well this new approach will work. Schneiderman may be hard pressed to stay on top of events in a state of 19.7 million people spread across 62 counties. The attorney general's office will still have to rely on local police investigators to build his cases. Schneiderman, who is widely expected to run for governor someday, may also think twice about aggressively pursuing cases that could bring down the wrath of the police and their supporters on him.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

While Cuomo is content to make splashy announcements and reap the positive headlines that follow, he should have heeded the 1994 report of the Mollen Commission, which investigated police corruption and brutality in the NYPD. The commission called the special prosecutor's office a "tough-sounding idea that will not solve the problem."

Trial convictions of police officers are notoriously difficult to obtain. The rare instances when police are held accountable, it is through civil litigation and settlements that are costly to the municipality and infrequently result in changes to police practices.

Grieving family members of people slain by police officers — and Americans in general — deserve better than this inherently ineffective model. In responding to the groundswell of public outrage at police killings, Cuomo squandered an opportunity to enact innovative, fundamental reforms to the institutionalized epidemic of police violence. Rather than creating yet another prosecutorial entity, he should have heeded recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in its seminal 1981 report, later revised, "Guarding the Guardians." In examining police practices that negatively impact communities of color, the commission called for reforms to increase police accountability and enact independent community oversight of police in order to reduce violent incidents. Such bodies would stand in stark contrast to toothless entities like New York City's Civilian Complaint Review Board, whose rulings in cases of alleged police abuse can be overturned by the police commissioner.

Cuomo could have announced he was devoting significant funding to a statewide campaign to instill higher standards among police departments throughout the state. The campaign would focus on improving police recruitment and retention policies so police forces would better reflect the communities they work in. Creative initiatives would be designed to increase diversity, promote recruitment of candidates who have college degrees, eliminate bias in hiring, improve the promotion rates of officers of color and promote a reward system for practices that protect civil rights and reduce questionable crime prevention strategies like "broken windows" policing.

OVERHAUL TRAINING

Training would be overhauled with increased basic training on diversity issues, especially during the early years of police officers' careers. Training, which should involve community members with differing perspectives, would emphasize cultural sensitivity, community policing, appropriate use of force and how to avoid racial profiling. It would

improve the overall effectiveness of officers (and safety of civilians), especially in demanding circumstances.

Law enforcement agencies would be mandated to continually assess internal policies and practices and improve them as needed, with the exception of deadly force, racial profiling and misconduct, which would be monitored by existing external review agencies. Police officials would construct a uniform policy on the use of deadly force. Intensive training with real-life scenarios would be provided on a continuing basis to help guide officers' discretion. Police administrators and Internal Affairs officials would be encouraged to regularly re-examine disciplinary procedures to improve the effectiveness of internal affairs divisions.

In cases in which the special prosecutor does bring charges against officers, each instance should be held out as a learning opportunity and not just punishment. Court settlements of civil lawsuits against the police should call for meaningful policy changes.

To adequately address modern-day police corruption — brutality, abuse of authority and disdain for established police procedures that increasingly result in the death of civilians — police departments must maintain and embrace internal oversight and accountability controls and a new approach among command authority to minimize the possibility of excessive use of force. Improving internal controls within the NYPD is essential in changing a culture that tolerates officers' use of excessive force. If that can reduce the number of fatalities by officers, and if prosecutions can be brought by impartial and unbiased attorneys, Cuomo has the chance — if he stands as a leader in calling for a re-envisioning of policing standards — to help reverse a longstanding trend of violent police acting with impunity.

It will go a long way in addressing the "crisis" that Cuomo described in his announcement; for white people, that crisis is a loss of confidence in the fairness of the justice system. For African-Americans, whose daily lives are directly impacted by the specter of police abuse of authority, that crisis is the state as purveyor of racist violence.

Heidi Boghosian is an attorney and the former executive director of the National Lawyers Guild.



CHRIS HALL

BLACK LOVE MATTERS

BY MESSIAH RHODES

When I arrived in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 24 to cover the Movement for Black Lives Convergence, an all-Black radical conference, I stumbled into the Cleveland State University auditorium with my camera equipment and bag of clothes. The opening ceremony was under way. On stage were relatives of victims of police violence — including Tracy Martin, father of Trayvon Martin; Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner; Amberly Carter, cousin of Emmett Till and more — sharing their stories. Their words were ones of strength and sorrow. The audience began singing: “I pray for you, you pray for me. I love you, I need you to survive.”

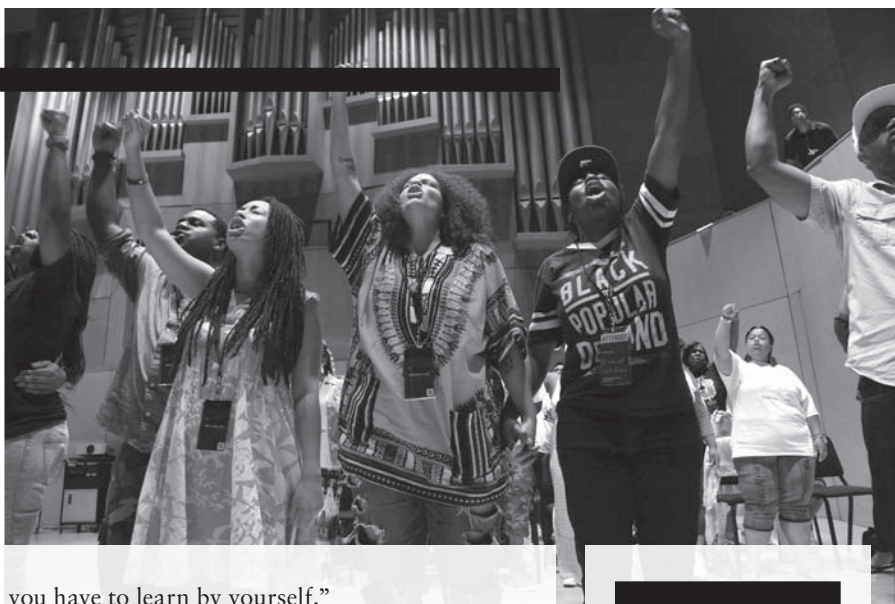
Since my partner of five years took her own life last year, the memories of us sharing our love have been intermixed with images of her lifeless eyes. That year, 2014, was also marked by the image of Michael Brown Jr.’s lifeless body lying in the street in Ferguson, Missouri, along with the video images of other Black men, women and children snuffed out on YouTube repeat. For many, including myself, the Black Lives Matter movement appeared as an oasis of resistance and healing in the middle of a war against the Black spirit and body.

From the events of the very first night of the inaugural Movement for Black Lives Convergence, I could see that this conference would be different than any other I had been to. The organizers had intended to create a space where, in their words, Black people could “reflect on our histories of struggle, build a sense of fellowship that transcends geographical boundaries and begin to heal from the many traumas we face.” Only Black people were allowed to attend, so that we might have a safer space to gain relief and perspective and share blunt truths about how our Black skin is seen through the white gaze. And indeed, the conference, attended by an estimated 1,500 people, felt like a living, breathing history where we could contemplate our present conditions and begin to heal together.

It also became a place where we could take concrete action together. At the venue for the opening party, a Black trans-man was kicked out of a bathroom. In response, all of the conference partygoers left the venue in solidarity and brought the celebration outside. This moment represented the reality of being Black in America, the persecution and discrimination, but also the importance of community. The walkout was our way of affirming that the Black Lives Matter movement has to manifest as something more than just theory and talk: It has to turn into real action for the survival of our communities, not least of them queer, trans* and gender non-conforming Black people.

At the conference I spoke with Dionne Smith-Downs, the mother of James Earl Rivera Jr., who was shot 48 times by police in Stockton, California, on July 22, 2010 — the day before his 17th birthday. Five years later, the police have yet to release dashcam footage of the carnage and Smith-Downs still hasn’t seen justice.

“When you lose a loved one by the system or police, who do we call for help?” She asked me. “A lot of these small cities have no activists, so



LAYLAH AMATULLAH BARRAYN

you have to learn by yourself.”

In Cleveland, where more than 100 panels and workshops were held, learning together was the order of the day. One panel featured Marshall “Eddie” Conway, a former Minister of Defense for the Black Panther Party of Baltimore, who was a political prisoner for more than 44 years. After being released in 2014, Conway had thought that he would live out the rest of his life enjoying his freedom. Instead, he’s found himself back in a movement space, once again fighting for Black lives. On another panel, Michael Brown’s father, Oscar Grant’s uncle and the cousins of Emmett Till discussed the erasure of Black fathers in media narratives of police murders and brutality.

The conference was a product of a decentralized movement, and while a diversity of people came, the tenor was set by a new generation of Black organizers who no longer see centralized leadership as an effective tool for fighting white supremacy. The gathering was less about creating a structure or agenda than about situating the movement in a history of resistance and facilitating personal connections and empowerment. “I never been a part of anything like this,” said Eldred Harris of the Multicultural Resource Center in Ithaca, New York. “A space where academics can think. A place that can allow people to heal and cry. A place to allow regular working-class people to come and engage and to give their insight. It’s beautiful. It’s an amazing opportunity.”

For me, it was an overwhelming experience of love and resistance. It was a place where, as a Black man, I felt human. It was a place where my pain and my struggle to survive was a valid feeling. I haven’t felt this way in a long time.

But the real world and the dangers of being Black in a culture of white supremacy remain. As the conference ended, near the venue a 14-year-old Black teenager was being harassed by the police over an open container of alcohol. Activists marched to the confrontation. Unintimidated by pepper spray, they conducted a nonviolent direct action, forcing the officers to release the boy from custody.

And a cultural shift has begun. Three days after the conference concluded, University of Cincinnati police officer Ray Tensing was indicted on murder charges for shooting Samuel DuBose, a 43-year-old unarmed Black man, in the head during a traffic stop. A body camera video of the incident led the prosecutor to indict. In the very recent past, this indictment would never have happened, whether or not there was video evidence.

Black Lives Matter is a new Black consciousness awakened, at attention and ready to act, respond and enact justice — not in the distant future, but now.

Messiah Rhodes is a New York City-based independent journalist and filmmaker.

RISING UP: The inaugural Movement for Black Lives Convergence in Cleveland provided a space for healing and reflection for an estimated 1,500 attendees.

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—AMY GOODMAN,
HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!

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AUTHOR DISCUSSION: Fucking, Falling in Love, and Radical Politics: Erotica as Social Struggle, with Gabby Matthews.

WED AUG 19 • 7PM

\$5 SUGGESTED

MEETUP: POLY CHAI. Are you polyamorous? Curious about non-monogamy? Want to hang out with like-minded people? Come to Open Love NY’s Poly Chai!

FRI SEPT 11 • 7PM

\$5 SUGGESTED

TALK: Lose Hate Not Weight: A discussion of body image with Virgie Tovar and Cassie J. Sneider.



TURNING LIBRARIES INTO CONDOS

BY PETER RUGH

When I was a teenager I used to skip class, nestle under a desk in my high school's library where the school administrators wouldn't find me and open up a tattered copy of *Leaves of Grass*. The way Walt Whitman wrote about America was so blithe and idealistic, operatic and direct that I had to read the words aloud, which I did in a low voice so no one would overhear me.

It is this opportunity to lose oneself in a world of new ideas and discoveries while communing with the past that renders libraries endearing. Not to mention that this most communal of civic institutions serves as a neighborhood social hub, an after-school gathering place for children of working parents, a vital resource for job hunters and English language learners and an air-conditioned oasis for members of New York's homeless population.

"Shut not your doors to me proud libraries," Whitman wrote. We in present-day New York would do well to listen. Libraries, like other bastions of the public sphere — our parks, hospitals, schools, public housing — are under siege from a real estate industry that sees the finite space of our city as a bottomless cash cow.

Whitman grew up in Brooklyn and later worked in a print shop in the area where the predecessor to the Brooklyn Heights Branch Library was first opened during the 1850s. Rebuilt in 1962, the library is now at the center of a dispute over the latest sell-off of public space.

The Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) board agreed last year to sell the library for \$52 million to Hudson Companies, a real estate development firm that is seeking to build a 36-story residential tower on the site. It will contain 139 units of luxury, market-rate housing and loom over the adjacent Brooklyn Heights neighborhood. In return, the company has pledged to build 114 "affordable housing units" two miles away in Clinton Hill — although 24 of the units will be priced 165 percent above the area medium income.

In a July 15 roll call vote nearly drowned out by chants of "Not for sale!" from the audience, members of Brooklyn Community Board 2 in Brooklyn Heights voted 25-14 with four abstentions in support of Hudson's plan. Under city law, the proposed luxury condo tower still needs to be reviewed by the Brooklyn Borough President and the City Planning Commission and then be voted on by City Council.

To win public support for the sale, BPL has pledged that \$12 million will go toward building a new branch library on the ground floor of the luxury development — but at only one-third the size of the existing facility, down from 62,000 to 21,000 square feet. In what critics of the sale see as a cynical attempt to pit the users of cash-strapped libraries against each other, BPL has also promised to use the remaining \$40 million from the sale to renovate BPL's Pacific, Washington Irving, Walt Whitman and Sunset Park branch libraries, which, like the Brooklyn Heights library, have fallen into disrepair over the years.

"We used to fight about getting enough funds to build and expand our libraries," said Michael White a former city planner and co-founder of the activist group Citizens Defending Libraries. "Now we're fighting about not getting enough money so that we don't have to sell off and shrink our libraries."

DEFUNDING THE LIBRARIES

Data collected by the Center for an Urban Future show

that operating subsidies for the city's three library systems — Brooklyn, Queens and the New York Public Library (NYPL) system, which encompasses Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island — declined by 10 percent from 2002 to 2014, under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The defunding of New York's libraries has come at a time when their popularity has been surging. From 2002 to 2014, annual attendance at programs put on by libraries increased from 1.7 to 2.8 million people per year. Checkouts of physical and e-books and other items have increased by 30 percent. Altogether, the city's libraries receive 37 million visitors per year, a number that exceeds the combined annual attendance at New York's major professional sports events, performing arts centers, museums, historical sites, botanical gardens and zoos.

Support for the libraries has begun to increase under Mayor Bill de Blasio. However, the neglect of the Bloomberg years has left the three library systems with capital improvement needs of \$1.4 billion to repair and update aging facilities, many of which lack the resources — such as outlets to plug in computers — one expects in the 21st century.

At Brooklyn Heights Library, for instance, the building's 30-year-old heating, ventilating and air conditioning system has been broken for about four years — a fact often cited by proponents of the library's sale. Instead of investing in repairs, which, according to the city's Department of Design and Construction, would cost between \$3.3 and \$3.6 million, the library has cut its summer hours, opening in the morning six days a week when the heat is less oppressive and then closing at 1pm.

"They've let things deteriorate," said Tom Angotti, a professor of urban planning at Hunter College and author of *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate*, remarking on what he describes as the New York's pervasive neoliberal development model, "So now they can turn around and say, 'You see, this is not working. We'll give it to a private company and they'll know how to use it.'"

While backers of the Brooklyn Heights Library sale are touting it as a win-win collaboration between the public and private sectors, the final outcome may disappoint library supporters.

Michael White, the former city planner, points out that the \$52 million from the sale will go into the city's general coffers. For the money to be spent on Brooklyn libraries will require authorization from a city council and a mayor who have any number of other projects they may want to see that money go to.

Contradicting White, Madeline Kaye, a spokesperson from the public relations firm Berlin Rosen, speaking on behalf of BPL, insisted to *The Independent* that the \$52 million will be spent as promised. Kaye cited a May 2013 memorandum of understanding between the city's Office of Management and Budget and BPL that states the proceeds from the sale will go toward meeting the library system's capital needs. Memoranda of understanding, however, are not legally binding.

OTHER LIBRARY SALES

The sale of the Brooklyn Heights Library is the latest in a series of transactions with developers involving New York's libraries. These privatizations began under Bloomberg and have continued with de Blasio. Two prior dealings between the libraries and the real estate industry offer a glimpse into what the public can expect from such activity. It doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

Plans to sell two Manhattan branches to develop-

ers — the Mid-Manhattan Library at Fifth Avenue and 40th Street, and the Science, Industry and Business Library on Madison Avenue at 34th Street — and use the funds to convert the NYPL's iconic flagship library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue (the one with the lions out front) into a much smaller lending library were shelved last year due to public outcry. The scheme involved moving some 3 million books into storage at an expense to taxpayers of at least \$300 million dollars.

The sale of the Brooklyn Heights branch most resembles a deal struck in 2007, at the height of the real estate boom, between NYPL and Orient Express Hotels. NYPL sold its Donnell Branch Library, located across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art on West 53rd Street, to a luxury hotel chain for \$59 million. The property now belongs to the Starwood Capital Group, which plans to build a 46-story luxury hotel that will feature 151 hotel rooms going for upwards of \$800 per night and 61 high-end residences. The building's penthouse comes with a \$60 million price tag, a million dollars more than the whole property sold for. The building will also feature a crystal boutique shop with items costing up to \$10,000.

"We're going to marry Louis XV with the modern era," Barry Sternlicht, Starwood Capital's chief executive officer, told the *Wall Street Journal*. "We will be catering to high-end couples and business travelers who may be shopping on Fifth Avenue."

The Donnell Library's replacement is expected to open this winter. It will be located in the basement of the hotel.

'RINGING THE DINNER BELL'

Library defenders like Michael White worry that the deal Community Board 2 backed on July 15 sends a signal to developers that public resources are now up for bids across the East River in the city's most rapidly gentrifying borough.

"This is setting the banquet and ringing the dinner bell for developers," White said. "It signals that we are willing to sell off any kind of public asset and we are willing to sell it off cheaply."

BPL spokesperson Madeline Kaye disputed White's claim that the property is being sold at a bargain-basement price after what she described as "a very competitive bidding process."

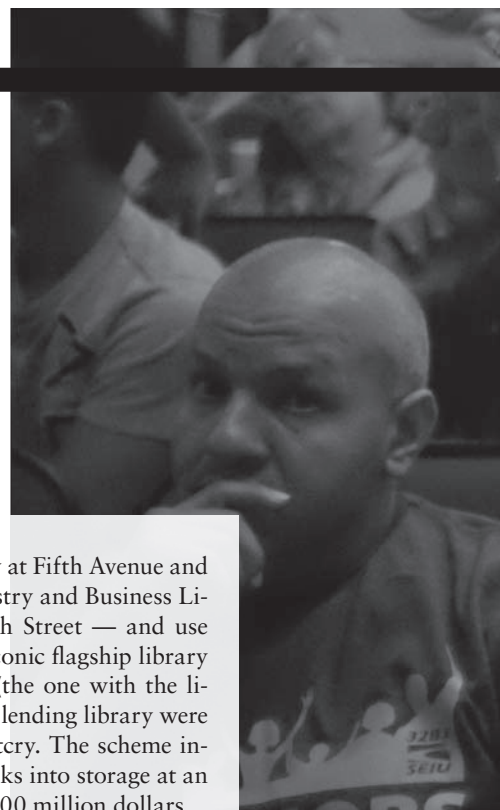
Seeking to distance the Brooklyn Heights sale from the Donnell library deal, Kaye said that BPL has a contract with Hudson Companies and "if the contractor exceeds the amount of time permitted by the city, 30 months to build the new library and 36 months to build the whole building, there is a reversion provision that would allow the city to take back title to the land and keep any and all proceeds already paid by Hudson Companies."

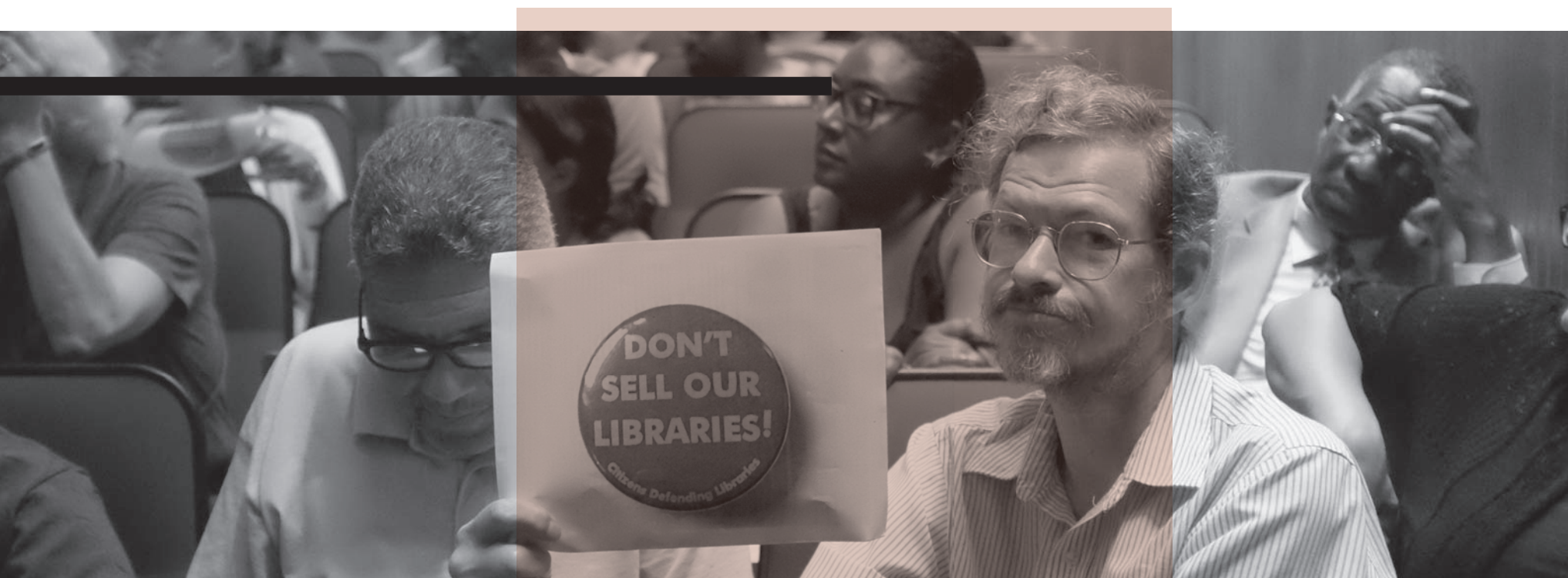
Under the terms of its contract, Kaye said, Hudson will sell the city back its new library, built into the bottom floor of the luxury tower, for \$1.

Assuming construction deadlines are met, Angotti observed, the new value realized by the luxury condo tower will ultimately go into the pockets of the developer, while most of the space that is created will be reserved for the wealthy.

Comparable apartments to those Hudson plans to construct in Brooklyn Heights are listed in the millions of dollars. Libraries, however, have an intrinsic value that markets can't tabulate.

"It's a matter of community," said Angotti. "Libraries are one of the few democratic places left in the city. You go to a local library, people are reading, going to events, socializing, people of all ages. They are places





SAHIBA CHAWHARY

where people can go for advice and look for information, using a variety of different media. It has a value that goes beyond the dollar value. It's a value to people."

The proposed deal is now under review by Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams. He will hold a public hearing on the proposed sale at Brooklyn Borough Hall on August 18 at 6pm. In a recent interview with *The Brooklyn Paper*, Adams said he envisions book-free libraries in the future.

"We no longer need shelves of books in libraries to look impressive," he commented.

On the sale of the Brooklyn Heights Library, Adams remains officially non-committal.

"I look forward to reviewing Community Board 2's recommendations and hearing from local residents about the proposed plans for the Brooklyn Heights branch of the Brooklyn Public Library," Adams said in a statement released by a press spokesperson.

The fate of the highrise and the life of the library underneath it might just depend on the pressure that comes from below, which critics like

White vow to supply.

"We'll be talking with the borough president," said White, who, along with other members of Citizens Defending Libraries, plans on attending the hearings Adams is holding on the sale in August. "You cannot sell off a publicly owned library like this without going through a public process, and we're still at the very beginning of that process."

BPL and Hudson hope construction will begin on the tower by next year. After Adams weighs in on the development deal, it goes to the City Planning Commission, followed by the City Council, before ultimately falling on Mayor de Blasio's desk — a clear test of whether the current mayor will continue in his predecessor's footsteps, auctioning away public space to private interests, or whether he will listen to the voices of book-loving Brooklynites seeking to preserve it.

SHELVE THE SALE:

Opponents of the proposed sale of the Brooklyn Heights Library turned out in large numbers for a July 15 meeting of Brooklyn Community Board 2.



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VISION ZERO: THE ROAD FORWARD

BY JANAKI CHADHA

It was a rainy December night in 2012 when Cara Cancelmo began the short walk from a friend's apartment to her parents' home on the Upper West Side. The 18-year-old college freshman was home for a holiday visit. When she reached 93rd Street and West End Avenue, she looked both ways before beginning to cross the street, just as she had learned to do from an early age growing up in New York. A moment later a taxi cab crashed into her.

Cancelmo's right shoulder was shattered, requiring reconstructive surgery and leaving her with a permanent disability. Now 21, Cancelmo is unable to lift her right arm behind her head. Everyday tasks like getting dressed, opening a package or chopping vegetables are a challenge for her. She experiences pain that moves down from her shoulder to her elbow and wrist and then to her hips regularly.

"I'm living with this pain that doesn't go away," Cancelmo said, "and having to contend with that as my reality for the rest of my life is pretty anxiety-provoking."

Cancelmo has responded by turning her pain into advocacy as a summer fellow with the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives and as a member of Families for Safe Streets, an organization comprised of people whose lives have been impacted by traffic crashes. On July 14, she addressed a crowd of hundreds of people who gathered at Union Square for a vigil to honor the memories of those who have lost their lives or been injured in traffic crashes this year on New York's streets.

"Do we want to live in a city where even when we are perfect pedestrians or cyclists, cars can still injure, maim and kill without consequence?" She asked the crowd.

The vigil, which was also attended by a number of local elected officials, was called to show public support for Vision Zero, an ambitious plan to reduce the number of traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries in New York City to zero by the year 2024. First adopted in Sweden in 1997 as a conceptual framework for ending traffic mayhem, Vision Zero was embraced by Mayor Bill de Blasio in January 2014 at the beginning of his term in office.

A year and a half later, New York City remains a long way from reaching "zero." At the vigil the names of the 127 traffic fatalities from the first six months of 2015 were read aloud, including 54 pedestrians and five cyclists. During that same time, 24,890 people were injured in traffic crashes, according to Transportation Alternatives. Of these more than 4,700 were pedestrians like Cancelmo. For advocates and policymakers, Vision Zero is a multi-pronged effort to change everything from laws and how they are enforced to the configuration of the city's streets while transforming a culture that tolerates reckless driving.

2014 was a landmark year for Vision Zero

advocates. The City Council approved 15 new traffic laws, including a bill that lowers the city's default speed limit from 30 to 25 mph, an important move as several studies have shown that even small decreases in the speed of a vehicle can have dramatic effects on the severity of the impact during a collision. A right of way law now makes it possible to charge drivers with a misdemeanor crime if they kill or injure a pedestrian due to a failure to yield. This is a dramatic change from the long-standing practice of assessing nothing more than a fine for a traffic violation against sober but reckless drivers who kill or injure.

The NYPD has also increased its use of traffic light cameras, speed guns and summonses for speeding and failure to yield. Overall, the first year of Vision Zero saw summonses for speeding and failure to yield increase by 42 percent and 126 percent, respectively, from 2013 to 2014, according to city data. However, advocates say enforcement of the new traffic laws has been plagued by inconsistency.

"Despite some improvements made in some precincts, it's really varied," said Caroline Samporano, deputy director of Transportation Alternatives.

The move toward safer street designs is also a core part of Vision Zero, particularly in terms of improving safety on arterial roadways. These heavily-used streets host high-speed traffic and witness a disproportionate amount of the city's pedestrian and cyclist deaths, despite making up only 15 percent of New York City street mileage.

As part of the mayor's Great Streets program, four major city thoroughfares — Queens Boulevard, Atlantic Avenue, Fourth Avenue in Brooklyn and the Grand Concourse — will undergo major capital improvement projects with the goal of preventing traffic deaths. Look for bike lanes, protected left turn signals, pedestrian islands that make it easier to cross wide avenues and more.

"Taking the street that has always been known and accepted to be the 'boulevard of death,' and saying 'no, we expect and we're going to deliver a different outcome because that's what New Yorkers deserve' is really powerful and important," said Samporano on the redesign of Queens Boulevard. "[It's] symbolic but also real, tangible investment in Vision Zero that's happening right as we speak."

De Blasio's willingness to use the punitive arm of the state to change driver behaviors has not been matched by the same willingness to invest money in the remaking of the city's streets to be multi-user friendly. Samporano voiced frustration that de Blasio was only bringing the Great Streets program to four high-profile roadways while Stephen Miller of Streetsblog.org said he was disappointed in the lack of funds in the 2016 fiscal year budget for more low-cost street redesigns.

"The most promising way to get fast results from street redesigns," he wrote in a post, "is

through 'operational' projects that use paint and other low-cost changes to calm traffic, rather than waiting years for the city to design and build an expensive capital project."

Samponaro agreed, saying, "I think that's something that next year we'll be focused on shining a light on."

Vision Zero has drawn comparisons to the 1980s-era crusade that permanently changed how our society thinks about drunk driving, which was once widely tolerated as a matter of personal choice and not a crime.

At July's vigil, participants vowed to stop using the word "accident" when referring to traffic collisions. For many safe streets advocates, the frequent dismissal of traffic deaths and serious injuries as unavoidable on the part of drivers is at the forefront of what they are trying to change.

For Cancelmo, telling people she lives with a permanent shoulder disability often invites questions. "[People ask], how did that happen, how did you break your shoulder? And I tell people that I was hit by a cab and then they say, was it your fault?" She adds, "I think we definitely have a culture in this city of blaming the victim about this issue and I think that we do it because we somehow think that if it were that person's fault, then it can't happen to [us]."

She hopes that, through her activism, along with bringing about change, she can end the isolation she's felt. "There are thousands of people walking around who have had similar surgeries to mine, similar injuries, similar rehab processes," she says. "If they heard my voice I hope that they would see that there are people who care, and there are people who know that this happens and are trying to make it never happen to anybody else."



RACHEL LEAGER



JANAKI CHADHA

MOTIVATED: Cara Cancelmo of Families for Safe Streets was hit by a cab while crossing an intersection. She is one of hundreds of New Yorkers pushing for changes that would make the city's streets safer for everyone who uses them.

PUBLIC VIGIL: Hundreds of people including local elected officials gathered in Union Square on July 14 to show their support for Vision Zero.

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GREECE'S 'DEBTOR'S PRISON'

By JOHN TARLETON

On July 5 the people of Greece overwhelmingly rejected further austerity measures in a referendum called by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, head of Greece's left-wing government. The 61 percent "No" vote came in spite of thinly veiled threats from Greece's European creditors, led by Germany, that they would wreck the country's banking system if they did not get their way. In the land where Western democracy was invented, the people had seemingly spoken.

Eight days later, the "No" became a "Yes." Faced with the prospect of his country of 11 million people being booted out of the eurozone's single currency with possibly catastrophic consequences, Tsipras acceded to all of the previous demands from his European "partners" plus new ones that seemed to emerge by the hour as talks dragged on. In order to receive 86 billion euros (\$96 billion) in new loans to finance Greece's already unsustainable debt load of 320 billion euros, Tsipras agreed to conditions that would have made a loan shark blush:

- Make deep cuts in pension payments.
- Increase regressive sales taxes.
- Increase the government's primary budget surplus, which will require deeper cuts in public spending.
- Weaken collective bargaining laws.
- Make it easier for banks to foreclose on people's homes.

• Repeal all legislation passed by the Greek government since it came to power at the end of January opposed by creditors.

• Allow the troika of the European Central Bank, the Eurozone Commission and the IMF to review proposed new legislation before it is voted on by the Greek parliament.

• Put up 50 billion euros in public assets as collateral to be privatized.

Previous "memoranda," as the bailout packages are referred to in Greece, are blamed for shrinking the country's economy by one-fourth and creating a 25 percent unemployment rate that is twice as high for young people. This agreement is considered the harshest one yet.

"It's like a 19th-century debtors' prison," former chief World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz wrote in *The New York Times*. "Just as imprisoned debtors could not make the income to repay, the deepening depression in Greece will make it less and less able to repay."

"We must stop taking on new loans pretending that we've solved the problem, when we haven't," Tsipras's former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis told *The New Statesman*. "We have made our debt even less sustainable on condition of further austerity that even further shrinks the economy."

Arguing that he fought for the best possible deal he could get, Tsipras has managed to win parliamentary support for the bailout package despite opposition from more than a quarter of lawmakers within Syriza, the left-ist coalition he led to victory in January. Leading Syriza figures who have

voted against the bailout include Varoufakis and Zoe Konstantopoulou, speaker of Greece's parliament. More than half of Syriza's 201-member Central Committee has also publicly opposed the agreement.

As *The Independent* goes to press, Greece still has not received any bailout funds and faces an August 20 deadline to make a 3.2 billion euro bond payment to the European Central Bank. According to *The Financial Times*, Tsipras is "facing demands from creditors for even more economic reforms before they will release the first tranche of aid payments."

WAS THERE ANOTHER WAY?

In his interview with *The New Statesman*, Varoufakis revealed that he had overseen a small team of five people within the Finance Ministry that had developed a "Plan B" for keeping Greece afloat financially if forced out of the eurozone. The plan: set up an alternate payment system by utilizing a system already in place to collect tax revenue and issue euro-denominated IOUs that could be converted to drachmas (the Greek national currency that existed prior to its joining the eurozone) at the flip of a switch. The plan also called for taking control of the Bank of Greece from the European Central Bank and unilaterally reducing debts owed to the ECB.

On the night of the overwhelming "No" vote in the referendum, Varoufakis said he urged Tsipras and other top officials in the Syriza government to put the plan into action. By a vote of 4-2, Tsipras's inner cabinet rejected Varoufakis's plan as too risky. Instead, the decision was made to return to the negotiating table prepared to reach a deal at any cost.

UNACCEPTABLE: Greek protesters clashed with riot police outside the parliament building on July 16 while lawmakers inside voted to approve a new round of austerity measures.



By DANIEL ORSINI

UNCERTAIN FUTURE: A woman walks by posters calling for the end of Puerto Rico's regressive sales tax and for the rich to be made to pay for the island's worsening economic crisis.

In July, Puerto Rico's Governor Alejandro García Padilla declared the island's \$72 billion debt "unpayable" and called on the U.S. government and Puerto Rico's creditors to negotiate debt relief and other measures to restore Puerto Rico's economic viability.

The island is undergoing the worst economic crisis in its history. And in a Western Hemisphere replay of the debt crisis strangling Greece, attempts by Puerto Rico's government to stabilize its economy through a combination of harsh austerity measures and further borrowing has created a vicious cycle that chokes off economic growth, which only makes the debt overhang bigger.

Among the cutbacks and other measures imposed by Garcia's Popular Democratic Party (PPD), which is aligned with the Democratic Party in the United States, are massive closures in the public school system; a sales tax increase from 7 to 11.5 percent; the rollback or elimination of public-sector pensions; cuts in teachers' health care benefits; an increase in the tax on a barrel of oil from \$9.25 to \$15.50; and steep increases in water and electricity bills.

Puerto Rico's gross national product has fallen on average by 2 percent each year for the last eight years. Some 270,000 jobs have been eliminated. Almost 200,000 people fled Puerto Rico from 2010 to 2013, leaving its population at 3.6 million. Most of them moved to the U.S. mainland, and of the 8 million Puerto Ricans, there are now more in the diaspora than on the island.

The government's austerity measures amount to an all-out offensive in the war against working-class people in Puerto Rico. But make no

mistake: the colonial government is merely a "front man" for corporate America and the wolves of Wall Street, which have been extraordinarily successful at compelling a string of governors to implement various neoliberal packages during the past two decades.

PUERTO RICO'S SHOCK DOCTRINE

The year was 1993, and the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP), which is aligned with the U.S. Republican Party, was in power. The governor, Pedro Rosselló González, was the most neoliberal leader the island had ever had, and he implemented dramatic changes in the colonial government and society.

Puerto Rico used to have a relatively robust public health system that depended on infrastructure all across the island. It was fairly accessible and affordable. If a person got sick, they could simply go to the hospital and get treated — no insurance card needed. Governor Rosselló privatized the whole system, selling off hospitals at almost half their market value and issuing the island's residents private insurance coverage paid for out of public revenue (something like Obamacare). Nowadays, the Puerto Rican health system is on the edge of collapse. Doctors are fleeing the island, which is further raising the cost of health care, and the government's constant scramble to keep up with its health care bills has the entire system sinking in quicksand.

In 1998, the PNP government privatized what used to be one of the island's wealthiest public corporations: Telefónica de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Telephone). Telefónica's militant unions waged a fierce battle to maintain the company as a public asset, enjoying active soli-

arity from many unions in both the public and private sectors, as well as university students and the public generally. The telephone workers organized a 41-day strike that became known as "La Huelga del Pueblo" (The People's Strike), but it was squashed with a heavily repressive governmental response that paved the way for the company's privatization.

In 1999, Rosselló cut \$40 million from the University of Puerto Rico's budget. His administration also passed "Ley 40" (Law 40), which represented a broad attack on the rights of public-sector workers. In 2008, the governor used the provisions of that law, which made it illegal for teachers to go on strike, to decertify the grassroots Federación de Maestros teachers union after a 10-day strike.

Rosselló wasn't the first or the only governor to implement neoliberal policies, but until he took power, no one had done it so effectively or widely. Rosselló's neoliberal "reforms" contributed \$10 billion in debt to the current \$72 billion debt crisis.

Rosselló's rule ended in January 2001 and the PPD won the next two gubernatorial elections. The party continued to advance the neoliberal agenda but in a more populist fashion. The successive PPD administrations of Sila María Calderón Serra, the first woman elected governor of Puerto Rico, and Aníbal Acevedo Vilá added to Puerto Rico's debt by \$13.3 billion and \$10.1 billion, respectively.

When the PNP returned to power in 2009, Governor Luis Fortuño Burset quickly became a contender for Pedro Rosselló's legacy as the island's foremost neoliberal heavyweight. Fortuño was a card-carrying

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IOU: HOW DEBT DEFINES THE NEW MILLENNIUM

By NICHOLAS POWERS

"Hello? Hello?" The debt collector asked loudly. I held my cell phone away from my ear and shook it, as if that might get his voice out. Finally I said, "Sorry, you got the wrong number" and hung up. An hour later he called again, so I blocked his number. Then he called from a new one. I tossed the phone on the bed and left the apartment. My head buzzed like a beehive. I hated the debt collector for harassing me and hated myself for falling into debt. When I got back, I saw my cell phone was quiet and sighed in relief. Then it started ringing again.

THE DIVIDED SELF

"Are you sure?" My friend asked as I put a credit card on top of the dinner bill. Waving the question away, I forced a smile. Every day, I add more debt to my life. The idea that debt is a form of social control echoes across the Left and mainstream media. But I don't feel controlled, I feel guilty for repeatedly buying what I can't afford. Even as I wear a mask of ease, behind the nonchalance is anxiety over my \$70,000 in student loans and \$2,000 in credit card debt.

When I talk to friends about debt, I see how many of us wear that mask. Over drinks, they speak in hushed tones about how much they owe. Sometimes the actual number is left unsaid until night's end, when roasted drunk, everything spills out. Then we cackle at how little we actually have in this world. But after wiping the tears of laughter away, hard pain can surface. Once, an artist close to me revealed that she did sex work for an older man to pay off her student loans.

The contradiction driving our lives is that we overspend to keep up an image for others, but the more we do, the farther in debt we go. The deeper in debt we are, the more we want to keep up an image for others.

But there is a larger contradiction, one beyond our control. We're not paid enough to afford "the good life." Economic jargon is like ice cream: too much too fast and you get brain freeze. But some facts do sink in, and they point to an image of modern life as one long, laborious debt trap. Pay for U.S. workers has flat-lined since the 1970s even as global trade filled store shelves. Unable to live on wages, we live on credit. We bought homes on credit. We went to college on credit.

After nearly three generations of this we are faced with a looming wave of debt that will either get larger or come crashing down. It is driven by those contradictions, one churning within the other: The wage theft at the heart of capitalism that is reversed into debt, and the human need to belong to each other that traps us

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THE GLOBAL DEBT DOMINO

Leading up to World War I, European nations wove military alliances across the continent. When a Yugoslav nationalist killed the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand, it triggered a diplomatic domino effect that sent millions into war.

Today, it's not only interlocking military alliances that threaten the world but also interlocking debt. Governments owe banks. Banks owe other banks. It is a wave of debt that must keep moving between institutions, propelled by payments and if need be, loans, to those in debt to pay their other loans. It can't stop because if it did, it would crash millions into poverty. People who once spent freely would find their bank accounts closed by the state and food riots exploding in the street.

The global workforce of nearly 3 billion wakes up every day to sow, to reap, to tend children and cook, to lay road and build towers, to hammer and bolt the world together. According to financial scales that measure wealth from hard currency to checking accounts to market funds, just last year the people of the world created more than \$75 trillion of treasure.

But since the Great Recession the global debt has increased \$57 trillion to nearly \$200 trillion. The bright promise of the 21st century has been eclipsed by the age of austerity.

How did we get here? Why do live in a system that has us hustling hour upon endless hour? The present crisis began with banks offering the working class the one thing they wanted — a home. Lenders offered people loans without checking if they could pay or falsified information to sign the deal. Overjoyed at achieving the American Dream, families moved into new homes. The lenders sold those mortgages to big banks, which then slapped false high-grade ratings on the sub-prime loans, bundled them and sold them again.

When the low payments on the mortgages increased, the new homeowners couldn't make them and defaulted. Terror shot up from the street to the CEO suites as the Great Recession began, spread to Europe and



JOSE CARMONA

POWER OUTAGE

WHY LEFT GOVERNMENTS FALTER ONCE IN OFFICE

BY STANLEY ARONOWITZ

Last January was an exhilarating time for the Left. In Greece an avowed left-wing party captured state power through a convincing electoral victory. In New York City one year earlier the newly elected mayor, progressive Bill de Blasio, and a like-minded city council majority took City Hall from the long-time Wall Street administration of billionaire Michael Bloomberg. A victory-starved left, especially in the developed capitalist world where neoliberalism has reigned since the mid-1970s with only scant protest and resistance, basked in the sunlight of social change.

The Greek left party, Syriza, came to power on the pledge to end years of economic depression driven by the austerity mandate of Germany and its northern European allies. New York's dark horse victor, running on the Democratic ticket after a stunning primary win, brandished the slogan that he would end the "tale of two cities" by substantially closing the yawning income gap between the tiny corps of the super wealthy and the rest of us.

BROKEN PROMISES

By now many of the promises have either been broken or scaled way back. The most dramatic reversal occurred in Greece. Fresh in office, the new government led by Alexis Tsipras entered a period of prolonged and ultimately humiliating negotiations for new terms of another bailout with the troika of the IMF, World Bank and the European Commission. The final outcome was the worst austerity agreement to date between Greece and its creditors. By late July, the government was on its knees, but in the name of "national unity" Tsipris succeeded in winning an overwhelming parliamentary majority — with the help of the more moderate Syriza members and the parties of the center and center right.

Despite his rousing campaign lurch to the left, de Blasio's political biography is deeply entwined with the Clintons and with the Democratic Party. To be sure, he boldly argued with the

conservative Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo that working-class New York needed genuine affordable housing. He proposed a combination of new construction and extensive renovation of older buildings as well as a mandate to assign 30 percent of all new housing construction to moderate- and low-income tenants. Cuomo, a beneficiary of the Clintons' Wall Street connections — remember he was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development during Clinton's second term — firmly rejected the mayor's entreaties as well as his proposals for enhanced school funding and a moratorium on charter schools. The charters, de Blasio charged, were draining public education funds for private interests.

Unlike Greece, where a mass movement for change operated from both inside and outside of government, de Blasio battled entirely within the legislative framework. In New York State, where New York City has not enjoyed fiscal and legislative autonomy since 1977, going it alone proved to be a futile gesture. De Blasio and City Council leaders were able to moderate, but not end, the police department's stop-and-frisk policies and to install a relatively progressive schools chancellor to replace a Wall Street darling, but he finally submitted to the charter leaders' program of expansion, scaled back his housing program to an 80-20 formula (with only a faint hope of enforcement) and essentially gave up his early push to end stop-and-frisk — a leading demand of the black and Latino communities.

These are only the latest in a series of dubious left "victories." In France a coalition of Socialists and Communists came to power in 1981 with the election of Francois Mitterand as president. Mitterand's government initially carried out a program of nationalizing key industries and greatly increasing taxes on the wealthy to expand social spending. Two years later, the government reversed course on all its key economic policies and began a drift to the right that continues to this day. Elsewhere, we have witnessed leftist movements

in the Global South — the African National Congress in South Africa, the Worker's Party in Brazil, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to name just a few — that persevered against great odds to win power only to subsequently accommodate themselves to global capitalism. They continue in power but only as the empty shells of their former selves.

THE CHALLENGE OF GOVERNING

The easiest answer to this malaise is to put the blame on feckless politicians and to cry "betrayal." There is some truth here but not enough depth. If Greece and New York were singular this simple expression might suffice, but the record is too long to be satisfied with that answer.

Part of the problem lies in the distinct challenge of governance. Progressive or radical governments frequently find themselves constrained by the fact that

PROGRESSIVES HAVE ACCEPTED CAPITALISM AS THE NON-NEGOTIABLE FRAMEWORK FOR DOING POLITICS.

most of their constituents out of necessity live in the short-term and must see their immediate needs addressed. Unlike their social movement counterparts, a left government has to keep the shelves stocked and the trains running, as it were, to maintain its credibility and its popular support. And a left government must do so in the face of fierce opposition of the 1% and its allies in the police, military and media who seek to destroy it or place it under such extreme duress that it abandons its commitments.

This is the bind Syriza was in when it contemplated leaving (or being kicked out of) the eurozone and not having the ability to pay for imports including food and fuel. Here in New York, a three-week "silent strike" orchestrated by the police union at the beginning of this year was enough to squash any talk

of reforming the NYPD from a mayor who understands that soaring crime rates would likely be fatal to his administration.

However, left "realism" can also become an excuse for inaction. Passivity does not have to be the only response to staunch opposition from entrenched interests. A left government can also choose to mobilize its social base to fight for its program, as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez repeatedly did in the past decade when confronting his country's intransigent right-wing opposition.

To these partial speculations, I would like to add my own analysis, which goes beyond immediate circumstances. Since the turn of the 20th century, European social democracy and American modern progressivism have fully embraced liberal democratic institutions as the main arenas of social struggle, which has meant accepting that the capitalist system is the non-negotiable framework for doing politics within these institu-

tions.

Socialists and Communists have differed on the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions. But within the leading industrial societies they have agreed to play by the rules. Of course, there have been disruptions such as May 1968 in France and the 1969 Italian Hot Autumn. On the initiative of the direct action movements, left and liberal politicians can and do introduce legislation to implement the demands that originate in the street but often in watered-down versions. But the movements are usually discontented with the result and sometimes resume their confrontations. In the end, neither civil rights legislation nor the enactment of women's rights by courts or legislatures are reliable solutions to



JACKIE O'BRIEN

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then the world. Banks convulsed. Governments shoveled mountains of cash into their accounts but financiers were still skittish afterward. They demanded higher interest on loans to deeply-in-the-red nations like Greece, sending them into a downward spiral.

The crisis was compounded in Greece by the troika of Europe's leading economic institutions, which forced the nation to be a transfer hub for international creditors. They gave the country loans to pay them back for older loans. The people saw none of the money, witnessing instead more stores closing, more people losing their homes and the government planning to sell its seaports and islands.

Today the debt crisis in Greece has been momentarily corked, but it surges up in Italy, Portugal, Puerto Rico and elsewhere. And this is life during late capitalism, where whole peoples sink in a quicksand economy. They take out loans to pay for loans with less and less work available to earn real money.

The brutal experience of debt is creating a resurgent class consciousness. People who once lived quiet lives erupt in protest, in the Maoist rebellion in India, in Occupy Wall Street, in the Indignados movement in Spain, in the Greek vote for Syriza. They see that capitalism has become a generational debt trap and are rising against the state and banks, flooding the streets and spilling into the halls of power.

JUBILEE WORLD

The unspoken truth of our world is that we erase each other's debts all the time. How many times has someone owed you something and you let it go? Money, yes. But maybe you gave them a place to stay? Or clothes? Or just listening? But then you erased it because someday, you might need the same or simply because giving was all the reward you needed.

Debt is erasable. Not just in small everyday gifts but in world history. Ancient kings cancelled public debt in the Jubilee Year. In modern times, nations like Germany were forgiven huge war debts.

Strike Debt, a movement of debt resisters, has a Rolling Jubilee project in which they buy debt from banks for pennies on the dollar and then, unlike collectors, simply forgive it. There are also more radical acts, like that of Chilean artist Papas Fritas, who recently stole records from the Universidad Del Mar and burned \$500 million of student debt in what he said was "an act of love."

The sum of these singular acts of protest is an early vision of a debtless society. And we need this vision to be realized just to survive. Too often, techno-utopians imagine that new means of production will free us from oppression, but the myths of technological innovation won't save us. We live

in a digital world that has within it near prehistoric poverty. It's not new technology that can end this cycle but an old truth that always returns, always repeats itself in our fantasies and art and protests. We are born free.

Years ago, a musician friend perused my bookshelf and found *The Social Contract* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. She read it over, humming some of his sentences into a melody. Weeks later, we were at a party and people were talking about work, high rent, the endless bills. Typical New York griping. She pulled out her guitar and began to sing that phrase, "Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains."

We tried to talk over her song but she kept singing. We stopped and listened, reluctantly moved by an old quote we knew but were too jaded to say, much less sing. But she lifted her voice higher and louder, until it was the only sound in the room, until we began to believe it.

"Man is born free," we sang, "but everywhere he is in chains."



"It all began in the first few weeks of 2010, when I made the life-changing decision to release to the public a repository of classified documents that provided a simultaneously horrific and beautiful outlook on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. ... It can be hard, sometimes, to make sense of all the things that have happened to me in the last five years (let alone my entire life). The things that seem consistent and clear to me are the support that I receive from my friends, my family and the millions of people all over the world. Through every struggle that I have been confronted with, and have been subjected to—solitary confinement, long legal battles and physically transitioning to the woman I have always been—I manage not only to survive, but to grow, learn, mature and thrive as a better, more confident person."

—Chelsea E. Manning (Guardian Op-Ed, 27 May 2015)



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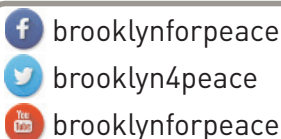
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WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE

PHOTOS BY ASHLEY MARINACCIO
TEXT BY ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

Before the island of Manhattan became the glass and concrete cityscape we know it to be today, it was inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape Native Americans. The tribe, before being displaced by white European settlers, had its home throughout areas of modern-day New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

The forced displacement of the tribe from its lands and the criminalization of Native American culture through far-ranging governmental policies fractured but did not erase its identity. Thanks in part to the influence of the Civil Rights Movement, since the 1960s the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape and other tribes across the nation have sought to resurrect their traditional cultures. In 1982 the tribe gained formal recognition from the state of New Jersey. Today, the tribe comprises about 3,000 people, with its base in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and members living as far away as Oklahoma, Texas and Ontario.

The fight, though, isn't over. The Lenape are currently locked in a battle with New Jersey and the administration of Governor Chris Christie to renew state recognition, without which the tribe does not have access to health care grants, scholarships and the ability to sell its crafts as "authentically" Native American.

As part of the cultural resurrection effort, the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape have hosted a pow-wow in southern New Jersey every summer for the past 36 years. The gathering is an act of culture sharing that includes food, art, singing, dancing, drumming and good-natured competition. Open to members of the tribe and the public alike, it's a time for the Lenape to honor the past and present and build for the future. These photos are from the pow-wow held on June 13 at the Salem County Fairgrounds in New Jersey.



Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Chief Mark "Quiet Hawk" Gould (right) performs traditional dance in the center of the pow-wow arena.



Dreamcatchers on display in the vendor tents. Some vendors are local artisans and shop owners while others travel the country during the pow-wow season, which typically runs from May through October.



Mayan pow-wow vendors demonstrate traditional tapestry weaving techniques.



Children take the center of the arena and dance to a rendition of Old McDonald. This year's pow-wow featured a large youth presence.



Youth participants in the pow-wow perform perfect dances throughout the year to present in the arena.

The hoop dance originated from the Pueblos of the Southwest. This dance utilizes a series of small hoops that dancers manipulate into various forms while keeping the beat of the song they are dancing to. They may form the shape of a butterfly, an eagle or the globe.

BOHEMIAN GROVE

SUMMER
CAMP FOR
THE 1%

GARY MARTIN

BY PETER PHILLIPS

July 18 was the first day of this year's summer camp for the world's business and political aristocracy and their invited guests. Between 2,000 and 3,000 men, mostly from the wealthiest global 1 percent, gather at Bohemian Grove, a bucolic 2,700-acre campground 70 miles north of San Francisco in California's Sonoma County — to sit around the campfire and chew the fat, off-the-record — with former high-level government officials, corporate leaders and global financiers.

Speakers this year giving "Lakeside Chats" include past Secretary of Defense and CIA Director Leon Panetta, former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker Jr., former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, founder of AOL Steve Case and former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill.

The Bohemian Grove summer encampments have become one of the most famous private men's retreats in the world. Club members and several hundred world-class guests gather annually in the last weeks of July to recreate what has been called "the greatest men's party on earth." Spanning three weekends, the event includes lectures, rituals, theater, camp parties, golf, swimming, skeet shooting, politics, sideline business meetings and feasts of food and alcohol.

One might imagine modern-day aristocrats like Henry Kissinger, the Koch brothers and Donald Rumsfeld amid a circle of friends sipping cognac and discussing how the "unqualified" masses cannot be trusted to carry out policy and how elites must set values that can be translated into "standards of authority."

Private men's clubs, like the San Francisco Bohemian Club, have historically represented institutionalized race, gender and class inequality. English gentlemen's clubs emerged during Great Britain's empire building period as an exclusive place free of troublesome women, under-classes, and non-whites. Copied in the United States, elite private men's clubs served the same self-celebration purposes as their English counterparts.

The San Francisco Bohemian Club was formed in 1872 as a gathering place for newspaper reporters and

men of the arts and literature. By the 1880s local businessmen joined the club in large numbers, quickly making business elites the dominant group. More than 2,500 men are members today. Most are from California, while several hundred originate from some 35 states and a dozen foreign countries. About one-fifth of the members are either directors of one or more of the Fortune 1000 companies, corporate CEOs, top governmental officials (current and former) and members of important policy councils and major foundations. The remaining members are mostly regional business and legal elites with a small mix of academics, military officers, artists, or medical doctors.

Foremost at the Bohemian Grove is an atmosphere of social interaction and networking. You can sit around a campfire with directors of PG&E or Bank of America. Surrounded by towering redwood trees, you can shoot skeet with the former secretaries of state and defense or enjoy a sing-along with a Council of Foreign Relations director or a Business Roundtable executive. All of this makes for ample time to develop long-lasting connections with powerful, influential men.

On the surface, the Bohemian Grove is a private place where global and regional elites meet for fun and enjoyment. Behind the scenes, however, the Bohemian Grove is an American version of building insider ties, consensual understandings, and lasting connections in the service of class solidarity. Ties reinforced at the Grove manifest themselves in global trade meetings, party politics, campaign financing and top-down corporatism.

This article originally appeared at counterpunch.org. Peter Phillips is a professor of sociology at Sonoma State University and president of Media Freedom Foundation/Project Censored. He wrote his dissertation on the Bohemian Club in 1994.

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Remi Kanazi's poetry presents an unflinching look at the lives of Palestinians under occupation and as refugees scattered across the globe. He captures the Palestinian people's stubborn refusal to be erased, gives voice to the ongoing struggle for liberation, and explores the meaning of international solidarity.

In *Before the Next Bomb Drops: Rising Up from Brooklyn to Palestine*, Kanazi expands his focus outside the sphere of Palestine and presents pieces examining racism in America, police brutality, US militarism at home and wars abroad, conflict voyeurism, Islamophobia, and a range of other issues.



we are the boat
returning to dock
we are the footprints
on the northern trail
we are the iron
coloring the soil
we cannot
be erased

—from "Refugee"

 HaymarketBooks.org

PUERTO RICO

Continued from page 11

member of the U.S. Republican Party and public admirer of Milton Friedman. He held up Ronald Reagan as the best president in U.S. history.

Fortuño's most striking neoliberal maneuver was the "Special Law Declaring a Fiscal State Emergency and the Establishment of an Integral Plan of Fiscal Stabilization to Save Puerto Rico's Credit." No one in Puerto Rico knew the law by this ridiculous name — Puerto Ricans just called it "La ley 7" (Law 7).

Law 7 resulted in the dismissal of 30,000 public employees, the freezing of all collective bargaining agreements in the public sector, massive tax credits for corporations and more. Fortuño's contribution to the debt was the most generous of all — he added as much to the debt as the previous two PPD governors combined: \$23.4 billion. By the time he left office, the debt of Puerto Rico stood at \$70 billion.

Last but not least, the current neoliberal in the governor's mansion is Alejandro García Padilla. He represents the PPD's most conservative wing and has distinguished himself through his poor leadership, his marriage to the interests of national and international capital and his shameful acceptance of the notion of Puerto Rican "democratic self-government" under the terms of U.S. military occupation.

His victory in the 2012 election was based on the logic of "lesser evilism." A lot of *independentistas* (people who support Puerto Rico's political independence), nonpartisans and even the PNP's working-class militants joined together to defeat Fortuño's bid for reelection. But the honeymoon with García Padilla was short-lived. In a telling move, a few weeks after his inauguration, García Padilla consummated Fortuño's efforts to privatize the island's international airport.

THE GREECE OF THE CARIBBEAN

Alejandro García Padilla's rule has coincided with the most far-reaching economic crisis ever seen on the island. For good reason, Puerto Rico is now known internationally as "the Greece of the Caribbean." Its situation, though, is unique.

Puerto Rico's debt is roughly \$72 billion, which amounts to nearly 70 percent of its GDP. Greece's debt stands at 177

percent of GDP. Besides the gap in their debt proportions, there are other significant differences to take into account. Since 1898, the year that the U.S. Navy bombarded Puerto Rico and began the occupation that continues to the present day, the island's economy has existed to serve the military, political and economic interests of the U.S. empire. For example, Puerto Rico imports more than 80 percent of its consumer goods from the United States.

The Jones Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1920, meanwhile, requires that all shipping to and from U.S. ports be conveyed by U.S. vessels and crews. As Nelson Denis, author of *War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony*, explained in a recent blog post:

This includes cars from Japan, engines from Germany, food from South America, medicine from Canada — any product from anywhere. In order to comply with the Jones Act, all this merchandise must be off-loaded from the original carrier, reloaded onto a U.S. ship and then delivered to Puerto Rico. It all makes as much sense as digging a hole and filling it up again. This is not a business model. It is a shakedown. It's the maritime version of the "protection" racket.

As a result, Puerto Rico's imports cost at least twice as much as neighboring islands'.

Added to this burden, Puerto Rico can't establish trade relations with other countries without U.S. permission. A few years ago, former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez offered Puerto Rico a generous deal that would have brought a steady flow of Bolivarian crude oil to the island on very favorable terms. It didn't take long for the U.S. Congress to forbid such an arrangement.

The structure of the debt itself also distinguishes Puerto Rico from Greece. Puerto Rico's lack of sovereignty means that it cannot secure loans from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank. As a result, its debt takes the form of lines of credit and bond issues traded on the open market. In June 2015, *Fortune* magazine reported that more than 50 percent of the island's debt is owned by vulture funds. The vultures have a take-no-prisoners strategy for the island, taking advantage of its economic crisis to buy up debt for cheap and pushing for severe austerity policies in order to profit.

But perhaps the starkest difference between Greece and Puerto Rico at the moment is the character of the ruling political party. The agreement of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to a new round of austerity measures has left the people of Greece and the international left with a bitter taste of betrayal after the historic July 5 referendum against austerity. Yet trying to compare Tsipras' left-wing Syriza government with García Padilla's PPD government would be like comparing Chile's former President Salvador Allende to Augusto Pinochet, the general who overthrew him in a coup.

While Syriza members are arguing in workplaces and communities for social revolt against austerity, García Padilla commissioned former IMF official Anne Krueger to issue a report on the island's economic situation and to propose solutions to the debt crisis. In keeping with the IMF's record of further impoverishing poor countries around the world with its programs of "structural adjustment," the Krueger report prescribes the same bitter medicine to "improve" Puerto Rico's economic health: restoring competitiveness by lowering labor costs, including eliminating the federal minimum wage and other deregulation of labor markets; cutting federal welfare payments because they are "too generous" relative to Puerto Rico's low wages; allowing private companies to compete with the public sector in generating electricity while keeping public electrical transmission and distribution, which are the least cost-effective sectors of the energy industry; reducing subsidies for the University of Puerto Rico; and cutting Medicaid benefits in excess of minimum standards on the U.S. mainland.

If Puerto Rico decides to impose the utterly predictable economic policy proposals of an IMF veteran like Anne Krueger, the island will most definitely follow Greece's path toward an ever-greater debt crisis. If the people of Puerto Rico, including those who have recently fled in search of a better life, don't want the island's destiny placed in the hands of vulture-fund managers, transnational corporations, the United States and its colonial puppet government, we must fight as the Greek people have been.

This article was adapted from an earlier version that appeared at socialistworker.org.

OUTAGE

Continued from page 12

discrimination and social domination. The role of the prevailing political system is integration or cooptation of the demands and often the movements' leaders.

THE TWO LEFTS

I suggest there are two lefts: the dominant left is loyal to the system. It has refused, except sometimes rhetorically, to articulate an alternative to capitalism, imperialism and the hierarchies of the bourgeois party system. Instead, it has readily participated in the electoral process, building mass parties linked, crucially, to the labor and elements of the "new" social movements that first

came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s. In this reprise, there is little difference between Communist and social democratic political formations. In their mutual fear of the right they have rallied behind liberal democracy and renounced revolutionary politics.

The second tendency may be characterized as libertarian left. Anarchists, anti-liberal Marxists and some fractions of the youth movements that periodically burst on the scene largely disdain the electoral route because they agree that, apart from contesting local office such as Podemos successfully did this year in Madrid and Barcelona, the attempt to take power over a capitalist state would prove to be a sinkhole. So, for example, Occupy Wall Street in 2011 occupied public spaces to dramatize its sharp critique of the 1% it argued ruled society. Spreading within weeks to hundreds of U.S. cities and

many overseas and in Latin America as well, the Occupy movement was simultaneously anti-capitalist and anti-electoral, at least in its practice.

The anti-capitalist left has its own problems. In most cases it is victim to the doctrine of localism. That is, we live in an era when one of the key tenets of the historical left — internationalism — has fallen into neglect or even worse, disrepute. Party formations are eschewed, leaving the field to the social democrats and electoral progressives. And we cannot ignore the disconnect between the radical left and the working class, black, Latino, Asian and white. While Syriza did have some ties in local communities, and New York is not without its coalitions, there still is no sense that either the Greeks or the rest of us have a well thought-out vision of the good life. Without that vision,

movements come and go. When they are tied exclusively to specific demands (such as the \$15 minimum wage movement), they tend to dissolve in the wake of political integration.

You can't always get what you want. But if you give up what you need, the outcome of any struggle that lacks perspective and a serious political analysis is likely to be a disaster.

Stanley Aronowitz is a professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center and the author of more than two dozen books, including The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers' Movement (Verso, 2014).

BIRTH OF A NATION

Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and A Great American Land Grab

BY STEVE INSKEEP
PENGUIN PRESS, 2015

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism

BY EDWARD E. BAPTIST
BASIC BOOKS, 2014

By Don Jackson

*Our elders taught us one thing but,
practice another
Just look what happened to the Indian
and the brother*

— “OUR GENERATION”

BY JOHN LEGEND & THE ROOTS

“**H**ow can we end racism?” I was asked in a recent conversation. The discussion centered on the murder of nine African-American churchgoers in South Carolina by a young white supremacist as well as on the many deaths of unarmed African-Americans at the hands of cops. As the list of the deceased and the fledgling “Black Lives Matters” movement grow, it’s becoming an increasingly familiar conversation. The first response that came to mind were the words of Malcolm X: “There can be no real progress in America’s crucial race relations until the basic historic ingredients that created this explosive race problem are pointed out in blunt terms that both sides can see and understand.”

Two recent books, Edward E. Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told* and Steve Inskeep’s *Jacksonland* attempt to do just that.

In *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, historian Edward Baptist describes the crucial role that slavery played in creating modernity and propelling the rise of the United States to a world power. Baptist’s hypothesis is not new. The same conclusion was reached by Karl Marx, who wrote in 1846, “Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. ... Without slavery, North America, the most progressive nation, would be transformed into a patriarchal country.” Many other historians came to a similar conclusion: W.E.B. Dubois, former Prime Minister

of Trinidad Eric Williams, in his 1944 book *Capitalism and Slavery*, and Sven Beckert, in his 2014 book *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, to name a few.

Baptist convincingly shows how slavery became the engine of U.S. capitalism. As the slave trade developed, it be-

came a catalyst for business innovation and “market making.” Institutions developed to bring buyers and sellers together and to facilitate the flow of information and credit. Meanwhile, as the United States acquired more territory, more than 1 million enslaved African-Americans were forced away from their families and transported to newly settled parts of the South to cultivate crops for the burgeoning global cotton market, which the United States would eventually come to dominate.

And it wasn’t just the planters getting rich. There were fortunes made in the South and the North, in shipping, insurance, banking and other industries linked to the forced labor of enslaved people. There was a direct and positive correlation between the growth of American capitalism and the suffering of enslaved persons.

Baptist delves into the human suffering behind the numbers and does so using today’s language. In his narrative a “plantation” becomes a “slave labor camp,” slave is replaced by “enslaved persons” or “forced migrants.” Words such as “gang-rape” and more than a few F-bombs find their way into the text, and not only in quotations. Baptist painstakingly tells the story of the tremendous sacrifices that enslaved persons made in developing new cotton-picking techniques under the pressures of what he rightly asserts was torture. Enslaved persons had quotas to meet. If they failed to meet them, they were tortured with whippings, sexual humiliation, mutilation and more. When they met their quotas, the quotas were raised. Under these inhuman work conditions, enslaved persons innovated or died trying.

Of course, there could not have been slave labor camps without land to build them on. This land was systematically taken, by hook or by crook, from the

Continued on page 19



UNITED STATES SLAVE TRADE.



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AT THE INTERSECTION OF NORMALCY & TERROR

Doris Salcedo
THE GUGGENHEIM
THROUGH OCTOBER 12

By Mike Newton

Doris Salcedo's untitled sculptures (1989-90) start with some white button-down shirts, sitting in piles on the gallery floor. They look, at first, like ordinary dress shirts, neatly stacked and folded. A closer look shows that the shirts are totally coated in plaster: no longer soft, pliable or translucent, now taking on a hardness, a heaviness and an opaque, stony whiteness normally befitting a tombstone. And there's another thing. Each stack has a dark, solid piece of steel rebar stuck through it — around where the breast would be — reaching stalk-like toward the ceiling.

As with much of Salcedo's art, these sculptures reflect on a particular, tragic occurrence. In March 1988, the Colombian military murdered 20 workers at the La Honduras and La Negra farms, all of them members of a local banana workers union with suspected ties to a leftist guerrilla group, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL). They were all dragged from their homes in the middle of the night and summarily executed. The work does not present documentation, recreations, historical artifacts or even a title; what it gives us is a haunting sense that something is missing and that something has gone very deeply wrong.

Salcedo's art — the subject of a retrospective currently on view at the Guggenheim — is focused mainly on violence in her native Colombia; sadly, she has no shortage of subject matter. In 1948, Colombia entered into a brutal, decade-long civil war known as "La violencia." Since then, between the state military, far-right groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and drug cartels, the war has never really stopped. According to a recent article in *The Guardian*, "The conflict is the world's longest continuous war," having caused more than 200,000 deaths and the internal displacement of over 5 million people — roughly one-tenth of the country's population. Virtually everyone in Colombia has been affected on some level by this conflict, and no Colombian under 66 has experienced lasting peace.

Salcedo's art exists at this intersection of daily normalcy and violent terror. These are two conditions that you would think, or hope, to be at complete and total odds with each other, but which all too often come to inhabit the same place at the same time. Salcedo's response is to conjure up a trenchant, mournful sense of burden and bearing. Much of her work is, literally, heavy: the series of untitled sculptures made between 1989 and 2008, for example, involves found pieces of stately wooden furniture filled with metal and concrete. These works suggest a longing for a bygone way of life, a past that continually recedes into the distance.

There's a problem that comes up whenever artists try to portray the experiences of oppressed, marginalized or displaced groups: Too much emphasis on suffering can, ironically, minimize that suffering in the public imagination. That

is, if a group of people is perpetually depicted as doing nothing but suffering, those representations feed into reductionist assumptions that suffering is their "natural" state of being and that it can never be otherwise. Salcedo looks into the particulars of events — she'll even do first-hand research by investigating sites, conducting interviews, etc. — but she doesn't tell us how, exactly, one particular group or one particular country has suffered. Instead, she ties the sorrow of Colombia's long-simmering war to universal themes of loss and lament. Salcedo's art is not about war, but about the ways people experience war. Her art is about the way war feels.

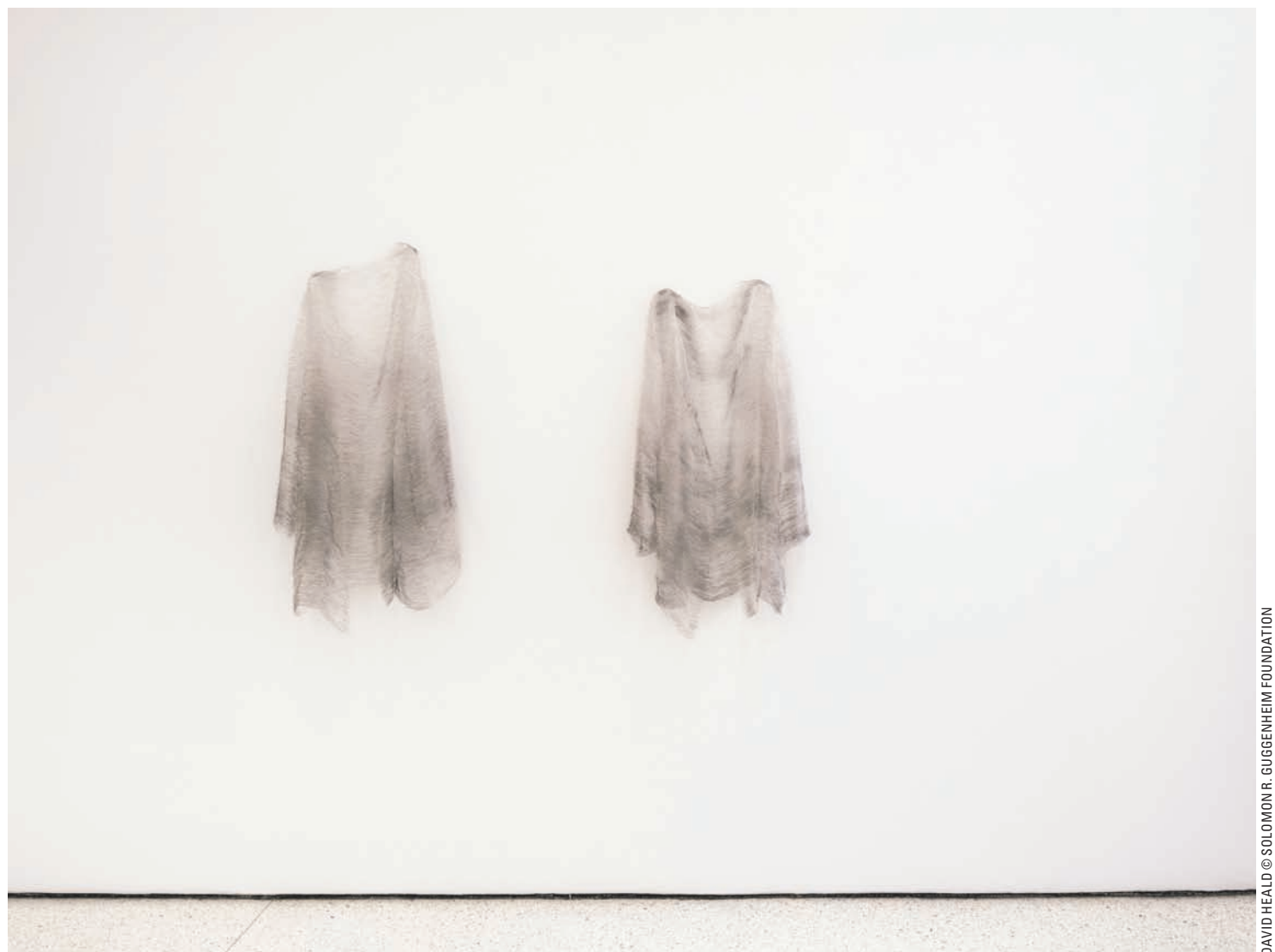
As of this writing, Colombian officials are engaged in peace negotiations with the FARC, and it seems that one of the biggest obstacles to future peace is a lapsed recognition of past atrocities. According to the news site *Colombia Reports*, "making concessions prove[s] difficult as both parties face thousands of accusations of war crimes that according to international law may not remain in impunity." Still, there's hope that these talks could bring an ultimate end to the conflict. With themes of death, there are also themes of recovery and rebirth. In Salcedo's *Plegaria Muda* (2008-2010) — a work influenced by gang violence in both Colombia and the United States — pairs of large, coffin-like tables encase small chunks of earth, and between cracks in the tables small, vibrant blades of grass can be seen. Much like a tombstone is erected at death to honor a life, Salcedo's work evokes ideas of both ending and beginning: the violence, and the peace that surrounds it.



IMAGE COURTESY THE GUGGENHEIM



PATRIZIA TOCCI



DAVID HEALD © SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION

NATION

Continued from page 17

Native American peoples in the United States' nation-building drive. In *Jacksonland*, journalist Steve Inskeep tells a compelling story about former President Andrew Jackson and his once-ally then-adversary Cherokee chief John Ross. Jackson, in essence, created what is now known as the Deep South, personally profited from it and cleared the way for these lands to be used in the expansion of slave labor camps and the mass production of cotton.

The Cherokees submitted to changing their entire culture and way of life so long as they were allowed to keep their lands. They allied with the United States government in military actions against other tribes, and in the manner of white settlers, cultivated farms, printed newspapers and sent their children to school. Some even got involved in owning and trading enslaved persons. But it wasn't enough.

President Jackson, an insatiable speculator and a firm believer in white supremacy, was determined to move Native American peoples to land west of the Mississippi River. When the government of Georgia threatened to seize their lands, the Cherokees decided to fight legally and took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. They won: The court ruled that the state of Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Cherokees and no claim to their lands. But Georgia officials ignored the ruling and President Jackson refused to enforce it. They lost their land anyway, 25,000,000 acres of

it. On the ensuing Trail of Tears, 20,000 Cherokees were marched westward at gunpoint. Nearly a quarter died on route.

Both books show how deeply racism and white supremacy are woven into the fabric of our society. When we observe the injustices of today, we are also observing the echoes of the past. The loss of identity, culture and land still restricts the development of Native Americans. The objectification and denial of the humanity of enslaved Africans has left such a deep mark that in 2014 the most heard slogan in the United States was "Black Lives Matter."

Some who heard the phrase "Black Lives Matter" responded that "All Lives Matter." They fail to recognize that the slogan came about in response to specific conditions that disproportionately affect Black lives and bodies, and that those conditions — violence and death at the hands of the state and vigilantes, for starters — are inherently unjust. Indeed the statement is as relevant now as it would have been in the cotton fields of 1840 Mississippi.

By examining the past and recognizing that racial injustice went hand-in-hand with the growth of capitalism and the wealth of Western imperialist powers, we can see that structural changes will be necessary to bring about a world where all humanity is respected equally. Until that day, we should keep asking, "How can we end racism?" until we have found and implemented answers that make "post-racial" a reality.



ANDREW JACKSON
U.S. President 1829-1837



JOHN ROSS
Cherokee Chief

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