

POLICE COUNTER-REVOLUTION, P6 | WIND VS. NUKES, P15 | QUEER COMICS, P18

THE INDYPENDENT

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IN PRAISE OF ALLIES

THE CASE FOR A NEW SOLIDARITY
BY NICHOLAS POWERS, P8

Two women pause during protests outside the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.



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BERNIE SEEDS A MOVEMENT, P6 • ORLANDO & HETERO-TERRORISM, P14 • BEAT THE SURVEILLANCE STATE, P16

THE INDEPENDENT
#215: JULY 2016

BACKED WITH FACTS

I feel Renée Peltz's article, on the elderly in prison, would have shined in any publication ("If the Risk Is Low, Let Them Go" July *Indydependent*). It was meticulous, and its tone came from the power of the facts it presented.

— PAUL BOSCO

RENEGADE PAROLE BOARDS

The laws allow for clemency, and law isn't being followed. There are two purposes to incarceration. One is punishment, and the other is to protect society. I hold the second one to be much the more important reason. If a person no longer poses a danger to society. Let him go.

— DAWN WOLFSON

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

The Washington, D.C. chapter of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) is doing major campus and community student recruitment over the next four months and we are going to use 400 copies of the July issue of the *Indydependent* (featuring Mujahid Farid of NYRAPP) to help with our campaign in Washington DC and Baltimore.

The Maryland chapter of RAPP is also participating in many local and national events over the next few months in order to educate people about this humanitarian crisis across the nation. The July issue will be a great resource and information tool. The Washington, D.C. chapter of RAPP recently gave testimony about aging people in prison at the State Department and distributed papers to about 40 government officials and other organizational and community participants at the meeting.

— TOMIKO
DCRAPP

*Lead Organizer/Research Anthropologist
in Residence*

HISTORY LESSONS

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign is get-

ting bigger and bigger ("BDS Targeted," July *Indydependent*). Cuomo can't stop it. In the future, U.S. politicians who clamor for supporting Israel and who bristle self-righteously at every criticism of Israel's many horrendous, sickening crimes will be deeply ashamed of themselves. Their empty, vainglorious support of Israel is going to be a large blot on their reputations.

— CAROL YOST

THANK YOU, BABELAND

Babeland was the very first advertiser with *The Indydependent* to take out a display ad in every issue. Many thanks to Babeland for their valuable public service, and for their support for the Indymedia project from day one! ("Adult Toy Store Workers Unionize," July *Indydependent*)

— JB

STRONGER TOGETHER

What unites us all far exceeds what divides us, and we need to all join together to achieve this goal ("Our Movements Are Strongest When Led by The Most Oppressed" June *IndyBlog*). Both liberals and conservatives alike need to realize that the same big money interests that have decimated our middle class use divisive issues to ensure we keep fighting each other instead of fighting them. It's time for us to go to war against our real enemies, and not one another.

— RONNIE

STRATEGIC VOTING

There is a way out ("Meet the Party of Upper-Middle-Class Liberals," May *Indydependent*). Break with the Democratic Party. If you're a progressive and supported Bernie Sanders, then vote for Jill Stein in the states where the Green Party is on the ballot. We are not powerless.

— ROHIT PURI

AGING PRISONER'S SUICIDE ROILS PAROLE DEBATE

BY RENÉE FELTZ

One of the men featured in The *Indydependent*'s July cover story about aging prisoners who are denied release by the New York State Parole Board despite their low risk of recidivism was found dead in his cell on August 4.

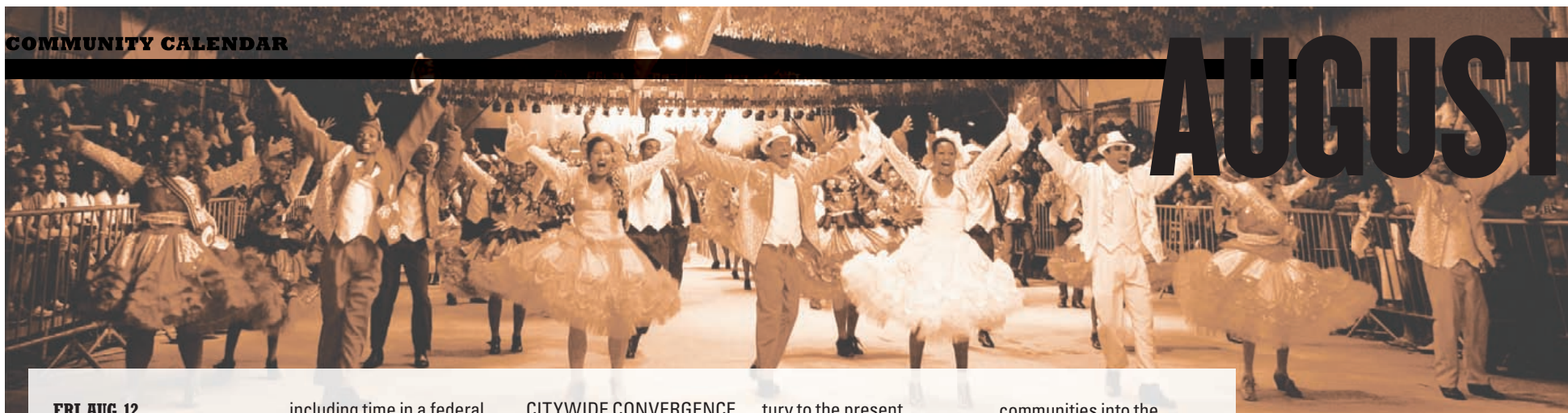
John MacKenzie, aged 70, reportedly hung himself after he was denied parole the previous week. He had spent 40 years redeeming himself and working with victim's families, and had been eligible for parole since 2000. "We don't intend to allow the death of John to be in vain," said Mujahid Farid, founder of Release Aging People in Prison, who spoke to MacKenzie the day before he died, and had been working with him on a case in which a judge held the parole board in contempt of court for refusing to acknowledge his clear remorse for killing a police officer in 1975.

"This petitioner has a perfect institutional record for the past 35 years," New York Supreme Court Judge Maria Rosa demanded in May. "If parole isn't granted to this petitioner, when and under what circumstances would it be granted?"

MacKenzie's death was marked by rallies at the board's Albany office and another in Manhattan. "I hold the parole board responsible," said his lawyer Kathy Manley. "They are not letting people out when they should be, and it is killing people."

More than 9,500 people over the age of 50 are held in New York's prisons, and two-thirds are eligible for parole. MacKenzie daughter Danielle said that while her father "took responsibility for his actions, the parole board has completely ignored theirs."





AGECOM BAHIA/FLICKR

FRI AUG 12

6:30 PM • \$5–10 (suggested donation)

FILM: FIDEL CASTRO; THE UNTOLD STORY

"Fidel" offers a unique view of one of the most influential and controversial figures of our time through exclusive interviews with Castro himself, historians, former U.S. officials and close friends, as well as footage from the Cuban state archives.

Freedom Hall

113 West 128th St

SAT AUG 13

7 PM - 9:30 PM • FREE

including time in a federal penitentiary, and discuss the importance of supporting political prisoners. McDavid was convicted on ecological terrorism charges in 2008, but the conviction was overturned due to revelations that the prosecution withheld thousands of pages of exculpatory evidence.

The Base
1302 Myrtle Ave
thebasebk.org**MON AUG 15**

7:30 PM • FREE

FILM: FLICKS ON THE BEACH; PURPLE RAIN

CITYWIDE CONVERGENCE AGAINST DISPLACEMENT

Join housing justice organizers, anti-displacement activists and tenant leaders from across the city for a convergence to share best practices from the frontlines of gentrification, build community over food, and draw from our collective creativity to broaden the movement for affordable housing.

Mayday Space
176 St Nicholas Ave**SAT AUG 20**

3:30–9:30 PM • \$12 in advance, \$25 at the door • 21+

tury to the present.

The Brainerie
190 Underhill Ave**TUE AUG 23**

8–11 PM • \$10

PERFORMANCE: GRIT

Grit is a new show spawned with the intention of bringing the genres of drag and punk together to establish spaces that create and build radical community. Live drag and punk performances in a dadaist gallery setting.

The Silent Barn

599-603 Bushwick Ave

WED AUG 24

7PM • FREE

FILM: IT HAPPENED HERE; EXPOSING & ENDING CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT

It Happened Here is an award winning documentary about the epidemic of sexual assault on campus and the disturbing extent to which universities go to

cover it up.

172 Allen St.

212-777-6028

bluestockings.com

SAT AUG 27

12–8 PM • FREE

JERSEY CITY LGBT PRIDE FESTIVAL

Come celebrate the diversity of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities and allies in Hudson County and the New York City metropolitan area.

Newark Ave btw Grove St

and Jersey Ave

jerseycitypride.com

SAT SEP 3

1 PM • FREE

LECTURE: HOW THE BRONX HAPPENED

How did The Bronx develop from a collection of small

communities into the second most densely populated area of the US, only to become synonymous with urban blight? Historian Matthew Foglino will examine how The Bronx was in exactly the right place at exactly the right and wrong times in the 20th century.

FRI SEP 9

7:30 PM • \$6–\$15

FOUCAULT AND THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Michel Foucault's astute assessment of Iran as a new type of revolution, neither liberal nor leftist, was marred by a surprisingly uncritical stance toward the upsurge of radical Islamism and an untoward silence on the issues of gender and sexuality.

Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson will discuss their 2005 book, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* in light of the contemporary rise of ISIS and Islamophobia.

Marxedproject.org

Brooklyn Commons

388 Atlantic Ave

THU SEP 15

7–9 PM • Free

COMMUNITY FORUM: A NEW COLD WAR?

Joseph Gerson of the American Friends Service Committee and NYU historian Molly Nolan will lead a discussion on Russia and NATO.

Brooklyn Commons

388 Atlantic Ave.

Brooklynforpeace.org



HARVARD LAW LIBRARY

DANCE DAYS OF

SUMMER: Celebrate the Brazilian S?o Jo?o festival with music, dancing and barbeque on a Manhattan rooftop, August 20. Costumes encouraged.

FOUCAULT AND REVOLUTIONARY

ISLAM: Join authors Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson on September 9 as they discuss Michel Foucault and the Iranian Revolution, and the insights the French thinker has to offer our present age of ISIS and Islamophobia.

**COMING THIS FALL
COMMUNITY REPORTING WORKSHOP**

Want to learn the basics of journalism but aren't sure where to start? The Independent will host a community reporting workshop on a Saturday afternoon this fall at the Brooklyn Commons. Final date still to be confirmed. Spaces are limited. If you would like to join us, please email contact@indypendent.org and we will send you an application.

SOBER POLY MIXER

Are you polyamorous? Curious about non-monogamy? Want to hang out with like-minded people in a no-pressure setting? Come to Open Love NY's Poly Chai! Anybody who is interested or participates in consensual open relationships is welcome. Come solo or with partner(s), metamour(s), and any loved ones.

Bluestockings
172 Allen St. 212-777-6028
bluestockings.com**SAT AUG 13**

7 PM • FREE

ERIC MCDAVID; OVER TEN YEARS TO TALK ABOUT

Eric McDavid, a former anarchist prisoner, will be talking about his decade-plus behind bars,

The Kid (Prince) is a Minneapolis musician on the rise with his band, the Revolution, escaping a tumultuous home life through music.

On the beach at Coney Island
3059 West 12th Street**WED AUG 17**

7:30–10 PM • FREE

BOOK LAUNCH: KRISTIN DOMBEK'S THE SELFISHNESS OF OTHERS

The author will talk about the intersections of psychology and culture with the *N+1* editor Dayna Tortorici. A wine reception will follow.

Greenlight Bookstore
686 Fulton St**SAT AUG 20**

3–8 PM • \$10–20 (suggested donation)

BRAZIL LOVES S?O JO?O — ROOFTOP DANCE PARTY AND BARBEQUE

An unforgettable summer afternoon of live music, dancing and food straight from the traditions of the Brazilian Festas Juninas. Festa Junina costumes and makeup are strongly encouraged!

95 Delancey St

Tickets at brasilloves.com/tickets/forroteria**MON AUG 22**

8:30–10 PM • \$10

LECTURE: TRASH; NEW YORK CITY'S BATTLE WITH GARBAGE

Pratt-trained urban planner and historian Inna Guzenfeld will trace New York City's protracted struggle to contain its solid waste burden, from the 19th cen-

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DEBBIE MEDINA WANTS TO SHAKE UP ALBANY

A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER CHALLENGES A DEMOCRATIC PARTY HACK. BUT WILL HER CAMPAIGN BE DERAILED BY REVELATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND HER SON'S GRUESOME CRIME?

BY PETER RUGH

I'm not on the streets of Brooklyn's Cypress Hill neighborhood with Debbie Medina for long before it's clear this will not be your average baby-kissing campaign jaunt for the state Senate candidate.

"Every time I drive a fancy car in this neighborhood I get pulled over," a young Black man washing an Oldsmobile in the July sun tells Medina when she approaches with a flier. "What are you going to do to stop these cops from killing us?"

The 53-year-old community organizer, who is trying to unseat incumbent Martin Malavé Dilan in the Sept. 13 Democratic primary, has a ready answer: Disarm the police.

The young man is incredulous. "Trust me," she says. "I have a son doing life in Pennsylvania. I know what it's all about out here, buddy. I'm real. I'm just like you."

It's conversations like this that underscore Medina's strengths as an outsider candidate, but also what is putting her run in jeopardy. Medina's grassroots run against incumbent Martin Dilan is the only competitive race in the Democratic primaries for state legislative seats from New York City this year. A victory for Medina, who identifies as a democratic socialist, would signal the growing strength of the "Berniecrat" wing of the Democratic Party and have reverberations well beyond the city.

At the beginning of July, it looked as if Medina had a decent shot at ousting Dilan, a machine Democrat who has held office in the district since 2003. Then news broke that she repeatedly beat her eldest son, Eugenio Torres, with a belt during his teenage years. Torres is now serving a sentence of life without parole in Pennsylvania for killing his girlfriend's 3-year-old son.

While talking with Cypress Hills residents, Medina sought to use her son's imprisonment to connect with voters, but her use of corporal punishment, which she disclosed to the news website *DNAInfo* on July 12, has cast a shadow over her campaign.

Dilan claims he knew of Medina's past child abuse and her son's incarceration back in 2014, when she first challenged him in the Democratic primary. "I did not want to run a negative campaign against her," he said. "My opponent made her choice and her son made a choice."

A TRADITIONAL INCUMBENT

Where Medina's personal struggles are catching up with her, Dilan's politics might be his undoing. He has taken thousands of dollars in donations from police unions at a time when law enforcement's use of violence against unarmed civilians has sparked outrage in communities of color; from advocates for charter schools, which have stoked parental anxiety as they

continue to receive state funds while traditional public schools deteriorate; and from the Rent Stabilization Association, a landlords' lobbying group, while representing a district where gentrification is pricing out thousands of residents.

According to an analysis of campaign filings from the end of July by *The Independent*, Dilan has received nearly half a million dollars in campaign contributions since 2012. This year, he has raised just over \$70,000 from 92 individual donations. Since January, Medina has raised \$43,700 from 556 individual contributions — 266 of which were for \$27 or less. By contrast, Dilan has received only seven donations of less than \$100 this year.

Prior to revelations of Medina's troubled relationship with her son, she appeared to be the perfect candidate for voters looking for a progressive alternative to the entrenched incumbent: Someone with real roots in the district but who isn't bought and paid for. She has worked for 30 years as a community organizer with Los Sures/Southside United, an anti-poverty group with deep roots in the working-class Puerto Rican community of Southside Williamsburg. She has built tenant associations and organized dozens of buildings to launch rent strikes against landlords to obtain repairs and rent reductions.

The 18th District stretches from Greenpoint southeast through Williamsburg and Bushwick and around to East New York and Cypress Hill. Both candidates were born and raised there, the children of Puerto Rican parents. Medina hails from south Williamsburg; Dilan is from Bushwick, which his son Erik represents in the Assembly. Despite rapid gentrification in the past 15 years, 54 percent of the district is Hispanic, according to census data, 21 percent Black, and 18 percent white. On Fulton Street on a Saturday afternoon, Medina's roots shine as she switches seamlessly between English and Spanish, making jovial conversation with shopkeepers and with elders catching tans in lawn chairs propped on the sidewalk.

Medina has attracted significant progressive support. She was the subject of a glowing profile in the *Nation* magazine in March and won a stamp of approval from the Working Families Party, as well as from the Bushwick Berners—an endorsement that came with 50 or so volunteer canvassers who had mobilized behind democratic-socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders this spring.

"I've been a socialist all my life, but I didn't think you could say so in public," Medina tells me when I ask why she neglected to apply the moniker to herself when she ran against Dilan in 2014. "Bernie gave me the confidence to say, 'That's exactly what I am.' The meaning of socialism is people being able to have a say in what happens in their community. If that's radical, then I'm a radical."

Albany exerts enormous control over life in New York City. Medina says she will work to strengthen the rent-stabilization laws, which are set by the state, including trying to repeal the 1997 vacancy-deregu-

lation law that lets landlords jack up rent, often illegally, when tenants move out. She also wants to raise the state's mansion tax, currently just 1 percent on properties worth a million dollars or more, and use the funds to finance permanent affordable housing through community land trusts.

She opposes public funds for charter schools, which currently match almost dollar-for-dollar what the state spends per-student on its public schools. That's money that could go towards smaller classes for public schools and free higher education, she argues.

Increasing state spending on public transit and rolling back fare hikes is another of Medina's top priorities. On the MTA's decision to shut down L train service under the East River in 2019 to repair tunnels damaged by Hurricane Sandy, she insists that future service changes won't occur without the involvement of subway riders in her district.

"Day one, when you find something wrong," she said, addressing the MTA, "you come to the community and say, 'We need your input.'"

When we stop in a Dominican diner, a middle-aged man examining a campaign flier puts down his egg sandwich and asks, "Why aren't you running for president?"

FOLLOWING IN SANDERS' FOOTSTEPS

Medina garnered 42 percent of the vote running against Dilan in 2014, but this year things are different. The left wing of the Democratic Party has been energized, and Bernie Sanders carried Greenpoint and large sections of Williamsburg and Bushwick in the April primary. Medina is building on that base and trying to expand her presence in East New York and Cypress Hills, Dilan strongholds that went heavily for Hillary Clinton. The donations she's received have enabled her to devote time and volunteers to neighborhoods she didn't have the funds to concentrate on previously.

On one July day, Medina and eight other canvassers have spread out across Cypress Hills. From the looks of it, her campaign is in full swing, undeterred by the *DNAInfo* piece earlier in the month. The Working Families Party, which uncovered the information about her and her son while vetting Medina in June, isn't returning her calls. The Bushwick Berners, however, are sticking by her.

"She's stood up for the poor and those that have the least for her whole career as a community organizer," said Brian Johnston, a founding member of the Berners. "She did what she did because she was trying to protect her family. I don't think she's trying to spin anything."

Medina insists the story hasn't hurt her campaign.

"I've gotten calls from people that have endorsed

SPREADING THE WORD:
Debbie Medina canvasses a Brooklyn block party, July 30, 2016.



PETER RUGH



ERIK MCGREGOR

BLACK LIVES MATTER HUNKERS DOWN OUTSIDE CITY HALL

24/7 PROTEST CAMP SERVES AS ORGANIZING HUB

BY EMAN ABDELHADI

As part of the latest wave of Black Lives Matter demonstrations arising this summer, approximately 200 activists in New York helped set up an encampment at City Hall Park on Monday, August 1. Their demands include reparations for victims of police brutality, defunding the NYPD and reinvestment in black and brown communities.

Threatened with eviction by multiple rows of NYPD officers during the encampment's first night, demonstrators moved a block southwest of City Hall to a property that is open 24 hours a day and designated as privately-owned public space. Activists are sleeping in the nearby park between Spruce and Beekman at night and return daily to City Hall Park which they have rechristened "Abolition Square." The number of participants fluctuates with several hundred visiting the protest after work hours and approximately a dozen sleeping overnight. The police presence around the demonstrators has tapered off since the encampment's first night. But barricades remained around City Hall as *The Independent* went to press, to keep demonstrators at bay.

Initially protesters, led by organizers with Millions March NYC, were also seeking the resignation of NYPD Commissioner William Bratton. Just one day into the encampment, the police chief announced he was stepping down at the end of the month to take a lucrative job in the private sector.

Activists at Abolition Square celebrated Bratton's resignation. However, the broken windows policies the commissioner institutionalized during his career are larger than any one person. Protesters say they will remain until the NYPD ceases to criminalize poor and working-class people in communities of color.

"They know that the economy is crumbling in our communities," said Joel Northam, one of the protest organizers. "But rather than do anything about it they'd rather arrest people and put them in cages. It's a really sick cycle. These arrests are filling the coffers of the city and in return the city is pouring more money into its policing apparatus."

Instead, the demonstrators want the NYPD's annual \$5.5 billion budget to go toward reparations for those who have been brutalized by police or their survivors, and to be invested in Black and Latino neighborhoods subjected to broken windows policing.

"Those are our short-term demands," said Northam. "As far as our long term demands go, we want the abolishment of this police force, this justice system, these political parties and this entire corrupt-ass system."

The protest marks a divergence from other Black Lives Matter demonstrations that have

shaken the country in recent years, both in form and substance. The organizers' radical, abolitionist politics set them apart from reformist strains within the movement. The tactic of establishing an encampment also differs from other protests, as it brings people together over a sustained period.

In Chicago, members of the #LetUsBreathe Collective have set up an ongoing encampment, too. Located across the infamous Homon Square detention facility that they want shut down, they're calling their tent city "Freedom Square."

Many observers see reflections of 2011's Occupy Wall Street movement in the demonstrations, although Northam prefers not to use the term "occupy," as it is offensive to indigenous peoples.

Since it was established, Abolition Square has been host to dozens of workshops, including self-care sessions, street medic trainings and discussions of police and prison abolition. Groups like Revolutionaries Against Gender-oppression Everywhere (RAGE), Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and Labor for Black Lives, a nascent network of unionists mobilizing to support Black Lives Matter, are among those who have hosted meetings in the park.

A generation politicized and trained through the Movement for Black Lives, as well as the anti-war and Occupy movements, has come together at Abolition Square. By providing a meeting space and a sustained presence for radical politics, participants hope the encampment will become a major organizing hub in New York City.

For the latest developments search the hashtags #AbolitionSquare and #ShutDownCityHall on Twitter.

DETERMINED: A participant in the Black Lives Matter encampment that began August 1.

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NOTHING TO SEE HERE

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION AGAINST BLACK LIVES MATTER

BY PETER RUGH

“**T**here is a phenomenon in this country that we need to examine and it’s just not in New York,” NYPD Commissioner William Bratton told reporters in May, after addressing a national conference of police chiefs at the Times Square Marriott Marquis. “This has become very serious. I would almost describe it as an epidemic.”

Bratton, who announced his retirement on August 3—much to the delight of Black Lives Matter demonstrators who set up an encampment at City Hall calling for his resignation one day previously—was not speaking of zika or ebola. He was talking about civilians filming police, a viral occurrence in recent years.

Bratton went on to equate recording law enforcement with intimidation and attempts to free individuals in police custody. “The community has to make up their mind if they want law enforcement or if they want mob rule,” Bratton said.

Much to the chagrin of top cops like Bratton, new technology has helped in recent years to pull back the curtain on policing in America. The widespread availability of smartphones and increased implementation of police-worn body cameras has meant acts of racialized brutality inflicted upon civilians by those sworn to protect them are being made more visible. This in turn has helped to fuel the Black Lives Matter movement with its calls to radically change the criminal justice system.

“The issue of police misconduct, police brutality, police killings particularly in Black and brown communities—none of that is new,” said Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, co-founder of the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF). “But for a portion of America who hasn’t been experiencing it on a daily basis, it’s been really important for them to witness what’s actually going on and for people of conscience to join together with one another.”

Facing heightened public scrutiny and a powerful protest movement that began two years ago this month in Ferguson, Missouri, law enforcement officials, police unions and their conservative political allies are diligently working to throw the spotlight off of police and roll back attempts to hold them accountable.

“As you see steps forward both in the capacity to shine a light on what police are doing and expose it to the world,” cautioned Verheyden-Hilliard, “you are going to see a parallel effort to try and push back against that because it is not in the state’s interest to have police accountability.”

On July 11, North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory signed a law exempting police body and dashboard camera footage from the state’s public record laws. North Carolina—along with South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Oregon and Illinois—is the sixth such state to do so.

Under House Bill 972, citizens who are filmed can view the material, as can interested reporters, but to do so requires filing a written request with law enforcement that police departments have the discretion to refuse. If such is the case, citizens and journalists must seek redress in court. Members of the public who are granted access to the footage can be prohibited from copying or distributing the material under the law.

McCrory has sought to portray HB 972 as a measure that strikes balance between open government and officer rights.

“If you hold a piece of film for a long period of time, you completely lose the trust of individuals,” McCrory said upon signing the legislation. However, “we’ve learned if you immediately release a video, sometimes it distorts the entire picture, which is extremely unfair to our law enforcement officials.”

The governor neglected to cite specific examples of body camera footage distorting the “entire picture.” When contacted, his office referred *The Independent* to Frank Perry with the North Carolina Office of Public Safety. Perry couldn’t provide any examples either but argued body cameras can render “an unfair angle or unfair picture of what happens” between law enforcement and the public.

“I’ve worked internal affairs for decades,” Perry said. “There are times when internal affairs needs a quiet view of what happened to render due processes to an agent or officer.”

Yet police already have legal protections that go far above what

is afforded to your average citizen. An Amnesty International report issued last year that found use of force requirements in all 50 states failed to meet standards set by International law, noted that “accountability for police use of lethal force is severely lacking” in America, since “the officer’s own police agency usually conducts the investigation before handing the case over to the local prosecutor” who has to “maintain good working relationships with the police.”

Protections that inhibit investigating, charging, or firing police officers who have been accused of brutality are often written into union contracts. Fourteen states, including Maryland where the Baltimore District Attorney announced last month she would no longer pursue charges against officers in the death of Freddy Gray, have enacted law enforcement bill of rights legislation. These laws allow officers to be informed of any testimony that can be used against them before they speak with investigators. Eleven states, North Carolina among them, are also considering extra bill of rights protections for cops.

Proposed Blue Lives Matter laws that protect cops under hate crime statutes have begun to crop up nationally as well. In Louisiana, the first of such pieces of legislation went into effect in August. Under the state’s Blue Lives Matter law, civil rights protections can be used against demonstrators for offenses such as gathering on police property or damaging police property. Florida, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Texas and the city of Chicago are also considering similar measures.

Meanwhile, victims of police violence and their families have faced

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, POLICE UNIONS AND THEIR CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ALLIES ARE DILIGENTLY WORKING TO THROW THE SPOTLIGHT OFF OF POLICE AND ROLL BACK ATTEMPTS AT TO HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE.

difficulty receiving justice through federal civil rights charges since prosecutors have to prove intent on the part of cops in order to convict. Attorneys with the Justice Department have reportedly broken down footage of Eric Garner’s death frame-by-frame in order to prove his rights were willfully violated by NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo, rendering, advocates say, such video all the more important.

Witnesses or victims in video of police interactions with civilians need to be protected too, insisted Perry. Still he conceded that instances might arise under the state’s public record law in which there is a genuine public interest in disclosing footage and yet it gets tied up in courts.

“I could see the possibility that law enforcement says ‘no’ [to a request to view its footage], a judge says ‘no,’ and then there’ll be an appeal,” said Perry. “We’ll see how this gets mitigated.”

Precisely such a scenario unfolded in Chicago where it took more than a year to win the release of dashcam video that showed the 2014 shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald. The city, including its mayor, Rahm Emanuel, argued that releasing the tape would hinder ongoing investigations. Once video of officer Jason Van Dyke gunning down McDonald surfaced it sparked immediate protests and widespread calls for Emanuel’s resignation.

Perry admits HB 972 isn’t perfect but he feels that like the officers bill of rights and Blue Lives Matter laws that it could become a piece of model legislation for other states to adapt.



HANNIBAL DIVAO

Verheyden-Hilliard takes a dimmer view.

“Just as body cameras are being deployed around the country, we’re seeing legislation and regulations and amendments to public records laws to restrict access to the footage,” she said. Protecting-the-victim arguments don’t hold water in her eyes. “There are ample technical capacities and blurring algorithms that could be used to ensure personal privacy. What they are really trying to do is stop the public from seeing clearly what police are doing, how police are interacting with the public.”

At the urging of the Fraternal Order of Police in Oklahoma City the police department dropped its body camera program altogether in June. “We have nothing to hide and fully support transparency,” John George, the union’s president said in a statement. It’s just that a policy which protects “our officers and their privacy along with that of our citizens” must be implemented first. At George’s insistence, however, members of the department were allowed access to a new piece of equipment last month; they were granted permission to carry their own personal rifles on the job.

Still, many police departments have embraced body cameras. Taser International, the largest purveyor of body cameras on the market, pitches their merchandise as a way for police to curb use-of-force complaints, an enticing promise for cities like New York that shell out approximately \$70 million annually to settle such cases.

“(Cops) will be able to photograph what is in front of them,” said NYPD Commissioner Bratton, who launched a body camera program he hopes will counterbalance the negative publicity his department has received from video footage shot by civilians, which in addition to Garner’s death have captured officers arresting a uniformed postal worker for no apparent reason, pepper-spraying young women and punching a civilian in the face for filming them.

Body and dash-cam footage is shot from the point of view of officers who have the ability to disable the cameras and, in some cases, decide when and when not to record—a fatal flaw, crit-

ics observe, in terms of transparency. Cameras attached to police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana niftily became dislodged and failed to capture the moment when officers delivered multiple gunshots to Alton Sterling on July 5. Roughly three weeks later, on July 29, a body-cam equipped cop in Chicago shot Paul O’Neal, an 18-year-old black teenager but, as in Baton Rouge, the officer’s camera wasn’t recording.

“We just want answers, the truth, that’s it,” said O’Neal’s sister, Briana Adams.

Along with restricting access to body cameras, police and their supporters are proposing laws to prohibit bystanders from recording their actions.

“You have an absolute right to film the police,” said PCJF’s Verheyden-Hilliard — barring certain restrictions. You can’t directly interfere with police operations, for instance.

But not everyone in the legal community agrees.

The American Civil Liberties Union has filed an appeal with the Third Circuit Court in Philadelphia after Judge Mark Kearney issued a summary judgement in February that claims citizens do not have “a

First Amendment right to record police conduct without any stated purpose of being critical of the government.”

The ruling concerns two separate First Amendment claims against the Philadelphia Police Department; one from a college student arrested for photographing a large group of cops, the other from a legal observer who was attacked by plainclothes officers during a protest when she attempted to film an arrest. Judge Kearney’s interpretation of the Constitution raises many questions, not the least of which is how must a videographer express criticism of the government in order to receive First Amendment protection?

“The freedom to monitor the police without fearing arrest or retaliation is one of the ways we distinguish a free society from a police state,” Reggie Shu-

ford, executive director of Pennsylvania’s ACLU chapter. “We hope the court of appeals will make a clear statement that every person has the right to observe and record police in public, irrespective of whether the purpose is to criticize them.”

The ruling is an outlier but the Third Circuit’s judgement could set a dangerous precedent. Meanwhile, the absence of a Supreme Court ruling regarding filming police has left a vacuum for lawmakers to propose their own rules.

Last year, Texas State Representative Jason Villalba of Dallas proposed legislation at the behest of the Dallas Police and the Texas Municipal Police Association that would have barred citizens, including news media, from filming within 25 feet of law enforcement. Though the legislation was promptly dropped after video shot by

any legislation regarding filming police must include a 15-foot buffer zone.

But just as it pulled back the curtain on policing, new technology might soon make disputes over documenting law enforcement activity moot. Apple received a patent this summer for an infrared sensor that enables third parties to disable camera’s on their iPhones. Judging from materials submitted to the U.S. patent office, Apple plans to market the device to the entertainment industry to prevent unauthorized recordings of concert performances and the like. But it is easy to imagine the technology, in the hands of law enforcement, being used to push brutal and racist policing practices back into the shadows.

PROPOSED BLUE LIVES MATTER LAWS THAT WOULD PROTECT COPS UNDER HATE CRIME STATUTES HAVE BEGUN TO CROP UP NATIONALLY.

a witness to the killing of Walter Scott by an officer in North Charleston, South Carolina gained national notoriety, lawmakers elsewhere have persisted with copycat proposals. A similar measure to Villalba’s was proposed earlier this year by Arizona State Senator John Kavanagh, a former New York City cop and promptly dropped amid public outcry.

Other pieces of legislation have aimed at protecting the right to film cops. Colorado lawmakers enacted a law last year that imposes a \$15,000 civil penalty on police who prevent the public from filming them. New York City Council Member Jumaane Williams introduced the Right to Know Act in July. The bill would prohibit police from interfering with or intimidating citizen’s filming them. Patrick Lynch, president of the Patrolman’s Benevolent Association opposes the act arguing that

IN PRAISE OF ALLIES

WHEREVER WE'RE GOING, WE'LL ONLY GET THERE TOGETHER

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Dear Allies, You deserve praise. Yes, you. I imagine you thinking, "But I'm white or male, I'm straight or able-bodied, I'm liberal or middle-class. I'm some combination of privilege, I'm part of the problem." No, you're not. You deserve praise.

Why? Because when I need help, you're there. You're the white woman yelling, "Hands up! Don't shoot!" at the intersection as cops warily watched. You're the men at Slut March, eyeing the crude street guys to shut up. You're my best friend, who held my hand at the Silent March against police brutality.

I've known you my whole life. My family knew you and before them, my ancestors knew you. Without you, our freedom wouldn't be real. It was you, our allies, who came to our meetings, who marched with us, were beaten and arrested with us, who lost jobs and family for siding with us, and sometimes, who died with us.

I'm writing to you because today, we talk so much of privilege and identity. It seems there are endless open letters online telling you how or how not to be an ally. It's become hard to say this one truth: You're family. Thank you.

How did we get here? Where you're seen as a potential oppressor instead of a friend? We tell you to check your privilege but also use your privilege. We tell you to decenter yourself from our dialogue. We tell you not talk to media and get at the back of the march. And you do because, yes, on some level, it rebalances our voices. But it's gone too far.

You show up, but after being browbeaten, you leave. Or you stay but shrunken to fit a small role. You become invisible or silent or scared. But we need you strong and loud and powerful. We're not looking for you to be a savior. Bono's got that. We do need you holding our hands at the front of the march. Wherever we're going, we'll only get there together.

ROLE REVERSAL

We are the Left. We try to reverse the values of a self-destructive world. To treasure those who've been thrown away. To see those who have been hurt be healed. All true. But left unsaid is that we who've been injured sometimes forsake liberation for spite.

When we, minorities, enter a leftist space, we go through a dizzying role reversal. The qualities about us that were a target are suddenly celebrated. Skin color, hair texture, body type, foreign accent, sexual orientation are all evidence of the Struggle. Narrating our

pain can, at its best, lead to enlightened identity politics. At its worst, identity chauvinism.

I saw this at a Left Forum panel where a speaker said that Black writers had been corrupted by "the influence of Jewish intellectuals." Silent tension filled the room. Shaking my head, I began to jot down a rebuttal. Halfway into it, I looked at him. He had long dreads. He wore a dashiki. The scent of Egyptian musk floated around him like a cloud. I stared, a little too long, and thought: I used to be you.

The first liberal space I entered was college. I grew dreads. I wore so much non-Western clothing I looked like a *Lonely Planet* guidebook. Incense spilled out of my dorm room. The Koran and a stack of Afrocentric books were piled on my desk. I learned to transform the confusion of being a minority into the weaponized language of resistance. My tongue was a switchblade. And I cut, cut, cut.

It was my allies who I hurt the most. I battered them with rhetoric. I forced them to walk on eggshells. Until Brad, with whom I spent long evenings debating politics, sat up with me until sunrise and finally said, "You have a chip on your shoulder."

I side-glanced him, eyebrows arched. Who was this privileged man to tell me shit? He was raised in a leafy suburb on Long Island. I came from a boarding school for the poor. Who did he think he was?

But I listened. He sounded afraid and hopeful. Like a man trying to coax a jumper off a ledge. He said my defensiveness could be self-destructive. He knew what it was like to always be on guard. I knew he knew it. I remembered his stories of coming out of the closet. Not sure if he'd be loved for his true self. And watching others, to see if it was safe for him to be him. He lived life as a target too.

I didn't change overnight, more like zigzagged my way to maturity, shedding along the way the reactive flexing on allies. But I never forgot how I acted because over the years, I met, over and over again, in anti-racist workshops or progressive panels, more identity chauvinists. They talked over everyone. They assumed their pain guaranteed their authority or the accuracy of their analysis.

Few allies checked them. Tension would fill the room. People sulked away from meetings. Tired. Hurt. Confused. That ugly energy spurted up at Occupy Wall Street, at Left Forum panels. Re-

cently on a livestream of a Black Lives Matter protest outside the Democratic National Convention, Black organizers told whites to get to the back of the march. Again the tension tightened people's faces. It is the silent centrifugal force that breaks the Left apart.

LOVE IS THICKER THAN BLOOD

"My father is such a fucking racist," she said and half-laughed, half-grimaced. She was driving through Brooklyn to move to a new apartment. I sat and listened to her say how old-school he was. How he didn't get it.

"Jesus," I said. "You make him sound like Darth Vader." She smirked, saying he'd probably lightsaber her hand clean off if he saw her with a protest sign. As we cackled in the car, I thought about why we become allies. Sometimes, it's for redemption. We want to forgive ourselves for acts we committed. Or acts we should have done but didn't. Sometimes we want to relieve the guilt of inheriting unearned privilege. Sometimes, we are human mirrors who reflect others and that radical empathy becomes rage at injustice.

For me it was guilt at acts committed. The boarding school I went to was run by Jesus freaks; the teachers and supervisors radiated Biblical homophobia. So when, inevitably, a boy was caught kiss-

ing a boy or a girl humping a girl, we, the students, beat them up or shamed them. They were hastily transferred if not kicked out.

When I met Brad in college, I was a Nation of Islam fan. He was Jewish and gay, just learning how to be out. I hid my homophobia behind a smile. But I lit up when he came to my dorm. He had a handsome, owlish face, an easy grace about him. He had radar eyes that didn't miss a thing. I felt a deep sibling love for him and, for the first time, consciously asked what kind of ally I could be to him.

I did acrobatic readings of the Koran to fit him into my spiritual life. I researched homosexuality. Mom and her old-school Boricua crew saw the books, got worried and asked me if I was gay.

But being an ally really began with a simple job. Keeping my friend safe. One time, Brad was prepping for a drag show. I palmed my forehead as he rolled stockings up his hairy legs, slipped on a long dress, put on makeup and heels. He didn't shave. He looked god awful. He also looked scared.

So I held his hand and along the street, faces flashed with hate and disgust. Every time someone stared at Brad with a threat, I held his hand tighter and stared right the fuck back. I was terrified at the rage he had to walk through just to get to a party.

My best friend was in danger for being gay and for resisting gender norms. In the months after, I began seeing homophobia in books, film, hip-hop and in everyday talk. One night, I read and re-read an anti-gay passage in the Koran, got up and threw it in the trash.

Being an ally meant dedicating myself to his struggle. To learn it. To be a part of it. To fight against straight privilege. To force people in my life to make space for Brad and his lovers at our table. And he did the same for me.

I think a lot of allies go through this life change, when you go beyond guilt to a place of love. When you reflect each other and it forces other people's ugliness to the surface.

Brad brought his grandfather to the African Meeting House where I gave lectures. His parents fed me at their

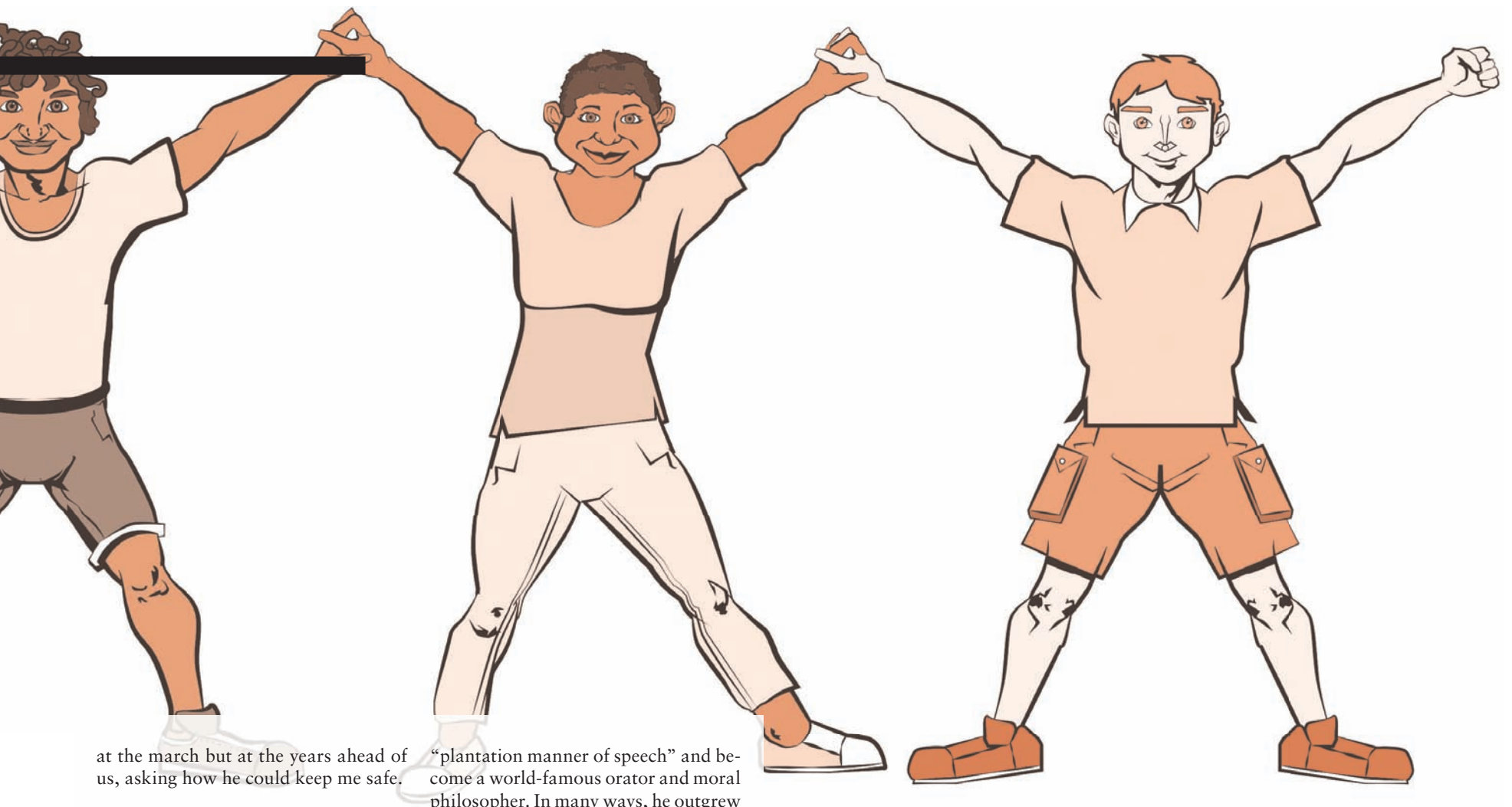
BEING AN ALLY MEANT DEDICATING MYSELF TO MY FRIEND'S STRUGGLE. TO LEARN IT. TO BE A PART OF IT. AND HE DID THE SAME FOR ME.

house. Years later, he told me his father made nigger jokes on MLK Day and asked if his nigger friend, me, was doing anything for him. It hurt to hear. It hurts, sometimes, being an ally. I sat quietly for a minute, my face like stone. Brad leaned over, hugged me and apologized for his father.

Years later, we met at Central Park as thousands of people gathered for a silent march against stop-and-frisk policing. Brad is a New Yorker, he knew how cops looked at me and the risk I take to walk the street.

The march began. Thousands strode down Fifth Avenue. At times, it was so quiet you could hear shoes padding the cement. Every so often, he or I reached out and held hands. I saw a deep focus in his eyes as if he was looking not just





at the march but at the years ahead of us, asking how he could keep me safe.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE STRUGGLE

“Better have a little of the plantation manner of speech,” white abolitionists told Frederick Douglass. In his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass recalled how they said to repeat his story of slavery, and they’d “take care of the philosophy.” I was reading it to prep for a class and chuckled, imagining a Black Lives Matter protester telling Douglass’s mentor, William Lloyd Garrison, to check his privilege.

We’re not the first to struggle with each other. Every generation of activists learns how to be an ally and how to let others ally with us. The evidence of the Left’s success is that the oppressed speak for themselves and allies know to listen. In order to get here, we needed identity politics as a correction to the totalizing of Marxist-based class analysis. In turn, the use of intersectionality corrects the silo effect of identity politics.

But the goal was always to struggle together. We feel a deep, human need for a just world. What guides us there is a vision. In practice, it means those who are part of a privileged majority do the work to see minorities beyond the stereotypes. It means we, who are minorities, don’t presume the guilt of allies or see them as potential oppressors. And we need this because any one of us could be on one side of that equation or the other.

How? Intersectionality cuts both ways. Oppression and privilege overlap the same body. Yes, I am a cis, able-bodied man who is also of color and in debt. You might be a transgender person with a trust fund. We’re both citizens. An undocumented worker may be read as white. So instead of pouncing on someone for a verbal misstep, we can offer each other grace. Instead of labelling each other racists or sexists or homophobes, we can show compassion.

It’s something Douglass did in his eulogy of Garrison. He’d long left the

“plantation manner of speech” and become a world-famous orator and moral philosopher. In many ways, he outgrew his teacher but he still paid tribute to the man who first invited him to speak. At the funeral, he said, “I must frankly say I have sometimes thought him uncharitable to those who differed from him. ... To say this of him is simply to say that he was human, and it may be added when he erred here he erred in the interest of truth.”

And that is what I think of you. When you, my ally, make an error, I know you do it in the interest of truth. And when I, your ally, royally fuck up, you dap me some credit. When we heal our failings with laughter, we can transform the world. Everyone can hear how large we are inside, how our strength comes from sharing the existential space behind our masks. They can trust our definition of freedom because they can see how we give it to each other.

You’ve probably heard the saying, “justice is love made public.” It hit home recently. Brad asked me to be the best man at his wedding to Timmy. I’m preparing a suit. I’m plotting a bachelor’s night of debauchery. I’ll walk him up the aisle and after their vows, give him the ring, knowing that this is justice, this is love and this is being an ally.

EVERY TIME SOMEONE STARED AT BRAD WITH A THREAT, I HELD HIS HAND AND STARED RIGHT THE FUCK BACK.

MOVEMENTS IN MOTION

PHOTOS BY ANTRIM CASKEY
TEXT BY JOHN TARLETON

The Democratic Party struggled mightily to carry out its carefully scripted coronation of Hillary Clinton during its July 25-28 national convention in Philadelphia. Whenever Clinton's name was mentioned on the first night of the convention, boos cascaded down from all sides of the sports arena where the convention delegates had gathered. On the second day, hundreds of Bernie Sanders delegates stormed out. Later former CIA Director Leon Panetta's speech to the convention was disrupted by chants of "No More War!"

Outside the convention center and the eye of much of the media, numerous protests and cultural events took place every day.

Legions of young Bernie Sanders supporters who had traveled from across the country were on hand. Even as the Sanders campaign wound down, there was a widespread recognition that sustained engagement both inside and outside of conventional politics will be necessary for years to come in the face of a system that is running on auto-pilot to create more poverty, inequality, war and climate chaos.

"Nothing changes for us," said Cathy White, a Sanders supporter from Los Angeles. "We still have to fight all these little battles to win the war."

The social movements that have energized the U.S. left in recent years — Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights, climate justice, anti-fracking and anti-TPP among others — also made their presence felt. We will be hearing more from them no matter who moves into the White House next January.

"Now that we're awake," actress Susan Sarandon said summing up the feeling of many at a rally the day before the convention started, "We're going to stay awake."



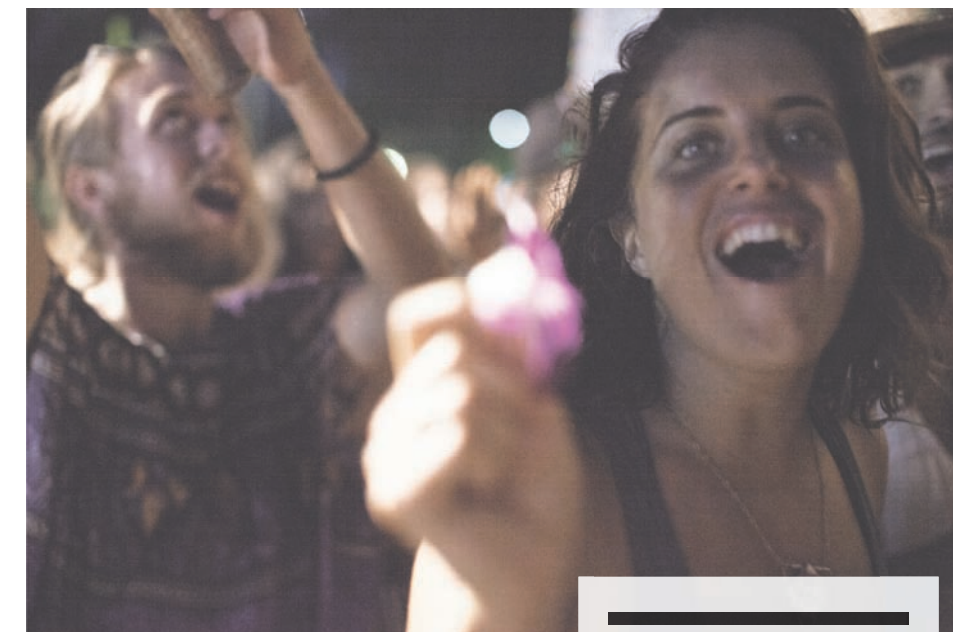
THE SOUND OF SILENCE: Participants in the Black Lives Matter march make light of the refusal of many of their fellow white Americans to confront the legacy of systemic racism.

AMERICANS TOO: Immigrant rights marchers took the streets on the first day of the DNC.



MARCHING FOR BLACK LIVES: Participants in a Black Lives Matter March meet up with a Bernie or Bust contingent at Philadelphia's City Hall before heading on to FDR Park next to the arena where the Democratic National Convention was held.

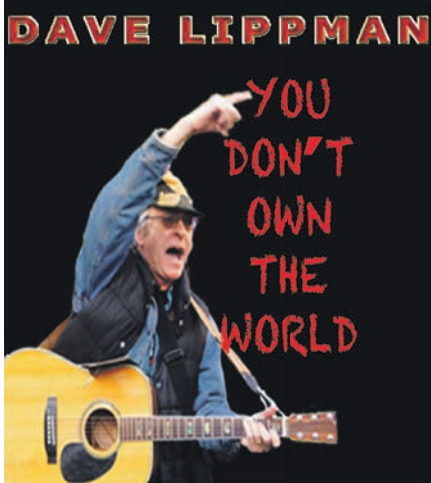
IT TAKES ROOTS TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM: Participants in a tour of toxic sites led by two local Philadelphia groups rally in front of the largest oil refinery on the East Coast, one that local Democrats hope to expand in the coming years.



FOR THE EARTH: Hundreds of people rallied for action on climate change in a public park on the day before the DNC began. As night fell, they sang and danced and then settled in to watch Josh Fox's new film *How To Let Go of the World — And Love All the Things Climate Can't Change*.



ACROSS GENERATIONS: The fight for a better world doesn't end with one election.



New
DAVE LIPPMAN
 CD

Hands Up Don't Shoot
Ciao, Inequality

19 songs

When We Stand Up for 15

This Brand's Not Your Brand
Alberta Tarbillies

13 dollars

Gaza's Ark

shipping included

[davelippman.com/
 music/world](http://davelippman.com/music/world)



FRI. AUG 12 • 7-9:30PM

BOOK RELEASE: Chinaka Hodge reads and performs poems from her new book, *Dated Emcees*, published by City Lights Books. Form blends with content in *Dated Emcees* as Hodge examines her love life through the lens of hip-hop's best known orators, characters, archetypes and songs.

FRI. AUG 19 • 7-9:30PM

BOOK RELEASE: Kick off Flame Con with a release party celebrating the debut of the critically-acclaimed anthology, *Fresh Romance*, an exciting collection of romance comics from some of comics' most talented creators!

THU. SEP 1 • 7-9:30PM

PERFORMANCE: Comedy Cunt Collective hosts an evening featuring marginalized comedians from various communities each performing and sharing their own life experiences using comedy as a medium.



2016 ELECTIONS

CLINTON REFUSES TO LABOR FOR WORKING CLASS VOTES

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

If the Democrats want to reach disgruntled Bernie Sanders supporters and working-class voters leaning toward Donald Trump, former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg was the absolute worst person to give a prime-time speaking spot to at the party's convention in late July.

Seriously, why would a party whose nominee confessed in her acceptance speech that “we haven’t done a good enough job showing that we get what you’re going through” showcase its support from the billionaire who broke a strike by school-bus matrons making \$11 to \$14 an hour, and then crowed that he had crushed “the special interests”? If they believe black lives matter, why highlight the mayor whose stop-and-frisk policing policies were arguably more racist than Rudolph Giuliani’s? And if the Democrats want to persuade the Rust Belt’s resentful dispossessed that they’re not a bunch of nanny-state elitists, why promote a plutocrat who enacted laws against cigarettes and soda?

Hillary Clinton pitching her campaign to ‘moderate’ Republicans who see Trump as dangerously irresponsible is politically logical. In the French presidential election of 2002, center-right candidate Jacques Chirac won more than 80% of the vote when all parties outside the far right united against the blatantly racist Jean-Marie Le Pen. But it means she is less likely to pursue a pro-labor agenda that might offend the wealthy. Less likely to speak to the millions of Americans who feel that the economy is just broken for them, while billionaires amass unprecedented mountains of moolah.

For all the talk about Clinton as a pragmatic progressive who “gets things done,” her ideas about reducing economic inequality have one major flaw. She frames the solution in terms of “breaking barriers,” of “giving people the opportunity to reach their God-given potential.” The problem with this is that not everyone can be a doctor, lawyer, or software engineer. If 100,000 more people went to law school this September, most of them would end up doing document-review temp jobs for \$15 an hour. We need to be a country where cab drivers, home health-care aides, and supermarket cashiers can make a decent living.

The Clinton camp’s philosophy amounts to an oddly corporate version of identity politics, in which giving a more diverse group of people the opportunity to enter the upper class is more important than whether all workers make a living wage. Like the identity-politics wing of the left, they seem to hear the phrase “working class” as referring solely to straight white cisgender males—as if black home health-care aides, Latino construction workers, and South Asian taxi drivers weren’t included. By doing this, they essentially write off the white working class, leaving it open to Donald Trump’s socialism-of-fools combination of racism and you’ve-been-screwed economic rhetoric.

This election could mark a depressing realignment of American politics: The Democrats as the Corporate Diversity Party, and the Republicans as the National-Socialist Party, denouncing “crony capitalism” while telling white workers they’ve been stabbed in the back by the elite who coddle terrorist Muslims and drug-thug Mexicans.

The Republican establishment’s problem with Trump is that he speaks in explicitly racist language instead of plausibly deniable



DIVERSIFYING THE ONE PERCENT: A

Hillary Clinton delegate celebrates her candidate formally winning the nomination on the second day of the DNC.

code words. The GOP achieved its political success over the last 50 years—controlling the Presidency and/or at least one house of Congress for all but four years since 1980—by turning the George Wallace voters of 1968, the Southern and some Northern whites who split off from the old New Deal coalition to support the segregationist, into “Reagan Democrats.” Does the party establishment think these people passionately care about “reforming entitlements”? No. They don’t want their Social Security cut.

Bernie Sanders has been the first major-party presidential hopeful since the Reagan era to focus his campaign on undoing the damage done to working people since then, the first to argue that the system is rigged against working-class people and needs dramatic change. It’s understandable that some of his followers show signs of a personality cult. At the “Bernie or Bust” rally in Philadelphia during the convention, one man was wearing a jumpsuit covered with multiple images of Sanders’ face, and a number of the 500-odd people there carried signs accusing Clinton and the Democratic National Committee of outright stealing the election from him.

Sanders would likely be the first person to argue that he is not the Messiah. He has praised the Midwestern socialist Eugene V. Debs for telling his supporters in 1906 that “if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I led you in, some one else would lead you out.”

It’s not a waste for radicals to get involved in elections. It’s the forum where most Americans view politics, and it’s the means to translate movement ideas into legislation. “People in the streets” are meaningless symbols unless they catalyze change. Hillary Clinton was right when she said that the 1960s civil-rights movement needed a Lyndon Johnson as well as a Martin Luther King, because Johnson got the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enacted. (On the other hand, if the Civil Rights Act had been introduced by the Clinton or Obama administrations, the ban on segregation in public accommodations would probably have been watered down to tax incentives for restaurants to serve black people.)

Sanders did way better than anyone thought he could. He lost largely because he didn’t win two crucial Democratic blocs: Most labor unions lined up behind Clinton before a single ballot was cast, and black voters, except those under 30, voted overwhelmingly for Clinton. He might have changed that if he’d started running earlier. As it is, he pushed a lot of ideas that the corporate Democrats would rather avoid into the political mainstream.

“It didn’t start with him. It’s not going to end with him. He mobilized more people than we’ve ever seen on the progressive side,” Stefanie Hahn, a 39-year-old union nurse from Berkeley, California, said during the Philadelphia “Bernie or Bust” rally. “What we’re going to do is use this energy and use this movement to continue to fight for the causes we believe in and to put progressives into office.”

SOME PLACES YOU CAN FIND

THE INDYPENDENT

**BELOW
14TH ST**

SEWARD PARK LIBRARY
192 EAST BROADWAY

HAMILTON FISH LIBRARY
415 E. HOUSTON ST.

LES PEOPLE'S FEDERAL
CREDIT UNION
39 AVENUE B

TOMPKINS SQUARE LIBRARY
331 E. 10TH ST.

KEY FOOD
52 AVENUE A

BLUESTOCKINGS
172 ALLEN ST.

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY
155 FIRST AVE.

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
52 PRINCE ST.

4TH STREET CO-OP
58 E. 4TH ST.

THINK COFFEE
248 MERCER ST.

FILM FORUM
209 W. HOUSTON ST.

HUDSON PARK LIBRARY
66 LEROY ST.

CINEMA VILLAGE
22 E. 12TH ST.

LGBT CENTER
208 W. 13TH ST.

**14TH TO
96TH ST**

EPIPHANY LIBRARY
228 E. 23RD ST.

MUHLENBERG LIBRARY
209 W. 23RD ST.

GRISTEDES
307 W. 26TH ST.

TACO BANDITO
325 8TH AVE.

COLUMBUS LIBRARY
942 TENTH AVE.

MANHATTAN
NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK
537 W. 59TH ST.

YORKVILLE BRANCH
LIBRARY
222 E 79TH ST.

ST. AGNES LIBRARY
444 AMSTERDAM AVE.

96TH ST. LIBRARY
112 E. 96TH ST.

**ABOVE
96TH ST.**

SAVOY BAKERY
170 E. 110TH ST.

MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS
LIBRARY
BROADWAY AND 114TH ST.
115TH ST. LIBRARY
203 W. 115TH

HARLEM LIBRARY
9 W. 124TH ST.

125 STREET LIBRARY
224 E. 125TH ST.

GEORGE BRUCE LIBRARY
518 W. 125TH ST.

PICTURE THE HOMELESS
104 E 126TH ST.

MAYSLES CINEMA
343 LENOX AVE.

COUNTEE CULLEN LIBRARY
104 W. 136TH ST.

HAMILTON GRANGE
LIBRARY
503 W. 145TH ST.

UPTOWN SISTER'S BOOKS
W. 156TH ST. & AMSTERDAM

FORT WASHINGTON
LIBRARY
535 W. 179TH ST.

BROOKLYN

BROOKLYN BOROUGH HALL
209 JORALEMON ST.

BROOKLYN LIBRARY
1044 EASTERN PKWY.

BROOKLYN COMMONS
388 ATLANTIC AVE.

TIMES PLAZA POST OFFICE
542 ATLANTIC AVE.

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS
LIBRARY
280 CADMAN PLAZA WEST

CARROLL GARDENS LIBRARY
396 CLINTON ST. @ UNION

COUSIN JOHN'S PIZZA
70 7TH AVE.

KEY FOODS
130 7TH AVE.

COMMUNITY BOOK STORE
143 7TH AVE.

ROOTS CAFÉ
639 5TH AVE.

PACIFIC STREET LIBRARY
25 FOURTH AVE.

BROOKLYN WORKS@159
159 20TH ST.

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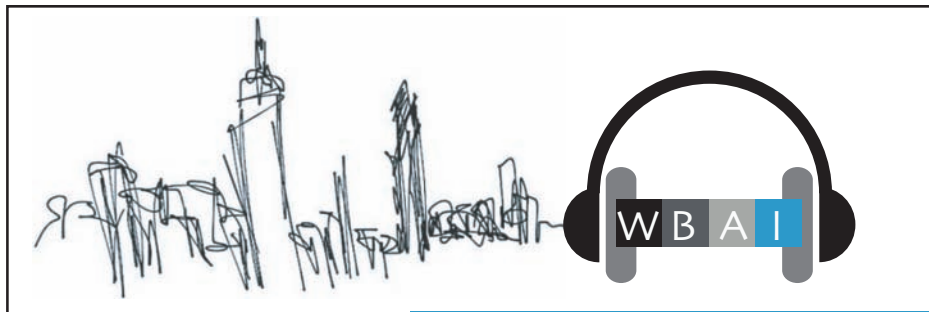
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BOMB TRAINS ON THE HUDSON

A NEW, EXPLOSIVE CARGO IS PASSING THROUGH THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY

BY LEANNE TORY-MURPHY

KINGSTON, N.Y. — In late 2011, freight trains in New York State began to carry a new kind of cargo, transporting a highly volatile form of crude oil extracted through hydraulic fracturing in the Bakken shale of North Dakota to East Coast refineries.

Each day, interspersed amongst the lines of graffitied boxcars, locomotives pulling dozens of identical, pill-shaped container cars rumble through the Hudson River Valley. “They pass through every hour or two. The noise, it’s constant. It shakes the house,” says Josefina Soriano of Kingston.

Railroad workers call them “bomb trains.” The crude oil being transported is particularly volatile, and the pitch-black colored container cars each hold 30,000 gallons of it, the equivalent of two million sticks of dynamite. The containers, known as DOT-111s, were not built to transport crude oil and are only designed to withstand punctures at up to 12 miles per hour. The typical speed limit on the rails is 50 mph.

In 2014, the same year Governor Andrew Cuomo caved to popular pressure and announced a ban on fracking in New York, an average of 4.2 million gallons of fracked-crude oil entered the Port of Albany everyday, according to an analysis of shipping data by Columbia University-trained geographer Stephen Shafer. (The New York Transportation Department does not provide figures.) The amount has decreased significantly since then, as oil prices have fallen, but that could change if the price rises.

“New York gets all the risk, and no benefit,” says Kate Hudson, director of Cross-Watershed Initiatives at Riverkeeper, a watchdog group dedicated to defending the Hudson River. “[The oil] is not a part of our economy, it is not creating jobs. It is just passing through.”

PROTESTING ON THE RAILROAD

On May 14, five arrests were made as thousands of protesters marched through the streets of Albany. Many sat down on the railroad tracks used to transport the oil.

The oil trains pass within 15 feet of the Ezra Prentice Homes, a public-housing development adjacent to the port that is home to over 400 people, including more than 200 children. Residents have complained of air pollution that causes nausea and asthma, and the potential long-term effects of being exposed to benzene, a known carcinogen that is present in oil vapors.

Activists also point to the risks of accidents. In July 2013, a train carrying fracked crude oil derailed and exploded in Lac Megantic, Quebec. It killed 47 people and dumped hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude oil into the local river. Since then, there have been 10 other accidents involving trains transporting crude oil in the U.S. and Canada, prompting evacuations and causing environmental damage.

The tracks and bridges the railroad cars travel on are privately owned and often poorly maintained. A 2014

WABC-TV investigation into a 15-mile stretch of railroad near Newburgh, operated by CSX, found “major cracks in foundations, holes in steel columns, and missing or loose bolts” in the overpasses.

The Federal Railroad Administration employs only one inspector to oversee rail bridges in 13 Northeastern states, including the 3,000 bridges in New York. Railroad operators are required to file a letter with state and federal transportation authorities once a year, asserting that they have inspected their bridges and found them to be safe.

“When was the last time that the airlines could inspect and certify the safety of their own airplanes?” asks Kate Hudson of Riverkeeper. “It is amazing that this industry is allowed the regulatory freedom that it is.”

RIVERBOAT GAMBLE

The Hudson River has been used in the past to transport gasoline and home heating oil—already refined products—for regional consumption, but crude oil was not allowed on the river until 2011. Once the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) began issuing permits to shipping companies, the volume rapidly increased.

In December 2012 the *Stena Primorsk* became the first tanker to leave the Port of Albany with a load of crude oil. Carrying 12 million gallons, it promptly ran aground just six miles south of Albany, rupturing its outer hull. Had the ship’s inner hull ruptured as well, the area, a state-designated “significant habitat,” would have been devastated.

The Hudson, once synonymous with PCBs, Superfund sites, and extreme environmental degradation, has become a poster child for environmental recovery, due to decades of activism. Billions of dollars have been invested in cleaning up the river. It is now home to over 200 species of fish, including endangered species, and is the center of the valley region’s \$4.7 billion tourism industry. It is also a source of drinking water for residents of Poughkeepsie, Highland, Port Ewen, Hyde Park and Rhinebeck.

Beginning in 2011, the organizations that spearheaded the river’s revival, including Riverkeeper, Scenic Hudson and the Sierra Club, began sounding the alarm about the risks of crude-oil transport.

ENGINES OF JUSTICE

The state government insists that it can’t regulate rail shipments of crude oil because it is pre-empted by federal railroad law, but there are areas where it has some authority. Environmentalists are using the courts, pressuring regulators, and passing local ordinances to force changes.

Attorneys with EarthJustice filed a federal lawsuit in February on behalf of environmental groups and residents of the Ezra Prentice Homes, accusing the Port of Albany oil terminal’s operator, Global Companies, of violating the Clean Air Act when it increased the volume of crude passing through the port by fivefold in 2012. The suit also alleges that Global failed to receive the requisite permits

from the DEC for processing Bakken shale oil, which emits higher levels of volatile organic compounds than conventional oil.

EarthJustice has filed another suit in state court challenging the DEC’s decision to forgo an environmental-impact study when it reviewed Global’s application to begin processing heavy crude from the Alberta tar sands. Though the courts have not yet ruled on it, that suit, together with 19,000 public comments, has so far delayed the permitting process.

Riverkeeper, a plaintiff in both suits, is pushing for more inspections and repairs to rail infrastructure, as well as for making railroad reports publicly available. Ulster County Executive Mike Hein has proposed that the county hire an engineer to inspect railroad bridges, although that issue is complicated because they are considered the railroad companies’ private property.

Riverkeeper and others are also pushing to increase the amount of money in the state’s spill-response fund, which was originally set at \$25 million in 1977. Gov. Andrew Cuomo bumped that up to \$40 million last year. However, if the fund had kept up with inflation, it would hold \$97 million today.

Ideally, advocates say, oil transporters and the railroads would pay for the costs of cleaning up spills. Riverkeeper is lobbying the state Legislature for a financial assurance bill, which would require companies that transport oil to demonstrate they have the financial resources to clean up in a “worst-case scenario.” In the Lac Megantic explosion, the company transporting the oil declared bankruptcy, and Canadian taxpayers were stuck footing the bill—which is expected to run as high as \$2.7 billion over the coming years.

Meanwhile, the Sierra Club is working to improve rail-car safety regulations. In May 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation issued new safety standards for crude-oil tank cars that include a 10-year phaseout of the cars currently used. The Sierra Club continues to call for an immediate ban on shipping crude oil by rail, citing the department’s projections that “15 derailments on mainline are likely every year.”

Several county legislatures and local governments in the Hudson Valley have passed resolutions against crude-oil transport. For now, the industry seems to have the upper hand, but memories of another longshot environmental campaign that ended in victory are still fresh in people’s memories.

Six years ago, Wes Gillingham of Catskill Mountainkeeper recalled at a public forum at Kingston City Hall on the crude-oil transports, he had “lots of conversations with experts, environmental leaders who have been in many fights over the years, saying, ‘There’s no way we can stop fracking. We just have to make sure it gets regulated as best we can.’ We proved that wrong.”

OFF THE RAILS: A birdseye view of a crude train derailment in Ontario, Canada on March 7, 2015.



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD OF CANADA/FICKR

THE ANSWER IS TWISTING IN THE WIND



UN PHOTO/ESKIN/DER DEBEBE

BY WENDY SOL

Environmentalists see a devil and an angel on Governor Andrew Cuomo's shoulder and it appears both are getting their way when it comes to New York's energy future — although one will have to be more patient than the other.

At the behest of state energy regulators in July, the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) delayed plans to approve a wind farm expected to be built 30 miles off the shore of Montauk at the far northern end of Long Island. With 15 turbines producing 90 megawatts (MW) of electricity, the project, built by Deepwater Wind LLC, would be the most sizable of its kind in the United States, which has lagged significantly behind Europe in developing offshore wind resources.

"We're looking at this and seeing a tremendous offshore wind resource that will be developed and it's not the last," Thomas Falcone, the utility's chief executive officer told the *Associated Press* a week ahead of the scheduled vote. "[T]his is a very big step for New York, but also for the U.S."

From Virginia to Maine, the Eastern seaboard has the potential to harness 240,000 MW of offshore wind, nearly 40,000 MW of which blows off Long Island's coast, according to research by the New York Energy Policy Institute and Stony Brook University. Deepwater Wind's farm will only generate a fraction of what is possible but environmentalists see the plan as an important move toward weaning New York off of polluting energy sources like gas, coal and nuclear.

"It's going to help to open the door here to offshore wind power," said Kim Fraczek, of the New York-based Sane Energy Project. The group hopes the project will lead to more turbines, including some off of Long Island's southeastern shore, where Sane Energy won a

hard-fought campaign last year to block a natural gas terminal and is now advocating for construction of a 750 MW wind farm in its place.

The state's Energy and Research Development Authority, chaired by Cuomo-appointed energy czar Richard Kaufman, intervened last month and requested that the LIPA delay approving the Montauk wind farm until the state releases an offshore wind master plan in August. It was the second time this summer the LIPA put off voting on the wind farm, which was originally expected to be greenlit in June.

The Deepwater Wind farm might be in need of CPR after the bureaucratic hold up, but Cuomo is breathing new life into geriatric nuclear reactors upstate, currently hemorrhaging money for their operators.

When the New York Public Service Commission approved new clean energy standards on August 1, it included a provision that will force the state's power utilities to purchase \$7.6 billion worth of electricity over the next 12 years from the R. E. Ginna and Nine Mile Point nuclear plants operated by Exelon Corp, as well as Entergy's James A. FitzPatrick nuclear facility.

Cuomo, who sought the bailout for the struggling plants and tied it to plans for New York to receive 50 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2030, praised the commission's decision. Electrical providers, forced to buy nuclear power at above-market rates, are going to "pay for the intrinsic value of carbon-free emissions," Cuomo said in a statement.

Ratepayers will ultimately be the ones picking up the tab, however, as utilities pass on the cost of electricity from nuclear power to consumers.

Critics also observe that while carbon emissions from nuclear plants are minimal compared to those burning fossil fuels, the process of mining and enriching uranium required to power reactors is carbon-intensive. The plants emit radioactive chemicals into the environment

as a matter of daily operation, produce large amounts of toxic waste and present a safety risk to the public, as evidenced by the 2011 Fukushima disaster, which only increases as they age.

"These plants are old and decaying," said Fraczek. "[The bailout] is a giant slap in the face to the public."

Her hope is that plans for the wind farm off the coast of Montauk will eventually move forward and pave the way for more ambitious projects, including the 750 MW wind farm Sane Energy wants built off the coast of the Rockaways in Queens.

"The only way our state is going to truly meet its renewable energy goals is with offshore wind," she said.

BLOWING THIS WAY: The Middelgrunden wind farm off the coast of Denmark. The U.S. lags behind Europe in developing offshore wind power, but that might soon change.

DEBBIE MEDINA

Continued from page 4

me and they'll continue to endorse me," Medina says, insisting that more people have come forward to support her since the article appeared than before. "People have said, 'Wow, that's really amazing you've just come out and gave your story.'"

The story, as she tells it, is this. At the age of 12, Eugenio Torres, the oldest of her four children, started hanging out on the street. He began smoking angel dust. Medina, a mother of four, couldn't afford rehabilitation programs that would have removed him from an environment where drugs were readily accessible.

"If I was rich I would have sent my son to Malibu, but that's not something I could afford," she says.

Still, she did everything she could to turn his life around. She approached dealers in Southside Williamsburg and pleaded with them to cut her son off. She posted fliers around the neighborhood that urged, "Do

not sell to this boy."

When Torres was 16, Medina and her husband found cash and the family's VCR missing from their home. They confronted their son and when he hit her husband, Medina intervened and began striking Torres with a belt — the first of multiple instances she used force in an attempt to rein in his delinquent behavior.

SPARED FROM DEATH

A mitigation specialist, testifying during the sentencing segment of Torres's murder trial, noted that in one instance child protective services arrived at Medina's household and discovered bruises on Torres's torso and arms. The testimony is a matter of public record and was reported on by *Lehigh Valley Live*, a local paper in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, where Torres's trial took place in 2010. Yet it was not widely known in Medina's district until she came forward. Like her socialism, it wasn't a subject she discussed during her 2014 Senate bid.

"I thought everybody already knew," Medina tells me, explaining that she has always been open with her neighbors about what her family went through.

The abuse Torres suffered served as a mitigating factor in the jury's decision to spare him from a sentence of lethal injection and instead opt for life without parole. The final tally was 10-2 in favor of death, but under Pennsylvania law, the death penalty cannot be imposed unless the jury's vote is unanimous.

Torres, who was 23 at the time of his conviction, maintains his innocence and told investigators he was playing with 3-year-old Elijah Strickland in a bathtub when the child swallowed water and stopped breathing. More than 90 injuries were discovered on the little boy's body, including cuts, burn marks, bruising and a fractured skull. A bloody white belt was recovered at the scene.

"I can only wish and pray to the Lord that it was an accident," Medina says.

I asked her what message she has for voters who might feel conflicted about checking off her name on the ballot.

"Elect me as a state senator and we can work to help families like mine. We should not allow one mistake that I made get in the way of me being able to go up there [to Albany] and help families avoid the [same] mistakes. How many parents are going through what I went through right now, but nobody knows about it because they're not running for a position? People are accusing me of trying to save my son, when the reality is we should be trying to find a way where parents don't have to go through what I went through."

As we approached the car waiting at the end of the block to take her to the next campaign event, Medina sighed. "I knew you couldn't just have a regular interview with me without having to ask me [about] that."

A VISION OF THE MIDDLE EAST YOU WON'T SEE ON TV

But a Storm Is Blowing From Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East & North Africa
SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
THROUGH OCTOBER 5

By Mike Newton

To make her piece *Flying Carpets* (2011), Nadia Kaabi-Linke, an artist who grew up in Dubai and Tunis as well as eastern Ukraine, spent time with North African street vendors near a large, tourist-y bridge in Venice. Over the course of a week, she observed the vendors as they bundled their wares in carpets and moved — frequently, furtively — across and around the bridge.

Flying Carpets is a busy conglomeration of rigid metal bars suspended from the ceiling. It simultaneously alludes to the grandness of Venetian bridges, ancient Middle Eastern stories of flying carpets with their connotations of unfettered flight and freedom, the harsh economic and social constraints placed on migrant workers, and the hard-edged traditions of modern architecture. Her sculpture is a shiny, flying toy, a contemporary city and, finally, a sort of cage.



RAMIN HAERIZADEH

Like *Flying Carpets*, Kader Attia's *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* (2009) uses angular, geometric forms to question the supposed divisions between European and North African cultures. The piece includes a miniature model — made with couscous, a staple food in North Africa — of the ancient Algerian city of Ghardaïa. The model appears along with historical documents showing that the revered French modernist architect Le Corbusier visited Ghardaïa in 1931.

Attia grew up in both Algeria and France. With *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* he posits that Le Corbusier's aesthetics, acclaimed in the architect's time for their avant-garde modernity, were, at least partially, a European reworking of concepts invented by North African architects since before the time of Henry the Great. The organic, granular model of Ghardaïa looks like it could fall apart at any moment — a metaphor, perhaps, for the fragility of assumed historical narratives.

Flying Carpets and *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* are the largest works in "But a Storm Is Blowing From Paradise," currently on view at the Guggenheim. They sum up most of the exhibition's major themes: modernity and tradition, movement and restriction, East and West; all from the vantage point of a contemporary, hard

to define and ever-fluctuating MENA (the Middle East and North Africa).

The exhibition's title sounds vaguely like a line from an ancient holy text. Christianity, Islam and Judaism all began in the Middle East, after all, but the phrase is actually adapted from German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin's famous description of the angel of history: A celestial being who watches as all of history unfolds as a single tragedy while he's helplessly blown into the future by a storm called "progress."



DAVID HEAD



DAVID HEAD

Rokni Haerizadeh, *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise*, 2014

Hassan Khan, *Bank Bannister (Banque Bannister)*, 2010

Kader Attia, *Untitled (Ghardaïa)*, 2009

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS YOU CAN TRUST

BY JONATHAN STRIBLING-USS

Newly leaked FBI guidelines for the use of National Security Letters (NSLs) have finally opened a window into how little control third parties, from Google, to Facebook to the phone company, have over the data of their users. The classified rules, were obtained by The Intercept in June, but date back to 2013, and concern the FBI's use of national security letters (NSLs).

NSLs allow for an FBI agent to request any type of data from a third-party provider, and then use a gag order to prevent the provider from speaking about the fact that the data has ever been requested. This allows the bureau to obtain information about activists and journalists without going to a judge, as is the case with a regular search warrant, or informing the organization being targeted.

Sixteen thousand NSLs are issued annually. The letters only require the signature of a unit director at the FBI to obtain data from any provider and are often used for investigations that have nothing to do with national security, including investigations carried out against journalists who expose information that displeases the government. This type of surveillance has dubious legality and becomes even more dubious when evidence from these sources is used in criminal trials. The most striking use of information from NSLs is when it is combined with "parallel construction": the laundering of illegally acquired evidence into court proceedings.

Anyone who has watched the "The Wire" or "The Good Wife" has seen fictional examples of how parallel construction may currently happen. But the most clear-cut case of parallel construction in present-day prosecutions is through the Special Operations Division, a \$125 million unit of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), where agents are trained to utilize "parallel construction" to hide NSA or NSL data by covering it with fake witnesses. The use of this illegally acquired evidence in trials has therefore been hidden from attorneys, clients and the judiciary, threatening the integrity of the legal process as a whole. This startling practice undermines the Sixth Amendment right of defendants to know the evidence that is being used against them in an open court, and it destroys an attorney's ability to effectively serve their clients. The vice chairman of the criminal justice section of the American Bar Association, James Felman, calls this domestic use

of evidence from NSL or NSA intercepts "outrageous" and "indefensible."

What can activists or concerned citizens do to stop this broad attack on freedom of speech and association? There are groups such as the National Lawyers Guild and The Electronic Frontier Foundation that work on specific legal strategies. As individuals, people need to understand that for law enforcement social media is public space. Although you may have privacy settings that can stop your mom or ex-partner from reading your posts, as far as federal law enforcement is concerned every page, post, mail, like or click on Facebook, Twitter, or Google could be used as evidence against you in a court of law.

To thwart these overbearing snoops there are a number of excellent Internet providers who take user privacy seriously, don't collect log data and/or utilize warrant canaries that allow them to warn users if they are ever asked to comply with government requests for NSL information. There are a number of long-running projects that exist to support activists maintain their constitutional rights while using digital communications. Two of special significance are Riseup.net and Mayfirst.org.

Riseup.net is a non-profit collective active since the 1999 Seattle WTO protests. Riseup runs an email service (mail.riseup.net), a groupware network for organizing (we.riseup.net), pastebins for securely exchanging large files (share.riseup.net), a "google docs" type collaborative document writing (pad.riseup.net). All of these are maintained by ensuring no logging data is saved. It has a "warrant canary" that they publish and update regularly. It also allow people to sign up for and use services over the Tor network to preserve their anonymity (something that Google, Facebook, Apple, and Twitter, don't allow.) Riseup relies on individual donations to survive.

May First/People Link (www.mayfirst.org) "engages in building movements by advancing the strategic use and collective control of technology for local struggles, global transformation, and emancipation without borders." This redefines the concept of "Internet Service Provider" in a collective and collaborative way as a democratic membership organization with an elected Leadership Committee and coop model where everyone pay dues and collectively manage websites, email, email lists, and more.

This is the second in a two-part series.

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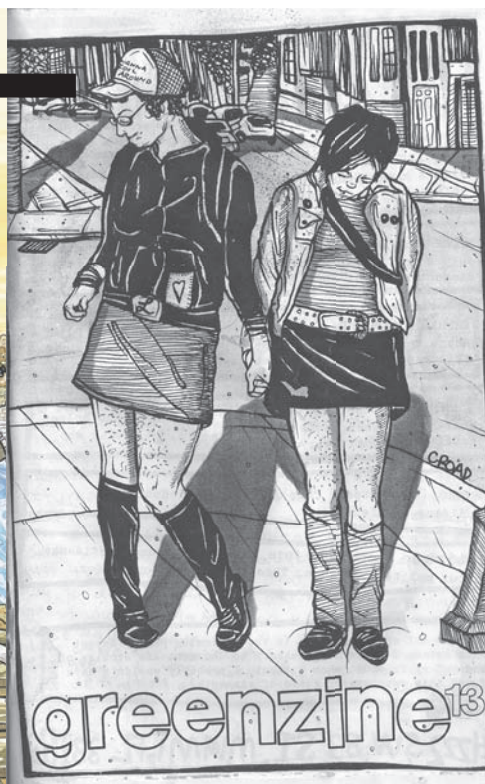
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—ASTRA TAYLOR

COLORING OUTSIDE THE BOX



BY GENA HYMOWECH

“Gay cartooning denotes pornography to some minds,” Robert Triptow wrote in his 1989 anthology, *Gay Comics*. “So for artists with marketable styles to work for a homosexual audience is a risky business.”

This was the state of queer comics in the late '80s.

A little less than three years later, gay artists and their fans got considerably more hope with the coming out of Northstar, Marvel's first gay superhero. The iconic *Archie Comics* series introduced its first gay character, Kevin Keller, in 2010, and last year marked the Broadway debut of *Fun Home*, the musical based on lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel's best-selling graphic memoir.

Today, comics “[p]ublishers both big and small are recognizing the more diverse audience reading their stories, and responding more and more with characters that represent the world we live in,” says Todd Sokolove, a board member of Geeks OUT, an organization that “rallies, empowers and promotes queer geeks,” as their site puts it.

Jeff Krell, the writer and illustrator of the series *Jayson*, says, “for the longest time after *Jayson* became popular, I thought that I had closed [the Archie] door forever. But then, with the introduction of Kevin Keller, suddenly the fact that I had been doing a teen humor strip with gay protagonists, for as long as I had, became a selling point.” (Krell was in talks to work on the comic for *Archie*. Keller recently returned in a digital-first series titled *Life with Kevin*.)

For Krell, being at a mainstream comic convention has become an entirely different experience. In the past, he said, convention attendees approaching the booth of the nonprofit Prism “would come up and just poke around, and then realize that it was focused on LGBTs and then they would sort of go, ‘Ew,’ and run away.” Straight males, he said, “would joke with each other and say, ‘That’s for you, ha ha,’ and it was a little disheartening. In the last five or six years, I’ve seen the opposite. I’ve seen people coming to the booth and discovering that these are LGBT comics and creators, and being happy to discover something new, and thinking it’s cool, especially teenage girls.” He adds, “There’s no ick factor left, at least not at the conventions I’ve been to.”

Still, there’s something about a dedicated queer comics convention, according to Krell, who was a founding member of the now defunct gay-themed Bent-Con. There, he finds, “a more receptive audience—people who knew exactly what they were there for, and coming for something that they would have difficulty finding somewhere else.”

With queer conventions, “[t]hat hurdle is cleared: You don’t have to deal with a lot of people who don’t know that there are gay comics or don’t know what they’re looking at when they walk up to the person’s booth,” he says. You avoid “that whole sometimes uncomfortable conversation of explaining what it is that you do and why they should buy it anyway.”

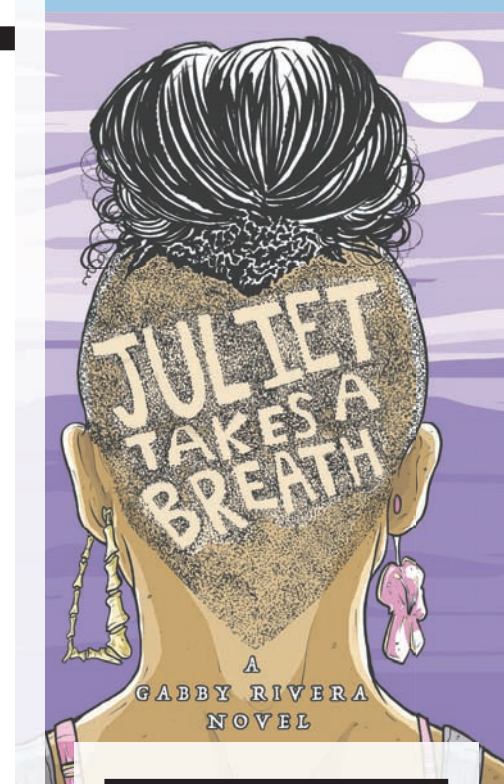
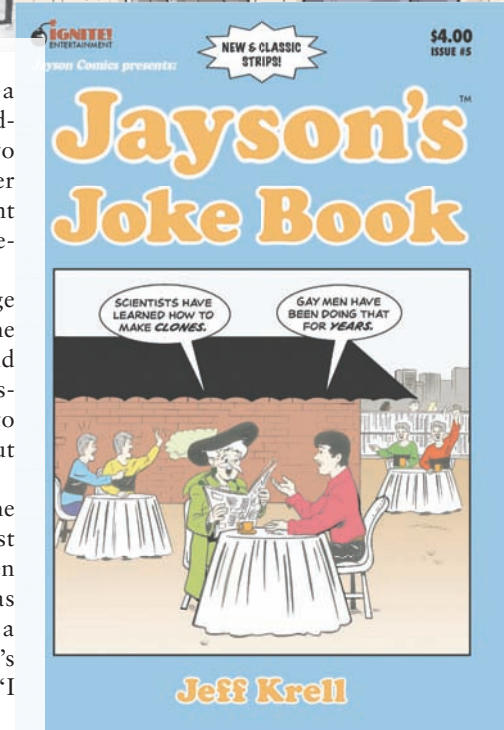
Cristy C. Road, who wrote and illustrated the novel *Bad Habits*, has attended mainstream conventions but never tabled at them, she says, “because I felt intimidated by the dominant presence of stuff that I’ve seen around, very straight boy-focused images and art, a lot of superheroes, or the portrayal of women as, like, sexy all the time.”

New York comic fans who are sick of the overwhelming straightness of the mainstream convention scene should thrill at the return of Flame Con, the queer comic con Geeks OUT introduced in June of 2015. That event, which took place at Brooklyn’s Grand Prospect Hall, had more than 2,200 visitors. This year, there will be panels, including one Krell is moderating titled

“Funny That Way: Humor in LGBT Comics”; a free youth day; a kick-off party and plenty of exhibitors and special guests, including Road. The convention is now longer, taking place over two days (Aug. 20 and 21) instead of one, and has moved to a larger location, the Brooklyn Bridge Marriott. In light of the recent shooting at Orlando’s Pulse nightclub, there will be increased security and a policy of no toy guns.

Road, who attended Flame Con last year, believes an advantage of the event is its potential to influence artists after it’s over. “The queer narrative in comics is still this other thing,” she says, “and if we create a space for us where we can be loud and we can present our work in a very serious platform, it’s ... inspiring [us] to move forward and not be intimidated by the industries that shut down our narrative.”

Road is also looking forward to presenting for the first time, the possibility of meeting new friends and folks to tour with and just having some good, geeky, queer fun. To be sure, there have been other conferences, like CUNY’s Queers & Comics, where she was a presenter at in 2015. But that event was “very academic. It was a lot of panels and talks, and it wasn’t a party. It was very, like, ‘Let’s go here and critically analyze the work that we do,’ “ she says. “I go to Flame Con and I’m like, ‘YEAH! COSTUMES!’”



INCLUSIVE: A sampling of queer comic books to look for during the 2nd annual Flame Con at the Brooklyn Bridge Marriott Aug. 20-21.



POKÉMON GO/HALEK IYRIY/NIKIL

POKÉMON GO FOR RADICALS

BY KATE ARANOFF

If you happen to have been living under a rock this past month, there's a good chance someone turned it over looking for Pokémon. Pokémon Go, Nintendo's free augmented-reality app, has been as ubiquitous in the news as the presidential election.

For the uninformed: Game designers have placed Pokémon and in-game items at specific hot spots around the country, encouraging users to venture out into their neighborhoods or others, and to contest for "gyms," where they can challenge other players for control of a particular location.

Its number of daily users has surpassed the location-based dating app Tinder, and is close to eclipsing Twitter and Snapchat. It even boasts more active daily users than Facebook. When the game's servers crashed July 16, it made headlines in some of the world's biggest news outlets.

Businesses that have offered hot spots (or are lucky enough to be placed near them) have seen profits climb. T-Mobile is offering a year of free mobile data as a game-friendly promotion. Unsurprisingly, Pokémon Go has proven a cash cow for Nintendo, the franchise's creator, which is raking in an estimated \$1.6 million per day off of the Apple iOS market alone. Marketers are scratching their heads at ways to put Pokémon to use. So far, there are no in-ad games, though company spokespeople say the app will soon support "sponsored locations" where players can reap for items like eggs and Pokéballs.

All this newfound in-real-life interaction isn't without its complications. Who can wander around unfamiliar neighborhoods unmolested varies widely based on a player's race and class. A friend in the Israel-occupied West Bank region observed a Palestinian organizer asking a Jewish activist to help him fetch a Pokémon in an area of Hebron that's been cordoned off from Arabs by the Israeli military.

And — like nearly everything on your smartphone — Nintendo is collecting myriad bits of personal information from every aspiring Pokémonmaster, especially if they've given the company access to a Google account. There's also the lurking fear that all human interaction in the 21st century is on course to be mediated by screens, as if all of us are suddenly living in an episode of *Black Mirror*.

The long-term viability of Pokémon-based campaign strategies will depend on whether the game is a passing fad or has a longer shelf life. But so long as rare Pokémon continue to send stampedes into Central Park, can it be used for good?

As Dylan Matthews pointed out in *Vox*, Pokémon Go one-ups social media's ability to draw people out, given that it actually gets them moving to a particular location. Rather than retweeting or liking a post, players have to physically flock to lures. It's why Hillary Clinton's campaign has been so eager to put it to

use registering voters, turning up to Poké Stops and gyms. Anyone can place Pokémon "lures," which attract creatures to a certain area, up around a city — and even more so if you happen to be working with a budget.

Even before the Clinton campaign started using it, NextGen Climate, an environmentally focused voter-turnout organization, had begun trying to put the app to work. "In each of our states, NextGen Climate will be dropping Pokémon Go lures in strategic locations, which means we'll release rare Pokémon in a specific location at a specific time," said Suzanne Henkels, the group's press secretary. "While they're there, we engage with them and talk about the importance of being registered to vote and committing to vote for clean energy leaders this November."

NextGen has held Pokémon-themed events in New Hampshire, Ohio and Iowa, complete with lures and recharging stations. In Nevada, they hosted a "real-life Poké Stop" with refreshments and "organizers there to register attendees to vote and educate them about the importance of electing climate champions in November."

What makes Pokémon good for voter registration could also make it invaluable in getting people out to the polls come November, when turnout among young voters — now about a third of the electorate — could make or break Donald Trump's shot at the Oval Office.

But its uses, some say, could go beyond the ballot box as well. Brandon Holmes of the community-organizing outfit VOCAL New York identifies several ways the app could bolster grass-roots movements.

"The more players you have in an area, the more rare Pokémon will show," he said, suggesting that players "build a large occupancy somewhere like Trump Tower or divestment targets and constantly attach lures to stops." Organizers, Holmes added, could even plan marches that route through different Poké Stops, though he saw a challenge in "keeping the attendees captivated and not buried in their phones during speeches or chants... You would need some serious marshaling and the world's best energy team."

In Florida, the Black Lives Matter Alliance of Broward County held an event at a Fort Lauderdale supermarket "looking for new ways to engage the community around the issues surrounding the movement for black lives," encouraging participants to bring water, friends and lures. Some environmental activists are also looking into how the game might bring people out to protests at fossil-fuel infrastructure sites.

Holmes notes that at the famously bigoted Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, a Clefairy ("fairy-type") Pokémon named "LOVEISLOVE" beat out the Westboro faithful for control of the gym. "If we could find gyms that are solid targets, we could nickname Pokémon after our campaign messaging and organize enough folks to train the gym

to be virtually unstoppable," he said. "We could also name them after our organizations."

Pokémon might also come in handy for fundraising efforts. After a Long Island pizzeria paid to have a rare Pokémon sent to its storefront, sales jumped 75 percent by day's end. "We could host a campaign-specific fundraiser where [a certain percentage] of the funds go directly to Pokémon Go for a rare Pokémon and the rest go to a specific campaign/action," Holmes said, noting that this could involve lobbying Nintendo and Niantec, the game's creator, for the ability to purchase rare finds.

Jeremy Gong, of the Sierra Club's San Francisco chapter, was more skeptical.

"I imagine that one can only do rather shallow organizing with Pokémon Go — like Facebook events, the game could be great for a quick turnout, but there's no guarantee those Poké-hunters are in it for the long haul," he warned. "I don't imagine a lot of people saying, 'I came for the Snorlax, but stayed for police reform.'"

Like any other new app or new technology, Pokémon Go is no replacement for the day-to-day work of community organizing and well-timed mobilization. But it might offer a few more pieces to an activist toolbox that — in 2016 — has never needed to be bigger.

A longer version of this article originally appeared at Wagingnonviolence.org.

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