

#231: JANUARY 2018 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

# THE INDYPENDENT

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IN 2018**  
COVERAGE STARTS P8



RUSTY ZIMMERMAN

**KEEP THE INDY STRONG**

FOR MORE ON OUR 2018 WINTER FUND DRIVE, SEE PAGE 2 & 23



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# WE ARE BEING TESTED

When we publish a new issue of The Indy, I like to slip away from our office in downtown Brooklyn and hand the paper out to rush-hour commuters at one of several nearby subway stations. It's a chance to absorb the energy of the city and witness people's reactions to the new cover.

"I just found this paper last month," one middle-aged commuter told me recently at the Jay Street-Metrotech station. "It tells the truth."

Yes, it does. And a lot more people are seeing it than ever before.

We have more than doubled our circulation in the past year to 40,000 copies per month, making us the fastest growing print newspaper in New York City, if not the country.

The Indy's rapid growth comes as much of the established legacy media is collapsing. Over on the Internet, the FCC is dismantling net neutrality which allows smaller websites to compete on an equal playing field with corporate giants. Closer to home the Village Voice ended its print edition and Gothamist and DNAInfo were closed down by their anti-union owner.

We can't know when or how the Trump regime will end or what will follow it. Whole groups of people in this country have been subjected to far worse over much longer periods of time and persevered. When we look back on this moment, I think we will understand that we were all being tested — our values, our willingness to take risks, our ability to think clearly and work with other people of goodwill and most of all our readiness to remain hopeful and engaged when despair and resignation may have seemed easier and more logical.

What we've accomplished here at The Indy this past year has been our response. And we're poised to do more great work in 2018 with your help. For more about how to pitch in, please see our fund appeal on Page 23 or visit us at [indypendent.org/donate](http://indypendent.org/donate).

In the meantime, enjoy this issue as we say farewell to 2017 and look forward to the new year.

— John Tarleton

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**FRI DEC 29**

11PM • \$10–\$20

**PARTY: THE FREEDOM PARTY**

A legendary annual old-school dance party that has brought people together to dance to hip-hop, R&B, pop, rock, reggae and house since 2003. Enter promo code "freedom" for \$10 tickets. Receive two free passes if you are born in December by emailing [info@freedomparty-worldwide.com](mailto:info@freedomparty-worldwide.com). Both offers good while supplies last.  
**IRVING PLAZA**  
17 Irving Pl.

**SUN DEC 31**

9PM • \$30 in advance, \$40 at the door

**PARTY: NEW YEAR'S EVE**  
Starr Bar rounds the corner on its second year and welcomes DJ Geko Jones and friends to host our new year's party. We're excited to put the lid on 2017 and pop the cork on a fresh new year with free champagne for all. Sets by DJs Ushka, Selecta 7 and Geko Jones. Performance by Banji Twerk Team. Hosted by Jay Boogie.  
**STARR BAR**  
214 Starr St., Bklyn

**SUN DEC 31**

9PM–5AM • \$30–\$60

**PARTY: METROPOLIS 2018**  
The volunteer-led, nonprofit arts collective Costume Kult brings in the new year with this retro-futuristic party based on the classic 1927

Fritz Lang film. Art Deco-inspired costumes encouraged.  
**SPiN NYC**  
48 E 23rd St.

**SATURDAYS JAN 6–JAN 27**

11AM–2PM • \$30–\$60

**CLASS: MARX, CAPITAL & THE MADNESS OF ECONOMIC REASON**

In this study group from the Marxist Education Project, participants will read and discuss David Harvey's recently published *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason*. Visit [marxedproject.org](http://marxedproject.org) for more information and to register.  
**BROOKLYN COMMONS**  
388 Atlantic Ave., Bklyn

**SAT JAN 6**

1PM • FREE

**CELEBRATION: REYES MAGOS PARTY**  
Celebrate El Dia de los Reyes Magos (Day of the Three Kings) with Brandworkers, a nonprofit that organizes for good jobs and a sustainable food system. Come out and enjoy friends, food and family.  
**BRANDWORKERS OFFICE**  
45-02 23rd St., Queens

**MON JAN 8**

7:30–9PM • FREE

**BOOK LAUNCH: LOADED: A DISARMING HISTORY OF THE 2ND AMENDMENT**  
From the enslavement of blacks and the conquest of Native America, to the arsenal of institutions that

# MIC CHECK!

**LISTEN TO OUR INDY AUDIO AND INDYSTRUCTIBLE PODCASTS ON ITUNES AND SOUNDCLOUD TODAY.**

# THE INDYPENDENT

constitute the “gun lobby,” Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s *Loaded* presents a people’s history of the 2nd Amendment, as seen through the lens of those who have been most targeted by guns. Meticulously researched and thought-provoking, this is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the historical connections between racism and gun violence in the United States.  
**BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE**  
172 Allen St.

**JAN 8–15**

Various times • \$30–\$35 + fees  
**THEATER: OCTAVIA BUTLER’S PARABLE OF THE SOWER**  
Based on the post-apocalyptic novel by the late Afro-futurist and science fiction author Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* is a genre-defying opera that harnesses two centuries of black music. Conceived by the genre-bending musician Toshi Reagon, in collaboration with Bernice Johnson Reagon, *Parable* fuses science fiction, African-American spiritualism, a deep examination of gender and race, and environmental activism to construct a mesmerizing work of rare power and beauty. Visit [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org) for tickets and showtimes.  
**PUBLIC THEATER**  
425 Lafayette St.

**TUE JAN 9**

7PM • FREE  
**PERFORMANCE: THE BROOKLYN POETRY SLAM**  
This event brings together the borough’s best slam poets for a monthly gathering of words and wisdom; hosted by poet, activist, and educator Mahogany L Browne with music by DJ Jive Poetic. The Slam is followed by an open mic, so come early to sign up and make your voice heard.  
**BRIC**  
647 Fulton St., Bklyn

**WED JAN 10**

1PM–3PM • FREE  
**DRINKS: SOCIALIST SERVICE INDUSTRY HAPPY HOUR**  
Join members of the Democratic Socialists of America to discuss ways to organize and work toward making the service industry more equitable and just over a snifter of brandy.  
**FRANKLIN PARK**  
618 Saint Johns Pl., Bklyn

**JAN 10–FEB 11**

Various • \$25–\$50  
**THEATER: THE HOMECOMING QUEEN**  
In Ngozi Anyanwu’s new play, a bestselling novelist returns to Nigeria to care for her ailing father, but before she can bury him, she must relearn the tradi-

tions she’s long forgotten. Tickets on sale starting Dec. 27 at [atlantictheater.org](http://atlantictheater.org). Enter promo code BTN25 for a \$25 discount.  
**ATLANTIC STAGE 2**  
330 W 16th St.

**FRI JAN 12**

6PM–9PM • FREE  
**FOOD: XM FOOD: A CONVERSATION ON THE BENGALI-NEW YORK COMMUNITY WITH JHAL NYC**  
In homage to the late Gordon Matta-Clark’s community project **FOOD**, XM Café is featuring local chefs and artists who incorporate food as part of their social justice practice. This month, new-immigrant chefs with Jhal NYC will share Bangladeshi street food and take part in conversations on immigration and community building. The musicians, poets and activists of Ifti & The Royal Bengal Tea House perform.  
**BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS**  
1040 Grand Concourse, Bronx

**FRI JAN 12–SAT JAN 13**

7:30PM (Fri), 6PM (Sat) • \$30–\$65  
**FEST: ZLATNE USTE GOLDEN FESTIVAL 2018**  
Golden Festival showcases more than 50 Balkan and Roma bands and acts on multiple stages over two nights. Plus, refresh-

ments, arts vendors and intricate textiles.

**GRAND PROSPECT HALL**  
263 Prospect Ave., Bklyn

**SAT JAN 13**

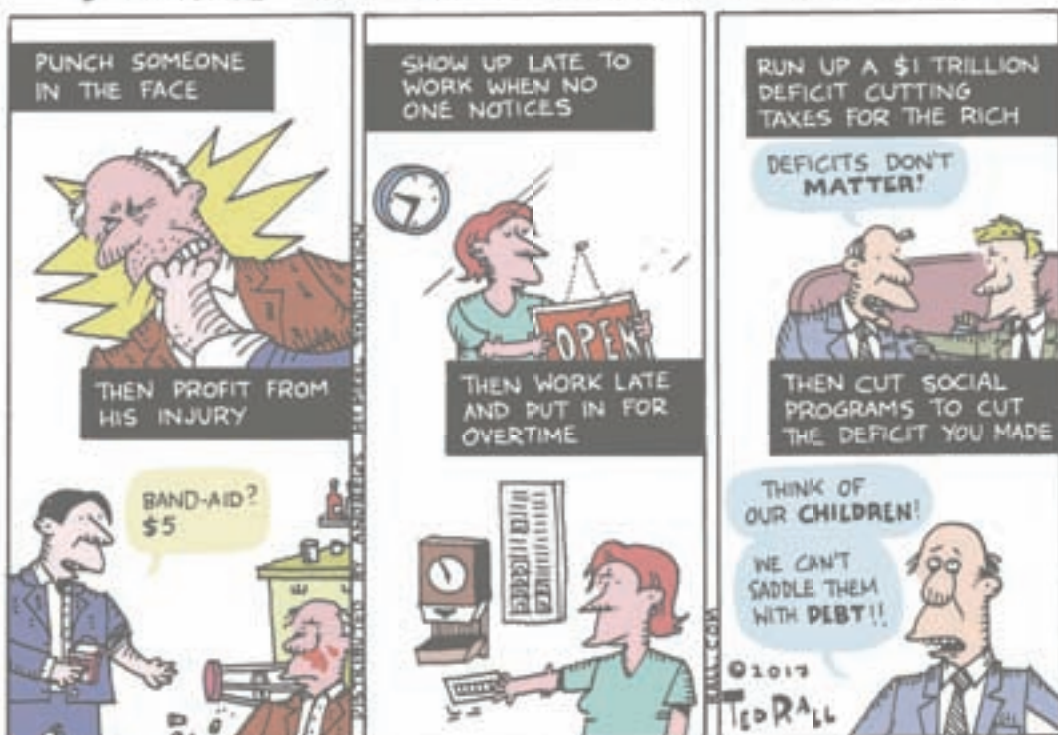
12PM • FREE, \$10–\$20 suggested donation  
**EDUCATION: FREE UNIVERSITY**  
On the one-year anniversary of Trump’s inauguration, in the face of horrific futures imposed from above, the Free University of NYC and Mayday Space invite people to come together and share skills, models, experiences and visions for building our own futures from below. Childcare, Spanish interpretation and a community meal will be provided. After-party at Starr Bar!  
**MAYDAY SPACE**  
176 St Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

**SUN JAN 14**

7PM–8:30PM • FREE, donations welcome  
**TEACH-IN: ANTI-CAPITALIST SELF CARE**  
Specifically geared toward black, brown and indigenous leftists, the goal of this monthly teach-in is to begin to create a culture of self-healing.  
**AUDRE LORDE PROJECT**  
147 W 24th St. 3rd Fl

**JAN 19–FEB 6**

Various times • \$9–\$15  
**CINEMA: “60S VERITÉ”**  
This film series features more than 50 modern classics that not only changed the recording of social history, but revolutionized filmmaking itself, including nine films by Jean Rouch, one of the inventors of cinema vérité. Visit [filmforum.org](http://filmforum.org) for listings, showtimes and tickets.  
**FILM FORUM**  
209 W Houston St.

**3 THINGS THAT ARE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME**

12-5-17

TED RALL

**NOT SO DISTANT**

**LANDS:** Showing at the Public Theater this January, *Parable* brings to life Octavia Butler’s Afro-futurist sci-fi classic of a young woman’s spiritual awakening in an America wracked by unrelenting greed and systemic injustice.

**DIG IN:** Join Jhal NYC at the Bronx Museum’s XM café for a night of culinary activism focused on New York’s Bangladeshi community.

# THE PROSPECT PARK HOTEL

A GROWING NUMBER OF NEW YORKERS HAVE OPTED TO FORGO THE CITY'S STRAINED SHELTER SYSTEM AND SLEEP OUTDOORS THIS WINTER

BY RICO CLEFFI

Early mornings, the scene at the LeFrak Center ice rink in Prospect Park is a model of comfort and tranquility. Skaters pirouette in time with Bach cantatas as ubiquitous landscapers tend to the surrounding greenery. On an unseasonably warm December morning, you could even mistake the men nearby, doing waking stretches and cooking over an open fire, for recreational campers.

In recent weeks, structures resembling large lean-tos mysteriously appeared within the park's southeast entrance, only to vanish, torn down by the Parks Department, witnesses said. The structures haven't gone unnoticed by many residents of the neighborhood abutting the park, the Prospect-Lefferts Gardens section of Flatbush. A neighborhood Facebook page was recently astir with calls for a crackdown amid quality of life complaints, including concerns about "soil erosion."

How many people are living in and around Prospect Park is anybody's guess. What everyone agrees on is that the number is up. When asked what was causing the increase in homelessness, one outreach worker who asked to have her name withheld told *The Independent*: "Evictions. The area is gentrifying so rapidly you've got people being pushed out, and going directly into the park. We're seeing people through the entire park. We're climbing fences to reach people, in the woods, everywhere."

The changes in the neighborhood are not lost on Thomas Harris, aka Yeshua Ben Judah, popularly referred to as "Drum Man," after the large battery of drums that surround him where he resides on the sidewalk beside the park. He blames the machinations of the Airbnb economy. "They're renting that shit out on the internet," he says, gesturing to the row of prewar apartment buildings across Ocean Avenue. "They're renting that shit out for the weekend and make three times the rent."

Deborah O'Brien lived in an apartment on Ocean Avenue and took to the streets after the person she was staying with got evicted. "I see the signs, apartments for rent. ... They're just advertisements, there's nothing there," she says.

Patrick Bonck, communications director for Breaking Ground, the organization contracted by the city to respond to street homelessness in Brooklyn and Queens, ascribes the problem to the high cost of renting: "There are certainly many other factors, but the primary cause is the lack of affordable housing."

Even though New York State has the right to shelter enshrined in its constitution, the dozen or so people staying in or around the park I spoke to for this article concurred on one point: none feel comfortable in a shelter. "The shelter is like jail," said Nicky Dario. For Casey "Now What?" Larson, the

park, attempting to respond to complaints and concerns about this growing population. "If someone in Brooklyn sees someone on the street that needs assistance, they call 311," Bonck says. "We're obligated to respond within an hour."

Thomas "Drum Man" Harris points to the view held by many that the street population is a nuisance, something to call the city to have removed. He relates comments he hears about his dwelling, an intricate jumble of djembes that would fit well in any number of art galleries. "A little kid says, 'Mommy, that's a bunch of garbage, right?'"

People have been staying in the park since

**THE DOZEN OR SO PEOPLE STAYING IN OR AROUND THE PARK I SPOKE TO FOR THIS ARTICLE CONCURRED ON ONE POINT: NONE FEEL COMFORTABLE IN A SHELTER.**

shelter was a place where "I felt like I was in high school all the time." She describes cliques that formed among other residents, condescending shelter workers, a general lack of dignity.

A white woman originally from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Larson has a familiar story: She became homeless after a relationship turned abusive. "First I went and slept in Central Park," she says. "Then I was in the shelter." Larson, who has an associate's degree and a history of retail work, signed up for the city's housing waitlist through the shelter she was staying in but the process went nowhere. She has been sleeping in and outside of Prospect Park off and on since September.

"I was here when it was below freezing," she says. "When I was sleeping near the bandshell, I woke up and my shoes were gone. I had to walk all the way to the other side of the park in flip flops. My feet hurt really bad." Larson has also endured harassment from some of the men in the park, including pressure to do sex work for money. "That's something I am not going to do. Sometimes at night, I'm scared to go to the bathroom. I like to have somebody walk with me. It's especially hard as a woman out here."

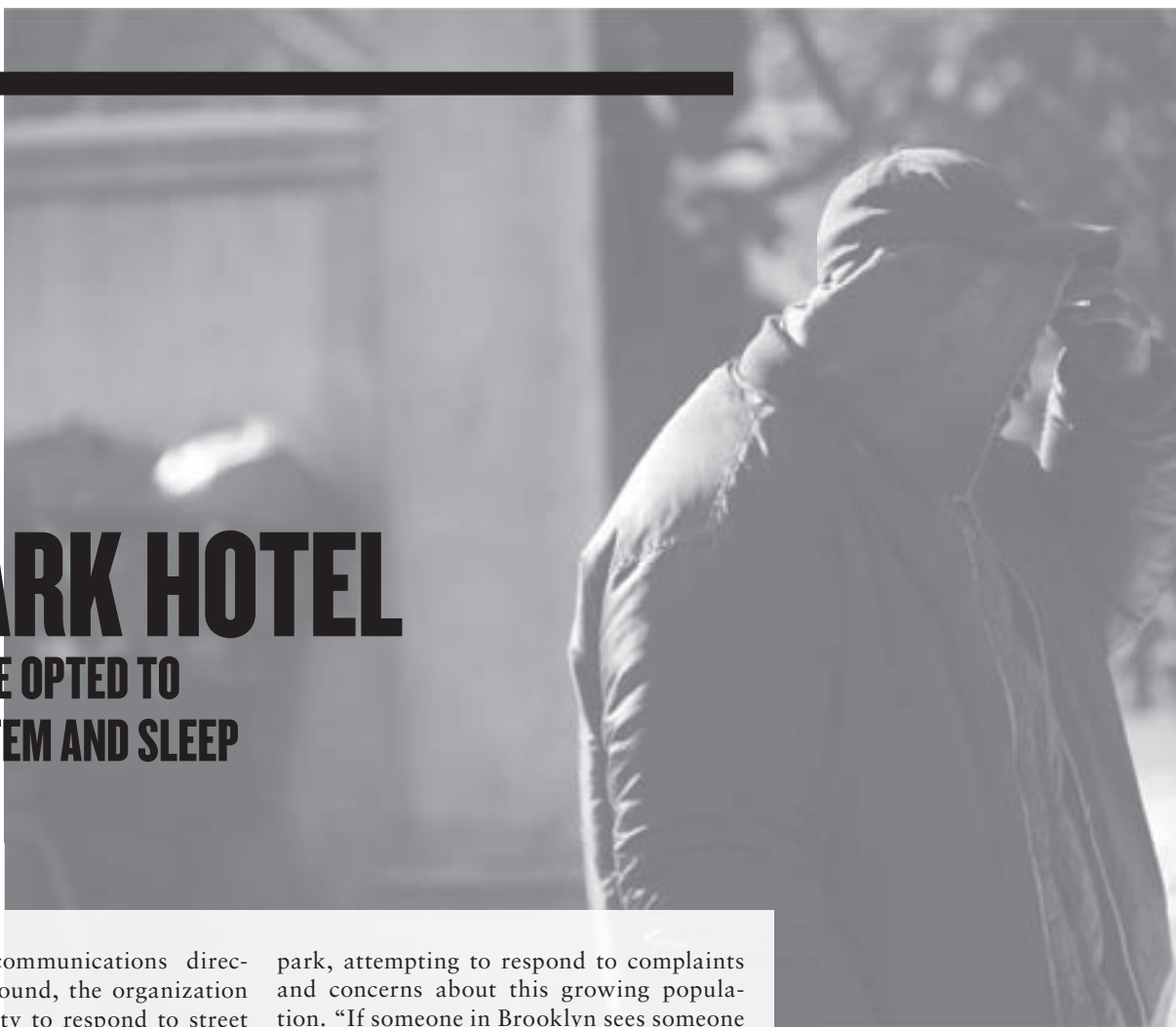
Meanwhile, the Breaking Ground outreach team logs endless miles circling the

probably as long as there has been a park. A *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* headline from 1908 decried "A Tramp's Paradise is Prospect Park West." Half a century later, the same paper told the story of a pregnant mother and three children, including a ten-month-old "clutching a panda doll," pulled from the park.

In recent years, people utilizing park space in inventive ways have drawn ire and disdain. In 2012, the *Brooklyn Paper* criticized "vagrants" for living in hollowed-out dead trees and "destroying a delicate ecosystem."

As this story was being written, the city's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released its annual "Hope Count," an estimate of the number of homeless. The count is considered to be low, since its methodology involves visual estimates of homeless people spotted on the streets on a given day. According to the Hope Count, the shelter population is up from 70,685 last year to 72,565. Two thirds of those in shelters are families. The street homeless population is estimated at just under 4,000, 39 percent above last year's number. To get an idea of how much the homeless population has grown in recent years, consider a 2011 Coalition for the Homeless report announc-

Continued on page 16



ALL PHOTOS ELIA GRAN

**COUNTED OUT:** Nobody knows for certain how many people are living in and around Prospect Park. What everyone agrees on is that the number is up.

**HARD TO BEAT:** Thomas "Drum Man" Harris blames the machinations of the Airbnb economy for the uptick in homelessness in his neighborhood.

**BROKEN SYSTEM:** As one homeless advocate put it: "Every conversation between the media and the city agencies should start with where's the \$1.7 billion going?"

# NEIGHBORHOOD GRANTS

Have a great idea to improve your neighborhood?



## CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR NEW YORK CITY

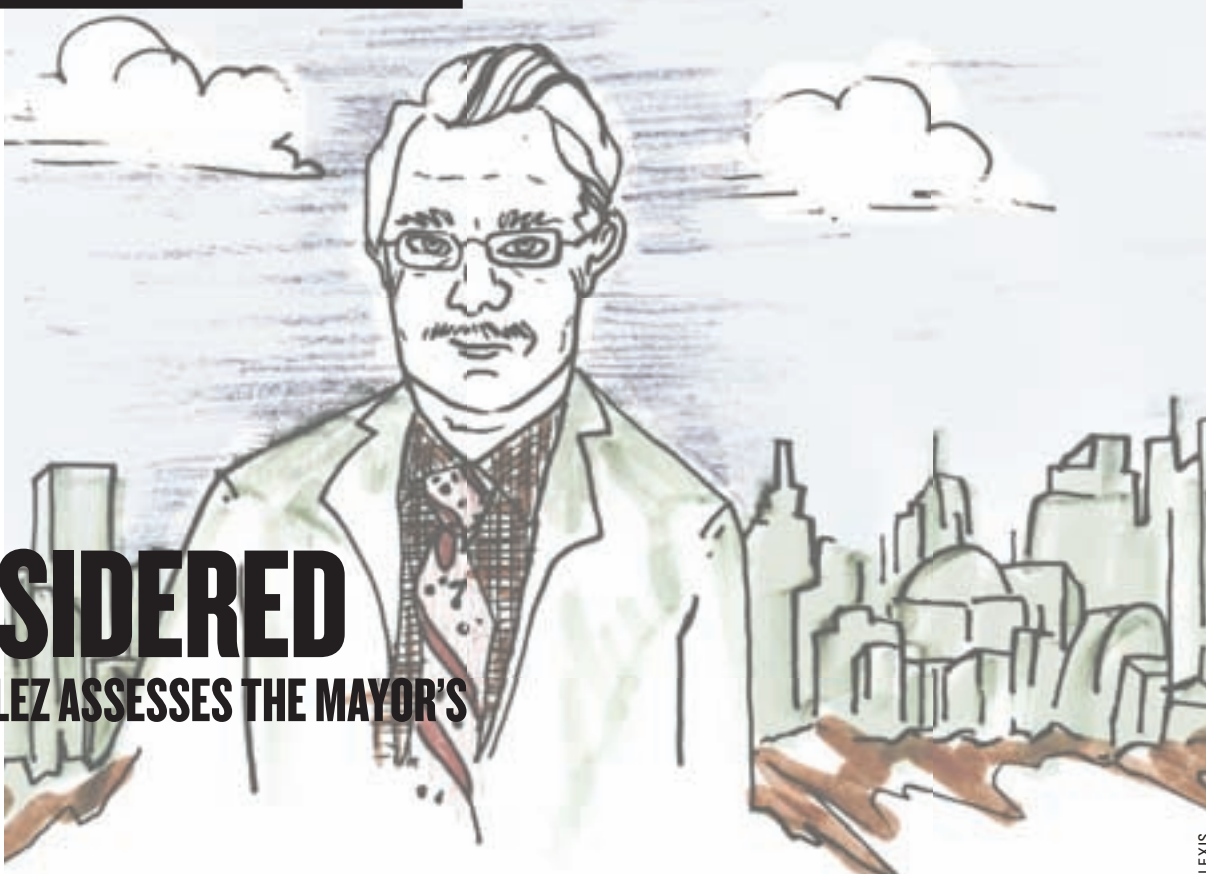
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**APPLICATIONS DUE JANUARY 22, 2018**

# DE BLASIO RECONSIDERED

## LEGENDARY NYC JOURNALIST JUAN GONZÁLEZ ASSESSES THE MAYOR'S FIRST-TERM SUCCESSES AND FAILURES



CHARLYNE ALEXIS

BY JOHN TARLETON

**W**hen Juan González retired last year from a long and distinguished career as a reporter, including 29 years at the *New York Daily News*, he didn't miss it. "Forty years was enough," he said recently as we walked over to a Chelsea coffee shop following his morning stint co-hosting Democracy Now!.

That may be. But González still has an unerring instinct for where the big story may lie. This fall he came out with his fifth book, *Reclaiming Gotham: Bill de Blasio and the Movement to End America's Tale of Two Cities* (New Press, 2017) that looks at the impact of New York City's 109th mayor and other progressive urban leaders like him who have taken power in recent years.

Where many on the left have been critical of de Blasio for his close ties to the real estate industry and his tepid attempts to reform the NYPD, González argues that de Blasio has accomplished more for the working people of the city than any mayor since Fiorello LaGuardia in the 1930s. Nonetheless, he adds, de Blasio will need a "hard push" from activists to fulfill the most important items on his second-term agenda.

**JOHN TARLETON:** *After 20 years of rule by Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, there was tremendous anticipation following Bill de Blasio's 2013 election on the promise to address the "Tale of Two Cities." How do you assess de Blasio's performance so far as he prepares to begin a second term?*

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** I place de Blasio in the context of a much broader movement that has erupted across the United States in recent years that has brought progressive mayors to power in a number of cities. De Blasio is not the most progressive of these elected officials. The difference is that de Blasio administers the largest city in America, a city that is the center of world capitalism, that directly employs more than 300,000 people and whose \$82 billion annual budget exceeds that of many nations. So we're talking about a huge administrative apparatus that is now being led by someone who espouses progressive views.

I supported John Liu in the 2013 Democratic primary, not de Blasio. So I have actually been surprised by how much of a progressive agenda he has enacted — universal pre-k, paid sick leave, increased minimum wage and much more. You would have to go back to Fiorello La Guardia in the 1930s to come up with a mayor who has directly and concretely affected the lives of ordinary

New Yorkers at the level that de Blasio has. Has he fallen short in several areas? Yes. I think the biggest has been the construction of new affordable housing. But in the sum total of all the reforms that he has managed to effect in a condition of a deep right-wing drift in this country, I think it's remarkable.

**Why is it important for the left to win control of municipal governments?**

Cities today are the only hope for progressive politics, not just in the United States, but in the industrial world. Federal and regional governments are going increasingly to the right. They're becoming increasingly xenophobic, pro-capitalism, pro-imperialism.

The cities are the only place where there's racial diversity, where there's tolerance, where there's the desire for sustainable development. You have to build a base area somewhere. And for me, the only place to build mass base areas right now is not in the labor movement, because the labor movement has been decimated. It's in the cities. But to do it in the cities, you have to build cross-class alliances and negotiate. You have to risk the possibility that your leader turns out to be a total fuck-up (laughs) and gets caught up in the trappings of power and celebrity. That's a risk you take, because there are no radical political parties to hold them accountable.

**In *Reclaiming Gotham*, you assert that de Blasio has curbed the urban growth machine model in which the government assists the real estate developers in maximizing profits from the land they control. Yet, when I look around New York, I see ever more luxury condo towers being built for people who live in a whole other stratosphere.**

In certain areas de Blasio has definitely sought to suppress the old urban growth machine model. He's refused to subsidize any more mega-project deals like Hudson Yards or Atlantic Yards where housing is an adjunct to a much bigger commercial development project. On the existing rent-stabilized housing, he's produced historic lows in rent increases, which has directly benefited tenants and hurt landlords. And he's investing heavily in fixing public housing.

Where he has failed, and where I think almost all of the progressive mayors have failed, is in coming up with a model to build new low-cost housing in urban America. In the absence of any federal or state attempt to build low-income hous-

ing, he has adopted the erroneous viewpoint that you can trade height or density for affordability. The difference is that you're now requiring a certain percentage of affordability, whereas previous administrations have pretty much left it up to the whims of the developers.

I think he's too beholden to the developer community on the issue of how to build affordable housing. He's giving up too much height, he's not requiring enough affordability and the affordability that he's requiring is not at the lowest levels of income that are necessary to meet the crisis. The key thing that he would need to do is get the for-profit developers out of affordable housing and just do it as nonprofits — whether cooperatives or nonprofit housing developments.

**Another problem that often plagues progressive mayors is how to manage their police department. In de Blasio's case, it often seems as if he is more a captive of the NYPD than the man who is ultimately in charge of it.**

**"CITIES TODAY ARE THE ONLY HOPE FOR PROGRESSIVE POLITICS."**

I don't think he became a captive of the police force. But he did make compromises with it. As I mention in my book, de Blasio was a young aide to Mayor David Dinkins in 1992 when there was a famous police riot at City Hall against legislation to create the Civilian Complaint Review Board. It was total bedlam. The police, I believe, stopped working under Dinkins and the annual number of murders peaked at 2,000 compared to the 300 or so we have now.

Because of what he saw under Dinkins, I think when de Blasio got into office he realized, "I have a very ambitious social agenda. If I have to battle the police from the beginning, I'm not going to be able to accomplish much of my social agenda."

So, he decided to bring in Bill Bratton as police commissioner because he felt that Bratton had the respect of the city's elites and of the rank-and-file — and that Bratton could take care of the police department while he implemented his social agenda.

I wouldn't have chosen Bratton, but I understand why de Blasio did it. Bratton was still into

*Continued on page 16*

## BRIEFING ROOM



### IMMIGRATION ACTIVIST RAVI RAGBIR FACES DEPORTATION ONCE MORE

“According to the policy, I could be deported,” said Ravi Ragbir, head of the New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, when *The Independent* called him for an update on his scheduled check-in with immigration authorities. Ragbir’s current stay of removal expires Jan. 18. But he has a groundswell of support from the community. For himself and innumerable others facing similar check-ins, Ragbir helped pioneer an accompaniment program in which supporters join them in the waiting area and courtroom. Ragbir’s check-in on March 9 drew hundreds of supporters who accompanied him, and they turned out again in April. Both times he was allowed to stay. His support committee urges people to join in solidarity with Ragbir and families facing deportation when he appears for his check-in on Thursday, Jan. 11 at 9 a.m. in the northwest corner of Foley Square.

### RIGHT TO ‘NO’

The City Council passed a package of police reforms on Dec. 19, but not before one of the bills lost the support of its original champions: civil rights organizations, public defenders and families of those killed by police. Part of the Right to Know Act, the bill requires the NYPD to identify themselves and provide a reason for stops during non-emergency interactions with the public, but was amended to exempt low-level and vehicular encounters. The bill “fails to require officer identification in the majority of police-community interactions and allows for unchecked officer discretion in determining whether to provide an explanation for any law enforcement activity,” a coalition of legal aid groups representing Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx said in a statement.

### DEVELOPMENT PLANS APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL

The New York City Council approved sweeping development plans in November that will change the face of two of the metropolis’ most prominent neighborhoods. After winning the support of Crown Heights City Councilmember Laurie Cumbo, lawmakers voted unanimously to sell off the 138,000-square-foot Bedford-Union Armory to BFC Partners. Activists who mounted a campaign against the proposal were successful in nixing proposed condos

at the site and winning more affordable housing, though their push for the city-owned property to be converted into a community land trust rather than privatized was unsuccessful. The council also greenlit a rezoning proposal that will allow higher density buildings in East Harlem. Proponents of the measure argued that larger buildings will generate more affordable housing, but as its detractors point out, a greater percentage of the new apartments will go for market rate, which will drive up housing costs in the neighborhood overall.

### STILL

**HERE:** Ravi Ragbir, executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition.

PETER RUGH

### DISSENT ON TRIAL

As *The Independent* went to press, a verdict was expected in the trial of six defendants charged with conspiracy to riot for attending Inauguration Day protests in Washington, D.C. In total, 194 people are expected to go on trial in a series of federal prosecutions related to the demonstration, which resulted in minor property damage near the National Mall. They face decades in prison. Though the government concedes that none of the defendants were involved in the destruction, it claims the dark clothing they wore to the protest is evidence they participated in a wider conspiracy. The trial will likely set a template for the prosecutions of the remaining defendants in the case, as well for as how the government treats dissenters in the Trump era. Visit [independent.org](http://independent.org) for the latest updates.

### TOUGH TIMES FOR UBER

Uber is a transportation company, not simply a software platform, the European Union’s highest court ruled this month despite objections from the firm. Based on the European Court of Justice’s ruling, E.U. states can regulate Uber as they would any other taxi company. Uber will be subject to taxes and worker protections with which E.U. members govern their transportation sectors. The company has flaunted such laws to monopolize the taxi market and drive down wages, not only in Europe but everywhere it has established itself. There are 46,000 Uber-connected cars on the road in New York City today.

— INDEPENDENT STAFF

A Daily Independent  
Global News Hour  
with Amy Goodman  
and Juan González

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HOW CAPITAL IS RESHAPING THE BATTLEGROUND OF CLASS WAR

KIM MOODY

“Moody’s “new terrain” is not a world, as most would have it, where globalization has left U.S. workers helpless. It shows how corporations’ inevitable push for profits actually opens up new vulnerabilities—if only unions can get their act together. He explodes myths about the gig economy and the potential to transform the Democratic Party. Readers will put the book down convinced that there is a way for workers to win.”

—JANE SLAUGHTER

January 2018 THE INDEPENDENT

# THE MUCKRAKER VS. THE MUCK

## A CRUSADING JOURNALIST IS RUNNING TO TAKE DOWN ONE OF ALBANY'S SLEAZIEST POLS AS NY PROGRESSIVES TAKE AIM AT GOP-CONTROLLED STATE SENATE

By PETER RUGH

**Y**ou might think that New York State, with its overwhelmingly liberal populace, would provide a blueprint for barricades or at least buffers lawmakers might erect against the far-right agenda now frothing out of Washington. But no. Universal health care, stronger rent regulations and tenant protections, cuts to greenhouse gas emissions, a genuine medical marijuana program, early voting, campaign finance reform, and tuition assistance for undocumented college students are just some of the progressive reforms that have gone to the state Senate to die.

With the blessing of its Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo, New York has become an exemplar of self-serving, dysfunctional state government, in which a faction of renegade Democrats expresses support for “progressive” initiatives while facilitating Republican control of the legislature’s upper house. Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison, deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee, has called the New York state Senate’s governing system “a danger to the nation.”

But look out, Albany. An emerging cadre of Democratic candidates plan on busting up the delicate balance of power in Albany in 2018 and blue-ifying New York — *for real*.

Among them is Ross Barkan, a journalist by trade, who in October announced his candidacy in the 22nd Senate district in southern Brooklyn. Tired of beating Albany over the head with his pen, first for the *Observer* — until the Jared Kushner-owned rag endorsed Donald Trump for President — and later for the *Village Voice* and *Gothamist*, the 28-year-old opted to step into the political arena himself.

“I understand how the system works, why it succeeds and why it fails,” Barkan says. “I know what motivates politicians, for better and worse, and I have a strong understanding of the issues. I’ve held the system to account from the outside. Now I will do it from the inside.”

On a rainy December night in Long Island City at John Brown’s Smokehouse, as a fundraiser for Barkan wound down in a tent behind the brisket joint, he explained what first motivated him to run for office. It was over the summer, when New York City’s subway crisis began to reach its apex and Gov. Cuomo wondered out loud “who’s in charge.” (He is.) As is the case in much of the city, the trains in Barkan’s native Bay Ridge neighborhood run infrequently, and none of the stations in District 22 are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. He wants the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s (MTA’s) budget boosted, and for the agency to spend money on computerizing its Depression-vintage signaling system rather than on flashy beautification projects backed by the governor.

“It’s a system-wide failure,” Barkan says. “And there has been a lack of impetus on the part of a lot of elected officials to hold the MTA to account, to hold the governor to account, to really say, ‘Here is the problem. Here is how we can actually try to fix it.’”

His get-down-to-business approach to the troubles afflicting America’s largest subway system is indicative of Barkan’s political style. He plans to tell it like it is, unlike the buckpassing politicians he has covered over the years. “You’re going to know where I stand on an issue,” he promises. “I have great relationships with people who are very conservative. We agree on nothing, but they know where I’m coming from. They know I’m an honest person.”

Those relationships with conservatives might come in handy if Barkan’s reform politics are to at least receive an airing in District 22, an artfully gerrymandered bastion of mostly ethnic-white and Republican voters that looks something like a cubist interpretation of a trowel imposed diagonally over Brooklyn’s south end. The fat northwestern handle of the district takes up Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights, Fort Hamilton and a chunk of Bensonhurst, avoiding the public-housing projects of Coney Island and Bensonhurst. Conveniently slim in the middle — save for a northwestern detour at Ocean Parkway — it bloats out again in a V shape, shoveling up the Gerritsen Beach and Manhattan Beach neighborhoods to its south and Marine Park to the north, much to the benefit of Barkan’s opponent, Republican incumbent Martin Golden.

New York State voters are predominantly blue but, in part due to gerrymandering, the state legislature is a bruised purple. For decades, the Democrats in control of the Assembly have outlined districts to their advantage, and by mutual agreement have allowed the Republicans in control of the Senate to do the same. Backroom deals, lax campaign-finance laws, lulus — stipends that come with committee chairmanships — and, of course, pork are other ingredients in how the sausage is made in the state’s capital.

For a muckraker aiming to take on the muck, Barkan could not have chosen an opponent more drenched in mire. Golden has funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign funds from landlord and law enforcement lobbies into his family catering business since he was first elected in 2002. His office did not respond to requests for comment on this article.

A staunch defender of Trump, Golden has been stoking the flames of controversy long before Boss Tweet’s ascent to power. In 2012, his office cancelled a workshop it planned to host that promised to teach women how to “sit, stand, and walk like a model” and “walk up and down a stair elegantly,” after women’s groups raised an outcry. In a 2015 Facebook post that Barkan himself reported on at the time, Golden jokingly conflated the Supreme Court’s decision legalizing same-sex marriage with the lifting of marijuana prohibitions in several states, writing: “It all makes sense now. Gay marriage and marijuana being legalized on the same day. Leviticus 20:13 — ‘if a man lays with another man he should be stoned.’ We’ve just been interpreting it wrong all these years.”

On Dec. 11, confronted by a Brooklyn bicyclist when a Cadillac he was traveling in drove through multiple red lights and nearly ran the man off the road, Golden impersonated a police officer and threatened to bring him to “the precinct,” the cyclist said. When the cyclist, who did not initially realize he was in the presence of a state senator, asked who he was, Golden responded, “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Barkan said he hopes to raise “several hundred thousand dollars” through small contributions. Last summer’s City Council bid by Palestinian-American pastor

Khader El-Yateem in Bay Ridge serves as an inspiration for Barkan. El-Yateem raised over \$100,000 before he narrowly lost the September Democratic primary. Though he resists being pigeonholed with the Berniecrat label, Barkan is seeking endorsements from the Working Families Party and the Democratic Socialists of America, which sent many of its 2,000-plus New York City members out knocking on doors for El-Yateem.

Barkan says he is already excited by the “number of people, the wide array of people, from all backgrounds” who have given to his campaign. Like El-Yateem, he wants to connect with the changing face of southern Brooklyn — home to a growing Arab population that enthusiastically supported Bernie Sanders in the 2016 presidential primaries — but to also be a candidate the district’s older white voters can get behind, by addressing bread-and-butter policy concerns.

“When I talk about our failing transportation system, when I talk about health care, when I talk about over-development and the real-estate industry running the state, [voters] are very receptive,” Barkan says. “And I tell them, ‘You know what? Marty Golden is in the pocket of big real-estate developers.’ And they go, ‘Wow.’ And suddenly something clicks in their head.”

Barkan sees his campaign as paralleling the primary challenges to the members of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) — the breakaway Democrats who share power with the Republicans. Technically speaking, Democrats hold 32 seats in the Senate to the Republicans’ 31, but the GOP wields power thanks to the IDC, along with Sen. Simcha Felder of Borough Park, a Democrat who caucuses with the Republicans.

“They’re turncoat Democrats, Trump Democrats,” said former City Councilmember Robert Jackson, who led a decade-long battle for fair state funding for urban school districts before entering electoral politics. He is challenging the IDC’s Marisol Alcantara for

### MARTY’S MOOLAH

Marty Golden (pictured at right) has repeatedly raised the eyebrows of government watchdogs for funneling campaign funds to Bay Ridge Manor, a catering business owned by his brother, where his wife works as an administrator. Golden was its proprietor until 2002, when he sold the company to his brother after he was first elected to the state Senate. He remains the owner of the building where it’s located, and continues to receive rent on the property.

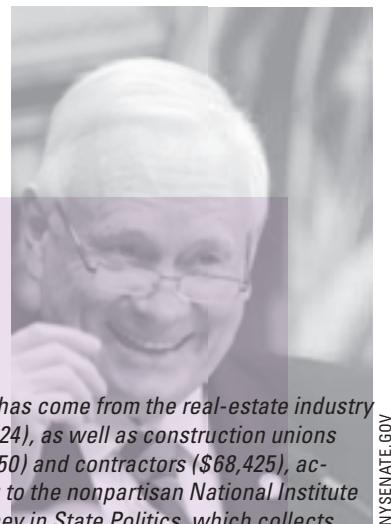
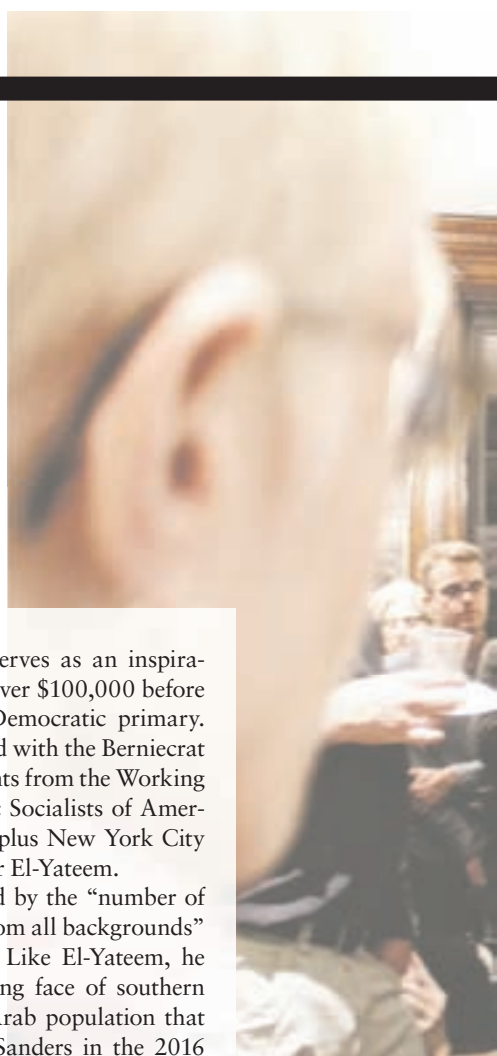
Despite scathing coverage spanning nearly a decade of Golden’s nepotistic use of campaign money, he has kept at it. A peek at his most recent expenditure report, filed following the 2016 elections in which he ran unopposed, shows that Friends of Marty Golden dropped almost \$20,000 at his brother’s business in November 2016 alone — \$3,300 for a “community cocktail party,” about \$5,700 for a Veterans Day breakfast and \$10,850 for an “election night town hall.”

A large portion of Golden’s campaign

money has come from the real-estate industry (\$284,424), as well as construction unions (\$160,150) and contractors (\$68,425), according to the nonpartisan National Institute on Money in State Politics, which collects campaign contribution data.

Landlords and their lobbying groups, such as the Neighborhood Preservation PAC and the Rent Stabilization Association — an organization that advocates for weakening and eventually eliminating rent-stabilization tenants — have put over \$100,000 toward Golden. With many of his constituents owning single-family homes, developers and landlords see the senator as someone who can oppose tenant-friendly legislation without fearing voter reprisals. Lobbying shops and unions that represent police and corrections officers, however, are by far Golden’s largest givers. They’ve showered his campaigns with \$387,000 over the years.

— PETER RUGH



NYSENATE.GOV





TIGLO SASSANO

her Upper Manhattan seat. Attorney Zellnor Myrie is looking to knock off IDC member Jesse Hamilton of Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, and Jessica Ramos, a former labor union staffer turned aide to Mayor Bill de Blasio, is mulling a run against Jose Peralta in Jackson Heights.

Their candidacies come amid a year-long grassroots push by activists with the Working Families Party, Fordham School of Law professor Zephyr Teachout — who won more than one-third of the vote in her longshot challenge to Gov. Cuomo in the 2014 Democratic primary — and others who have held rallies in Albany and bird-dogged the Republican collaborators in order to shine light on and break up the alliance.

Treachery has its perks, however.

Senate Republicans have been generous to the IDC turncoats. IDC members receive additional staff, computers and larger offices, and committee chairmanships that attract donors hoping to influence legislation and come with lulus ranging from \$9,000 to \$34,000 a year. As lawmakers often chair multiple committees but can legally receive only one stipend, Republicans opt to receive lulus from the committee with the largest payout, and then pass the cash remaining on the table to GOP and IDC vice chairs, misleadingly listing them as committee leaders on payroll documents submitted to the state comptroller. Jesse Hamilton, for instance, chairs the Banks Committee, receiving a \$15,000 stipend.

The IDC's political chicanery has also meant that Senate Democrats have secured just \$3 million for their districts out of the \$1.6 billion State and Municipal Facilities (SMF) bond issuance program established in 2013, while the Republicans have received \$210 million and IDC members \$35 million. The largest IDC share has gone to the faction's leader, Jeff Klein, who took \$17 million in SMF bonds home to his northeast-Bronx/Westchester district, where a 2018 primary challenger has yet to emerge. Klein has used the dough to put millions of dollars toward park upgrades in his district, according to records from the state Dormitory Authority, which reviews most SMF requests.

"What the IDC has relied on is their ability to bring back some of these perks and to be able to tell the community, 'Well look, I'm doing what's best for you,'" explained Zellnor Myrie. "Once people start realizing we are only getting one slice of the pie when we should be getting the entire pie, people are going to be upset about that."

With each party ruling a legislative house, the spoils are nearly divided: Assembly Democrats have steered \$150 million in SMF earmarks their way, with Republicans getting just \$4 million. But beyond the pork, the power split allows the Assembly and Gov. Cuomo to support liberal legislation, but blame the Senate when the bills are watered down, as happened with 2016's \$15-an-hour minimum-wage law. If a measure goes nowhere, like 2017's universal health care bill, Cuomo and company can also blame the Senate. In neither scenario do they lose face before their well-heeled donors.

"Reaching across the aisle as a principle is a great thing, but blaming the opposition party for not working with you is also a great thing," former Cuomo campaign advisor Hank Sheinkopf told *Politico*, describing how the governor, possibly positioning himself for

a 2020 presidential run, "can have it both ways."

It remains to be seen where the state's powerful labor unions will fall in 2018. In the past they have campaigned for and donated heavily to Cuomo and the IDC senators. With the Trump administration powerfully anti-labor and a pending Supreme Court decision that could force public-employee unions to represent nonmembers for free by banning "fair-share fees," unions could be more likely to back less progressive candidates they are confident will win, in order to have a seat at the table when legislation is drafted or when their contracts are up.

New York unions are "going to do what is best for their members," said Myrie. "I would hope that what they feel is best is real progressives in Albany, people who won't just be satisfied with compromises, but will go on the offensive."

Myrie, Robert Jackson and their comrades have apparently lit a fire under Albany. Cuomo brokered an agreement that is supposed to bring the IDC members back into the mainline Democratic caucus, which has 23 members and is headed by Andrea Stewart-Cousins of Yonkers, who is poised to become the first woman of color to lead either house of the legislature.

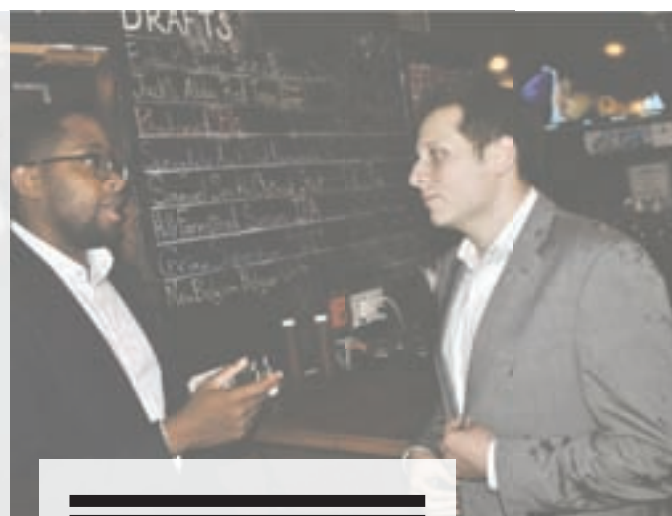
The IDC says it's on board, with Jeff Klein praising the offer as an "assurance that our progressive legislative agenda will be advanced." But Cuomo will likely blunt the deal's effect by not calling a special election to fill two vacant seats in Democratic districts until April, after the March 31 budget deadline — the most important day on the legislative calendar.

The deal was crafted to "delay special elections and allow a Republican budget," Zephyr Teachout tweeted. "We have to double and triple the heat!"

Even if the IDC steps on board, Simcha Felder will likely be a holdout. Secure in his Borough Park seat — home to a conservative, predominantly Orthodox Jewish community — he promptly went over to the Republicans after being elected as a Democrat in 2012. Felder has urged IDC senators to rejoin the Democratic fold, but has made excuse after excuse for not doing so himself, telling one reporter he won't join up with his party again until there is an armed guard stationed at every New York City school. One Republican will have to fall if Democrats hope to win control of the Senate again. Barkan hopes it will be Marty Golden.

"In order to build a strong Democratic majority in the Senate, you have to defeat Republicans," he says. "I see this as a joint effort. We want the same thing. We want a majority of real Democrats who are going to fight for New York City."

In Washington State, an IDC-style agreement in which two Democratic state senators made a power-sharing deal with Republicans ended after last November's elections, when voters gave Democrats full control of both houses of the legislature and the governorship. The odds of knocking off all nine of the New York Senate's renegade Democrats in one election are much steeper. But the days when IDC members could brazenly live a double life in Albany without being noticed by their constituents are over.



PETER RUGH

**STUMP SPEECH:** State senate candidate Ross Barkan speaks to supporters at a house party hosted by the writer Masha Gessen.

**INSURGENTS:** Fellow senate candidate Zellnor Myrie confers with Barkan during a joint fundraiser in Queens.

# HOW TO GIVE TRUMPTY-DUMPTY A PUSH

BY ETHAN YOUNG

Living through this era of rotten feelings is like being trapped in an endless dystopian movie. We now live under an alliance of the old-guard conservatives and the far right (evangelicals, Tea Party and overt white supremacists), funded up the yin-yang by billionaire lunatics. This alliance includes theocrats like Vice President Mike Pence and open fascists, and their beliefs are surging into the mainstream.

The goal of this real-life hydra, which now dominates all three branches of government, has gone beyond the old conservative dream of dismantling the social benefits brought about by the New Deal. Now they are set on destroying what's left of bourgeois democracy. A Hunger Games story is emerging in its place: a tightly controlled state, militarized police, unregulated monopolies, privatized services, a powerless and destitute working class and a culture pulsing with the venom of war and racial hatred.

The role of the electoral opposition largely falls to the corporate-friendly Democratic Party centrists, now decidedly in the minority in Congress despite the GOP's low polling numbers. The centrists did not plan it that way. They play that role because no one else is in any position to put up a fight at that level of politics. But they're lousy at it. They blew the election and they know it, but they don't want to confront their mistakes.

Instead, they are praying for the cavalry, a fairy godmother, any superhero from the power centers of society to come to their rescue. Their appeal has always been to the moderate wing of capitalists: You need us, keep us funded and we'll keep them dogies rollin'. To the public, their appeal is: We'll protect you if you come through with the votes. Between the money guys' indifference and being out-organized in key sectors of key states, those appeals fell flat. Yet they seem to know no other way to play politics.

The Democratic centrists' main hope right now is that the Mueller investigation will bring Trump down with a crash, à la Watergate. They envision a scenario in which Trump's Russian ties get him legally branded a traitor to America. This would get them off the hook for their bungling the election and tarnish the Republicans' image enough to give them a path back to power. It would also enable them to win without offering a strong alternative that would draw on their base's eagerness for change; for more, not less, social welfare and stability, for peace at home and abroad and for democratic rights.

This works out nicely under the tunnel-view formula the center-clingers have cultivated for decades. Follow the shift to the right halfway, keep the left at bay and eventually the public will get sick of the Republicans and return to Old Faithful. So in the face of an active attack on every principle they purport to be about, the centrists still insist on a half-assed response. They are afraid of their party's base. They are afraid of losing favor and financial support from big business and Wall Street.

That's their problem. Our problem is that the stakes

are much more than just win or lose for the Democratic Party. The country and the world are at a critical tipping point. Government is being transformed amid widespread voter disenfranchisement, rampant privatization and monopolization, shrinking wages and the destruction of basic democratic and human rights. And, of course, all the money in the world can't deal with the ravages of a wrecked environment.

We can't afford the Democrats trying to fight the rightist siege with their usual tactics of "bipartisan" halfway trade-offs. Their working assumption is that the more balls-out crazy Trump performs, the more power he'll lose, as Republicans and more moderate supporters defect. Some see Roy Moore's defeat in that light. But generally, without a strong progressive alternative, the crazy becomes normal.

When the media talk about "the resistance," they are usually referring to Democrats in office. Secondarily, they mean the crowds of angry civilians confronting elected officials in town halls, on the heels of the massive women's marches in January. Below the radar, there is widespread opposition, anger and revulsion. This is where the left should come in. Situations like this call for a solid, politically coherent left, but that's what seems to be missing.

The left's role is to move this unrest and opposition in the direction of politics — enabling working-class people to apply pressure where and when it can change the situation in their favor, building their (small-d) democratic strength. This is our mission inside and outside the Democratic Party, in social movements, in unions and in intellectual settings.

The next move should be away from fragmentation and isolation. Each fragment tends to confuse building the left with keeping its own particular project afloat. This is a problem even in the suddenly expanded Democratic Socialists of America and more spontaneous self-conscious resistance groups like Indivisible. There's so much going on in every state and territory, but most of those involved are unaware of it. All of us need to find and connect the pieces into a coordinated mutual project, one with a unified focus on democratic action and potential power.

The focus we need comes down to an immediate, defensive political operation: Unseating and defeating every Republican and "blue dog" (conservative-friendly) Democrat we can, between now and November 2020.

This is workable, based on the electoral wins in 2017, and even the social movement-centered successes of 2008 and 2012. The Bernie Sanders campaign won 13 million votes and opened up space for a class-conscious left populism within the Democratic Party that had not existed since Jesse Jackson ran for President in 1984 and 1988. We have gained ground on popular support for Medicare-for-all, dignity for women and raising the minimum wage, and forced the issues of income inequality, police terror and climate destruction into the discussion, despite the right's offensive.

One reason to play on this field is to isolate the right inside and outside the party. The left is in no position to drive out the Trumpoids without allying with the center, as



JOSE CARMONA

much as we (and they) might like to avoid it. This worked in Virginia this year, when a centrist Democrat was elected governor over a Trump imitator spewing anti-immigrant urban legends, and progressives won a number of legislative seats, including socialist Lee Carter and Danica Roem, Virginia's first transgender state legislator.

This should not be confused with "pushing the Democrats to the left." Centrists will be centrists, dependent on support from corporate donors even when they use leftist-sounding rhetoric for votes or back some leftist goals. But if they actively push back against the GOP, it will create more political space for the left.

Nor does it mean dropping other issues. Single-payer health care? Hurts the rightist regime. Ending police murder and violence? Also. Every social movement that confronts the attack on democratic rights shakes a pillar of the right-far right alliance's influence on voters.

Third-party efforts and campaigning for socialists as Democrats can sometimes be feasible tactics. But in order to cut Trump & Co. off at the knees, we'll also have to work for some lesser evils to break the GOP stranglehold on Congress and state legislatures. A center-left alliance will be necessary over the next three years, even if the centrists have to be dragged into it to avoid collapse.

Politically-minded leftists need to practice solidarity as something more than just mutual sympathy and support. We'll have to make connections across old, entrenched and increasingly obsolete barriers. No single group will achieve this. Competing sects hooking up momentarily won't cut it. It's up to individual group leaders and movement organizers to make up their minds that this approach should be the priority over tending their own gardens. This is happening to a limited extent, and people are finding each other and beginning to talk seriously.

One potential national rallying point is the Poor People's Campaign being organized by Rev. William Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis of Kairos Center. They are reviving Martin Luther King's unfinished Poor People's Campaign of 1968. They plan to draw organized poor people into direct action targeting state and federal authorities to demand that poverty and inequality be addressed. It grows out of the Moral Mondays movement, which helped slow North Carolina's race to the far right after the state government fell under total Republican control in 2012.

The project's goals bridge the gulf between left populism and the crucial sector of working people who are already well acquainted with their fate in the 21st-century U.S. economy. To win the political goal of economic justice, the campaign frames it as a moral issue, in which inequality and lack of workers' rights are simply wrong.

Mass organization + political action = power. Or as Rev. Barber says, "Forward together, not one step back."



DONNA K. WILLIAMS

# EXPANDING THE ELECTORATE

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Peter Hogness saw a spot of hope in Nevada in last year's otherwise disastrous election. Donald Trump lost the state, and Democrats held on to a Senate seat and won control of the state legislature — for which he credits the work of the Culinary Union, UNITE HERE Local 226, which represents more than 55,000 hotel, casino and restaurant workers in the state, mostly women and immigrants.

“What struck me was that the union played the role it did in expanding the electorate and the pool of activists,” he says.

But Hogness, a longtime union staffer and labor journalist, was also well aware of the pitfalls of electoral politics, that the intensity and passion put behind a progressive candidate like Bernie Sanders or Jesse Jackson in the 1980s can “start sucking up all the oxygen” and dissipate after the election.

The result was Water for the Grassroots, an organization founded in February to aid other groups doing “long-term organizing, but active at election time” — particularly those in states that are more likely than New York to elect right-wing politicians who can impose their agenda on the entire nation. This year, it assisted voter-registration, canvassing and get-out-the-vote efforts by grassroots groups in Philadelphia; drummed up support for a Florida ballot initiative that would restore the right to vote to 1.6 million people convicted of felonies other than murder or sexual assault; and raised money for Woke Vote, a black-led campus get-out-the-vote effort in Alabama's Dec. 12 senatorial election.

“We think these elections are important,” says Hogness, “but we also want to put our energy into groups that will be around for the long term.” The group has about 10 to 15 regular participants and 40 to 50 occasional ones, he says.

In Philadelphia, Water for the Grassroots volunteers went door to door in predominantly black North

Philadelphia neighborhoods on behalf of Reclaim Philadelphia and the BLOC Party. Reclaim Philadelphia's main issues include economic equality, criminal justice reform and education, while the BLOC Party seeks to end mass incarceration and “create a voters' bloc” uniting the city's more than 300,000 formerly incarcerated people with community activists and neighborhood residents, says cofounder

Jondhi Harrell. It's also trying to stop a natural gas plant slated for the Nicetown-Tioga neighborhood.

“It was really inspiring to know that people from New York City wanted to come down and help,” says Rich Krajewski of Reclaim Philadelphia.

The groups' electoral efforts were part of their backing of Larry Krasner, who was elected district attorney in November on a platform of changing the office's culture from one “of seeking victory for prosecutors” to one of achieving “real justice for victims and others caught up in the criminal justice system.” Water for the Grassroots volunteers were part of an effort that “knocked on 60,000 doors,” says Harrell.

Krasner's opposition to stop-and-frisk and the death penalty — and that he was not part of the “extremely white supremacist” mainstream of Pennsylvania law enforcement — resonated in North Philadelphia, says Harrell. The political problem for activists there, he adds, is to persuade people that voting can actually change things. If the new prosecutor can fulfill some of his promises, “it's going to be a lot easier for us to mobilize.”

Orange, New Jersey City Council president Donna K. Williams, who joined Water for the Grassroots for one weekend of door-to-door canvassing in Philadelphia, had similar experiences. People who initially ob-

## SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS:

Members of Water for the Grassroots joined community organizers from Reclaim Philadelphia and the BLOC Party last October to go door-to-door canvassing in advance of local elections.

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# [End of Year Giving]

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Continued on page 17

# FINALLY HEARD

## AND LET'S NOT CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

The memories are still crystal clear, four decades later. I remember the shirt I wore, the time of day, the look on his face. He reached out and pressed his finger on my breast. Like most young women of that era, I went without a bra, not much needing it anyway. I was 21, and he was 42, married with kids, and my boss, and he was pressing on my nipple in the middle of our workspace.

My face apparently turned bright red, because he began to make fun of me for not being as much of a hippie as he had supposed. In truth, I was mortified by his presumption, and doubly dismayed because I'd looked up to him. We were a two-person operation, running a mass spectrometry lab for a nuclear-research institute. He ran the lab and I was his student assistant for four years, the only female in a four-story building. After that morning, I started missing work. I was eventually replaced. With a guy.

This tiny story is a drop in the ocean of what can be heard every day now. We are living in a moment of unprecedented global social revolution. Victims have forced the issue into the public domain, achieving an unparalleled visibility. From Argentina to Mexico, from the United States to France, from India to Indonesia, their voices are growing in strength and taking courage from each other's success. Their words have brought down powerful men and put revered institutions — religious, military, media, government, entertainment — on the defensive.

Yet the most recent wave of resignations, firings, and otherwise precipitous departures of high-profile men — including some progressive and avowedly feminist men — has generated a moment of reflection: Has the movement gone too far? Maureen Dowd's Dec. 9 column in the *New York Times* referred to figures such as Senator Al Franken as “road kill” — a term that conjures up images of innocents who got in the way of a speeding vehicle. Feminist theorists and activists have begun a vigorous online debate over the importance of due process and whether we should make “distinctions” between degrees of harm. Has the movement already reached the stage of “la terreur,” when the public executions after the French Revolution attracted cheering mobs? Will this produce, as it did in France, a conservative reaction?

We need to be reflective about the implicitly biased assumptions that may be framing our judgment of a powerful women-led social movement. The British philosopher Jenny Saul has characterized “implicit bias” as operating unconsciously to affect perception and interpretation. Loads of empirical studies have demonstrated its effects on job applications, jury deliberations, electoral campaigns, as well as informal social interactions. Women's rationality has been dismissed for so long and in so many cultures that the image of an unthinking mob of overemotional women may be quite ready in the recesses of our minds. This is how implicit bias works: with troubling ideas and images lurking just below our conscious values and commitments.

Aristotle deemed the tenor and pitch of women's voices a sign of insincerity and depravity, and today female news anchors still go to voice coaches to learn how to lower their tone, trying to achieve a masculine depth. Socrates

believed women's attention to their dress was proof of their intention to dissemble. Immanuel Kant wrote that a woman who studies physics “might as well have a beard.” Georg Hegel likened the difference between men and women to that between animals and plants.

These ideas may seem extreme, but few educational curricula spend the time necessary to thoroughly debunk them. As a result, they remain implicit but powerful parts of our mental landscapes.

The result is what some today refer to as “epistemic injustice,” or, even, epistemicide, when a whole class of persons and sometimes cultures are denied presumptive credibility. The basic human capacity to know reliably and objectively, even to know one's own mind, is routinely denied women. It is unclear whether the global epidemic of sexual violence is the effect of this, or its cause: It ensures that accusers will not be believed.

Thus, the moment we are in is all the more remarkable. Many of the high-profile charges are far from new: Harvey Weinstein's criminal behavior was widely known, Bill Cosby had been formally accused years before and Louis C.K.'s behavior was the subject of comedy routines. What is new is that women are being believed by a wider set of people.

The public visibility of rape and sexual violence today is a complex phenomenon. There continues to be lurid sensationalism and a highly selective focus on certain sorts of victims, but there is also a new form of public declarations of victimization and resistance. Each new case reverberates with the echoes of others around the globe, and across powerful institutions, from the Catholic Church to the U.S. military to the BBC and Fox News, from Ivy League universities to the Hasidic communities in Brooklyn. Victims inside these institutions have taken courage and ideas from others facing similar closed-door, self-protecting organizations.

What we are witnessing is not simply the emergence of a hidden discourse that is now coming into the light of day. Rather, this is contesting the terms in which sexual violations can come into the larger public domain — who can speak, what they can say, who will be accorded credibility, how their speech will be circulated, and what its subsequent effects will be.

Victims are speaking out and gaining a public platform in some cases, but their speech is often packaged, interpreted, given a “spin,” and highly circumscribed. When victims speak out publicly, they put themselves at risk to be discredited, blamed, threatened and physically harmed. Those threats are also echoed globally, exacerbating women's fatalism and giving rape cultures new ideas about how to stifle victims' rebelliousness. Social media has proved to be a double-edged sword: a powerful way to mobilize a movement, but also a means to enact a virtual stoning of accusers.

So when we ask the question, “Has it gone too far?” we need to consider: “What is the ‘it’?” The power shift in which accusers are accorded credibility? The seriousness accorded to sexual harassment? What the public has learned from

### WOMEN'S STRIKE

The International Women's Strike, which organized a successful rally this past March 8 to build an anti-racist and anti-colonialist “feminism for the 99 percent,” is again working to expose “lean-in” and corporate feminism. People in more than 50 countries participated in this first coordinated international day of

feminist action in years. Today we need a new wave of feminist mobilization to focus on the problem's systemic and economic nature. For more information email [internationalwomenstrikenyc@gmail.com](mailto:internationalwomenstrikenyc@gmail.com).

— LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF



these courageous victims in the past two months is pretty profound: That sexual harassment can escalate into assault and rape; that the scale of the problem is just as large as feminists have long claimed; that harassment is so institutionally protected and promulgated that it has a systematic effect on women's employment. And that women are not going to back down.

However much power some accusers may seem to have today, we need to remember that survivors are rarely if ever in control of the ways in which our speech is edited, processed, packaged, publicized, globally transmitted, interpreted, understood or taken up as a cause for action, or of the kinds of action that ensue. We are speaking, but the institutional contexts and domains of public communication that our speech is entering do not share our priorities. These domains mainly want to protect their brands, their consumer market-share and the institutions of our society. Like any smart aristocracy, they are trying to calculate how much change is necessary to keep the peasants at work.

We are seeing mostly celebrity stories because that's what sells. Sexual violence is a dramatic story that garners attention, and as such, it has value as a political football. It is being used as one in competitions between political parties, media empires and corporations. It has long been used to legitimate war and a racist carceral system. This should not deter us from speaking out, but we need to think strategically. Our voices are too often used for agendas that have nothing whatsoever to do with finding the real causes of the problem or the real solutions.

Social movements based in social media are not strategic. This is both an advantage and a problem. The decentralized nature of social media can inspire more participation; unlike orchestrated demonstrations or reform movements with pre-set goals, there is a sense that anything might happen, and anyone can make a difference.

We need distinctions, and we need due process, but this revolution has erupted because the current theories and procedures and laws and rules are forms of management: managing the problem and managing the victims. The status quo is not acceptable.

The strategic questions are how to enlarge the movement to include workers and immigrants, the most vulnerable groups of victims. How to help the broader public see through media spin. And finally, how to outsmart those who would exploit our courage for their own purposes. We have our own agenda.

Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at the City University of New York, author of the forthcoming book *Rape and Resistance* (Polity Press) and a member of International Women's Strike NYC. Her writings can be found at [www.alcoff.com](http://www.alcoff.com).

### GLOBAL #METOO

It began with a tweet.

In the wake of sexual harassment and assault accusations against Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein, Alyssa Milano made a simple request on Twitter: for victims of harassment to write “me too,” a phrase first used by social activist Tarana Burke a decade ago, in order to demonstrate how pervasive the problem of sexual harassment and abuse is. Within three weeks, there were more than 2 million #metoo tweets from 85 countries.

Here's a look at how the #metoo movement has spread around the world.

#### BRITAIN

Britain's Defense Secretary Michael Fallon resigned in November after he was publicly accused of misconduct by a number of women journalists, as well as the Commons leader Andrea Leadsom. Other Members of Parliament are under investigation now as well, including one individual who sent his secretary to buy sex toys for him. The #metoo movement has also given attention to incidents from the past, including the case of a woman who said she was sexually assaulted by a Member of Parliament, but was ignored despite her reporting it four times.

#### ISRAEL

Israeli activists reported that the movement arrived in Israel as well, as scores of women are publishing their personal experiences on social media. On live TV, news anchor Oshrat Kotler shared her personal story of being propositioned by the head of an Israeli media giant 15 years ago, when she was a young journalist. He now stands accused of rape and misconduct by at least three other women. And

Israeli native Gal Gadot refused to sign on to a sequel to *Wonder Woman* until Hollywood executive Brett Ratner, who has also been accused of harassment by other women, was removed from the franchise, a campaign which proved successful.

#### IVORY COAST

Laetitia Ky, an artist who has amassed a large Instagram following for the unique and creative sculptures she makes with her hair, published an image of a sculpture where a man is lifting a woman's skirt. The photo was accompanied by a powerful message to her more than 60,000 followers: “...I repeat it once more, dare to talk about it, dare to SNITCH ON YOUR PIGS...talk to the people around you so they can bring you all the support that the victims desperately need to start the process of healing.”

#### SWEDEN

Though Sweden is typically considered a bastion of gender equality, #metoo inspired thousands of people to attend 13 rallies across the country. In one of the most high-profile scandals there, an individual involved with the Swedish Academy, which is responsible for awarding the Nobel Prizes, is being investigated after being accused of rape and abuse by 18 women. Employment Minister Ylva Johansson said Swedish women have had enough. “For such a long time, women's experiences have been diminished down to something not that important or not very serious. But thanks to #metoo, the magnitude of it all becomes visible.”

— BIANCA FORTIS

# P IS FOR PRIVATIZATION

## HOW TEACHERS & PARENTS PREVENTED SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE MARIA

BY CAMILLE BAKER & LYDIA McMULLEN-LAIRD

**W**hen Nilda Sánchez and her children ventured outside after Hurricane Maria waged a direct hit on Puerto Rico, aluminum road signs were crumpled by the highway near their house and trees crisscrossed each other like slain animals in the street. The power and water were off, and remained so for six weeks. It was nearly three months before Sánchez learned whether another of the mainstays in her family's life would be restored: her son's education.

Sebastián, Sánchez's 9-year-old son, had been receiving therapy for his learning disabilities at Instituto Loaiza Cordero, a public school in their San Juan neighborhood. Already the school had been shut down following Hurricane Irma's sweeping of the island Sept. 6. For the next three months, Sánchez had no word on how much damage the school had sustained in the storms, and no inkling of whether or when it would reopen.

Their hardships multiplied. Sánchez began to worry that Sebastián, who suffers from developmental delays in hand-eye coordination and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, was regressing without therapy and the routine of school. Child support payments from Sánchez's ex-husband — whom she left, she said, after he became abusive toward her — stopped coming, slipping through the cracks of administrative upheaval. Without anywhere else to be, Sebastián had to accompany Sánchez to the few job interviews she could find in the hurricane's wake.

Sánchez says Hurricane Maria opened her eyes to the "cruelty" of living in bureaucratic limbo.

On Dec. 4, three months after Irma shut down Instituto Loaiza Cordero, and after its reopening was twice scheduled then postponed, a handful of students trickled through the front door at the morning bell. Sebastián, who Sánchez says had taken to sleeping in his school uniform, excitedly wheeled his backpack through the schoolyard.

Public schools in Puerto Rico began reopening roughly three weeks after Hurricane Maria, according to the island's Department of Education (DOE), and 97 percent of island's approximate 1,100 schools were open by the first week of December. The reopenings come after a protracted battle that pitted union leaders, parents and teachers against the DOE, led by Secretary of Education Julia Keleher, whom activists accuse of trying to render the temporary school closures necessitated by Maria permanent. Officials stalled in order to drive down enrollment and continue a trend of public school shutdowns on the island, say the critics who allege the ultimate goal was to privatize the \$3 billion per year public education system.

Privatization is ultimately a matter for the island's leadership to determine, but Keleher and the DOE ap-

peared to be attempting to make the decision easier for them. "[W]e should not underestimate the damage or the opportunity to create new, better schools," Keleher wrote on Twitter on Oct. 26, using Katrina "as a point of reference."

New Orleans fired the entirety of its unionized classroom workforce following the 2005 hurricane. Teachers were forced to reapply for their jobs at the private, decentralized charter schools that replaced the city's public schools. Many were not rehired. Only five traditional public schools remain today, and while student test scores have improved, critics say that is because charters persistently drop students with special needs from their rolls in order to bolster testing data and secure funding.

In Puerto Rico, however, a campaign of popular resistance that grew in the path of Hurricane Maria's destruction has so far been able to deter possible school closures, at least for the time being.

"At the beginning, the DOE didn't want to open the schools," says Rafael Feliciano Hernández, a former president of the Puerto Rican Federation of Teachers. "They wanted to close the schools for four months then to reopen them as charters. We fought. We joined forces with the community."

Dozens of protests have been staged in the months since the storm, involving hundreds of parents, students, teachers and other advocates. Jinnette Morales Díaz, the mother of a 12-year-old child with Down syndrome and other disabilities whose school in the municipality of Guaynabo was closed for more than 50 days after Hurricane Maria, went on hunger strike outside the DOE's San Juan headquarters on Nov. 2. Just hours into her hunger strike, the DOE announced her daughter's school would reopen. Five days later, 19 people were arrested during a sit-in organized by the Puerto Rican Federation of Teachers at DOE headquarters.

Sec. Keleher, who until January 2016 worked as a management consultant in Washington, D.C., denied intentionally keeping schools closed, telling *The Independent* that each school building had to be inspected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) before it could welcome students back. Keleher said she was "personally informed" of schools with active mold and missing roofs. "They were, by everyone's estimation, unsafe conditions."

The Corps has publicly refuted Keleher's claim that it was keeping schools closed, and advocates contend that many of the schools that were shuttered for months after the hurricane sustained little or no damage in the storm. Some even had power and water where the communities surrounding them did not. "They tried to [institute a] neoliberal agenda using the U.S. Corps of Engineers to justify the lack of response to our communities," said Edwin Morales, vice president of the teachers federation. "That that was a lie."

An important factor in Puerto Rico's education battle is the island's massive debt crisis. The territory is sad-

dled with \$74 billion in public debt and the island's Fiscal Control Board — instituted by Congress in 2016 to supervise a debt restructuring — imposed budget cuts across several departments, including the DOE, which represents nearly one-third of Puerto Rico's \$9 billion annual budget. Even before the debt crisis, public education shouldered cutbacks.

The DOE closed 150 schools between 2010 and 2015. Then, in May, the DOE announced it would close 179 more, estimating it would save about \$7 million per year on water and electric costs at the schools. The DOE is using the fiscal crisis "to justify budget cuts and make rightsizing measures" that especially impact poor children, said Morales.

In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that over 40 percent of Puerto Rico residents were living below the poverty level. Closing and consolidating schools leaves poor Puerto Ricans with limited educational options.

Kelvin Coffie, whose 11-year-old son has autism, says Puerto Rico's 120,000 plus disabled students suffer disproportionately from school closings since they require special services and have a more difficult time adapting to new school settings. His son's school is still closed despite having sustained no major structural damage in the hurricane. Coffie said none of the other schools in his district are equipped to serve students with disabilities. "If they don't open the school, I don't know where I'm going to put my son," he said.

Additionally, advocates continue to worry a mass exodus of students to the United States will lead to future school closures and disenfranchise the families who remain.

When asked how many schools will eventually close in the aftermath of Maria, Keleher said she would have to wait until January to tabulate what "our population looks like, because the dust hasn't settled yet." She said her October tweet was "referring strictly to the physical conditions" of schools in New Orleans post Katrina. "I have not opined on the issue [of privatization]. I have done nothing and I have said nothing," she said, adding that she is "going to look and fight for every resource and every dollar that I can bring to the island."

At Instituto Loaiza Cordero, two weeks after reopening, many students are absent. Nilda Sánchez fears her son's classmates will never return. "Some are out of Puerto Rico," she explains. "Some of them cannot go to the school or do not know that the school is open."

Monica Espitia contributed to this article.



**BACK TO SCHOOL:** Sebastián Emmanuel Delgado Sánchez, 9, pictured outside the Instituto Loaiza Cordero in San Juan, the day it opened after being closed for nearly three months.

# TRUMP'S TAX HEIST FOR THE RICH

BY DEAN PATTERSON

**L**awmakers on Capitol Hill approved massive tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and corporations on Dec. 20. Rallies against the Republican legislation were held across the country, including a protest in front of the New York Stock Exchange in which hundreds of demonstrators participated.

According to an analysis by the Tax Policy Center, the final version of the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” gives the highest-earning 1 percent of households, those with incomes of at least \$733,000, an average tax cut of \$50,000. Those in the top .1 percentile, earning \$3.4 million or more, will receive a \$190,000 cut on average.

There are a number of other goodies embedded in the legislation that further favor the rich, including a provision that allows for a new deduction on income earned from real estate “pass-through” entities, such as limited liability corporations (LLCs). Fourteen Republican senators with investments in holding companies whose assets amount to a combined total of \$105 million stand to personally benefit from the law, as does President Trump. His financial portfolio contains 560 such businesses.

Middle- and low-income households will see a modest break from the tax bill, but the benefits they receive will taper off over the next 10 years, with only cuts for high earners remaining.

By eliminating the Affordable Care Act’s health coverage mandate, the tax bill is expected to drive up premiums, forcing millions of poor- and middle-income Americans, unable to keep up with rising health-care costs, off of insurance rolls. They will thereby no longer receive tax breaks and subsidies provided to those with coverage. Four million Americans will no longer have health insurance by 2019, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Thirteen million will be without coverage within the next decade.

Over that timeframe, the CBO estimates that the tax cuts will add \$1.4 trillion to the deficit, which advocates fear will be used to justify reductions to health, education, welfare and other forms of social spending. Additionally, the bill eliminates nearly all deductions for state and local taxes, shifting more of a burden on to taxpayers in states with robust public pensions and social programs. Republicans are betting that taxpayers will be less willing to support such spending if they are forced to front a larger portion of the costs.

Already, the unpaid-for tax cuts automatically trigger yearly reductions to Medicare, agriculture subsidies, student loans, affordable housing and other programs that begin at \$114 billion and will mount to \$150 billion by 2027. A total of \$400 billion will be gutted from Medicare.

“The tax bill is part of a class war we are caught in with Wall Street corporations,” said Jim Perlstein, a retired professor and an organizer with the Professional Staff Congress, a union representing 27,000 current and former CUNY faculty and professional staff that helped

organize the Dec. 19 rally in front of the Stock Exchange on Wall Street. “This bill is an assault on every part of life the union represents. It will devastate the public service sector we represent.”

Sherry Wolf, an organizer with the 8,000-member American Association of University Professors at Rutgers, commented on the irony of the bill’s passage during the Christmas season: “The rich have launched this attack on the public as a gift to themselves. They are relying on people paying the least amount of attention at this time of year.” The public, especially public-sector unions, must amp up their resistance, she said. “We are under siege and we ought not to stand in paralysis. They want to dismantle public institutions for their private benefit.”

Activists from the faculty unions staged a civil disobedience during the protest, blocking a gated passageway leading to the Stock Exchange building. After 20 minutes of warnings by the police to “willingly open the pedestrian walkway,” 15 protesters were arrested. The sit-in was largely symbolic, however, given that little stands in the way of the legislation.

The tax act will likely arrive on President Trump’s desk before Dec. 25 and defeating it could take a Christmas miracle, although he may delay signing the measure until January to suspend cuts to social spending until 2019, after next year’s Congressional elections. Nevertheless, in 2018, protesters plan to continue to lay the groundwork for unraveling the legislation in the streets and at the ballot box — a new year’s resolution they aim to keep.

## REVOLT:

Demonstrators take part in a sit-in outside the New York Stock Exchange on Dec. 19.



ERIK MCGREGOR

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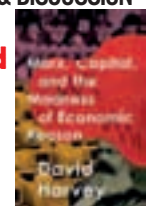
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—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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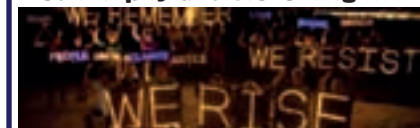


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## PROSPECT PARK HOTEL

Continued from page 4

ing the homeless population had topped 41,000.

Despite Mayor Bill de Blasio's pronouncements of a "blood and guts war strategy" to reduce homelessness, the problem keeps getting worse. The mayor continues to push a housing policy that relies on tax breaks for developers to produce luxury housing, with a minority of affordable units. Many of the designated "affordable" units are still unaffordable to many New Yorkers because the designation is based on the Area Median Income, which factors in more affluent suburbs that surround the city.

The city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) budget has doubled under the de Blasio administration but it's hard to see tangible results. A spokeswoman for DHS told The Indy that in the past year its outreach teams helped "865 homeless New Yorkers off the streets citywide," including 13 people from the park and surrounding area, providing them "transitional or permanent housing opportunities" — a drop in the bucket given the scope of the homelessness crisis.

One homeless advocate told me, citing the department's annual budget, "Every conversation between the media and the city agencies should start with where's the \$1.7 billion going?"

Many homeless advocates point to the city's policy of paying landlords and hotels market-rate (and far greater) rents to house homeless families in "cluster sites." Advocates point out that it is far cheaper to provide long-term housing. Charmel Lucas, a member of Picture the Homeless, is currently being housed by the city in a Manhattan hotel. According to Lucas's documentation from DHS, the city is paying \$7,716 a month to the hotel. "And you can't even cook there," she says.

The de Blasio administration recently announced a plan to convert 8,000 apartments located at cluster sites into long term affordable units, using eminent domain if necessary.

"That's a big step and a big change in strategy from what we've heard from this administration," said Coalition for the Homeless Policy Director Giselle Routhier. "That's one way you can get out of these poor models of shelter on one hand and increase the number of permanent affordable housing as well." Over the next decade, says Routhier, the city "should be creating 10,000 new units of housing specifically for homeless households."

Picture the Homeless has mapped much of the city's vast stock of abandoned and vacant buildings. The group advocates tapping into this resource as a means of ending homelessness altogether. "There's enough apartments out there," says Lucas, pointing to the almost 2,000 abandoned buildings containing close to 12,000 apartments and 505 vacant lots Picture the Homeless has documented in Manhattan alone.

As proponents of the de Blasio plan tread with cautious optimism, the real estate industry has a different view of what it takes to survive in the city.

A recent analysis by the rental listing site "RentHop" found that the median rent for a two bedroom apartment in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens was \$2,450 a month. Tenants earning the neighborhood's median household income of \$42,462 would have to sacrifice nearly 70 percent of their pay to make rent each month. Citywide, the median household income is just over \$50,000 a year, with 1.8 million households earning half that figure. Median rental prices, however, hover either at or above \$3,000 a month in Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. Given those numbers, we can probably expect a steady increase in the number of homeless.

The situation a few blocks south of Prospect Park is indicative of the housing challenges facing much of the population.

Joy Noel, a grandmother in her eighties was recently evicted from 585 East 21st Street. Noel's management company misspelled her name and sent her legal notices to the wrong address. The court subsequently ruled against her in absentia, and she is now reportedly staying on a friend's couch. Other tenants at 585 East 21st tell how Carnegie Management shut off the building's gas for months at a time in an effort to force rent-stabilized tenants out. Stories like these are part of what writer Michael Greenberg calls a "humanitarian crisis," a situation spawned by a lack of tenant protections and the takeover of housing stock by private equity firms and other speculators.

Many black and West Indian residents in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens — and those staying on the streets are no exception — feel unwanted and unwelcome in the face of a larger demographic shift. "This is a war for survival," Thomas Harris says. "White people are moving in, black people are moving out."

Just a few blocks up Flatbush Avenue, in the thralls of rapid gentrification, the "Refugees Welcome Here" signs have been taken down. Storefronts bear signs advertising "space for lease" as longtime businesses face unrealistic rent increases or are unable to get lease renewals. Fancy bars and restaurants sprout up regularly. And a few blocks over at "Lefferts Manor," the neighborhood record for a townhouse sale was recently broken, with a Victorian-era brownstone on Rutland Road closing for \$2.627 million.

And the Breaking Ground outreach van continues its endless circuit around Prospect Park and the homeless in and around the park show no intention of leaving as the temperatures plummet.

## JUAN GONZÁLEZ

Continued from page 6

broken-windows policing which was effectively ended when City Council voted to decriminalize all the minor offenses like holding a can of beer or urinating in public that people got locked up for. Bratton's gone, and broken-windows policing is effectively gone. And now the city is doing things like a bail program for people who can't afford bail that they didn't have before. So there's been substantive changes in criminal justice that overall ranks New York City as among the more progressive cities when it comes to criminal justice systems today.

*What do you expect de Blasio will focus on in his second term?*

He's outlined universal 3-K as a next big step. It's two reforms in one. You are providing an extra year in school for every child, and you are saving the parents of those children huge child care costs. On building affordable housing, he's made deeper affordability requirements for lower incomes, but it's not enough yet. Activists have to keep pushing him on this issue. It's nowhere near what needs to be done.

The other thing he has to make real is the closing of Rikers Island. You should read the report on Riker's Island by former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman. It's a phenomenal report about how mass incarceration failed, and the damage it did to Black and Latino communities. Pushed by outgoing City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, De Blasio has vowed that Rikers will be closed by 2027. He will be term-limited out of office by then. In the meantime he will have to take steps to reduce the prison population, find sites for the replacement local jails, expend the money and start building.

*Will it be politically feasible to site smaller local jails?*

They existed previously. You had the Bronx House of Detention that was torn down to build the Gateway Mall. There was a Brooklyn House of Detention, there was a Queens House of Detention. Some of them could still be retro-fitted. It's all a question of how big the population is. At its height, Rikers had 16,000 people. Now it's down to about 8,000. So if you reduce the population more you won't need it, and then you'll be able to do the local jails.

*What do you think the impact will be from the Republican tax bill that just passed Congress? It takes direct aim at blue states such as New York and California that have high taxes and higher levels of social services.*

The dirty secret of New York government over the last five years is that the city and the state are swimming in surpluses. All you have to do is read State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli's reports, because he charts quarterly how big the state surplus is growing. And now the city has a budget surplus of about \$4 billion. The city's population has grown by 375,000 people since 2010. There are more jobs. Tourism is also at an all-time high, a million people a week visit the city. And of course Wall Street continues to have record years that the city benefits from. So I think that it's possible to weather the federal storm. It's not going to be easy, but it's possible to do it.

*De Blasio is often portrayed in the media as restless to move on to higher office. What do you see in his political future?*

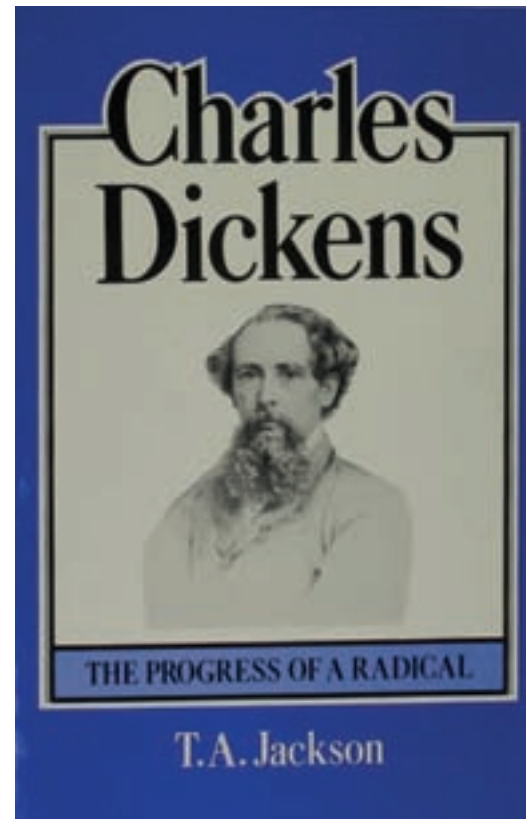
It would be nonsense for him to run for president. I think he would have a better chance running for governor after he completes his second term as mayor. His

problem is he is unpopular with whites. In New York City, 40 to 45 percent of whites supported him for mayor while he registers 65 percent with Latinos and 80 percent among African Americans. Why is that? I believe that his reforms have more directly affected African Americans and Latinos. I'm certain 300,000 of the 500,000 workers who received paid sick leave work in bodegas or in the backs of kitchens are Latino, and the tenants whose rents were frozen are largely African American and Latino.

The immediate suburbs of New York City are becoming more Democratic, and more Black and Latino. Whether the combination of the suburbs and New York City would be enough to offset the rest of the state, I don't know. But he certainly has a better chance to run for governor than he has to run for president.

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## WATER FOR GRASSROOTS

*Continued from page 11*

jected to registering to vote — “I did have people say, ‘I don’t believe in that,’” she says — were more open once she explained what Krasner’s policies would be.

Canvassers have to be persistent and engaged enough to get past those initial objections, she adds. “I can say to them, ‘I remember when ban-the-box was just a thought,’” she says. “There’s going to be no change unless you get involved.” Being an elected official gave her credibility, she adds, because when people told her politicians don’t care about them, “I can say, ‘I’m an elected official, and I’m here.’”

Reclaim Philadelphia is “really excited about 2018,” Krajewski says, because they believe that “unabashed progressive candidates” can win by riding the “backlash to the Trump agenda.”

Water for the Grassroots is also likely to work with Lancaster Stands Up, a group born out of an emergency meeting after the election attended by more than 300 people in this city of 60,000 in south-central Pennsylvania, says organizer Michelle Hines. Health care and immigration have been two main issues; the city is now 40 percent Latino and home to many Syrian and Palestinian refugees. It staged a sit-in in May at Rep. Lloyd Smucker’s office to protest his support for repealing Obamacare, and raised money to defend Osman Aroche Enriquez, a 27-year-old Guatemalan seized by immigration authorities after his application to renew his stay and work here under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was one of the thousands that missed the deadline because the Postal Service took several weeks to deliver them.

But the group is becoming more involved in electoral work. Some politicians just can’t be persuaded and need to be voted out, says Hines.

“The left has often failed to enter this political arena and contest for real power,” she says. “There’s too much at stake. It would be irresponsible for us to sit out and say ‘electoral politics doesn’t change anything, it’s only incremental.’”

Lancaster Stands Up is now taking questionnaires from the three candidates running in the April Democratic primary. Unseating Smucker will be an uphill battle. The rural areas outside Lancaster are heavily Republican, and Pennsylvania’s congressional districts vie with Texas for the most GOP-gerrymandered in the nation. Still, Smucker won his first term in 2016 with only 52 percent of the vote.

To win, she says, they’ll need to register more than 15,000 new voters. “The potential to have 12 volunteers come down will be really helpful,” she says.

One project Water for the Grassroots originally envisioned is on the back burner for now: being a “matchmaking service” to connect low-budget community organizing groups that can’t afford to pay for professional-quality video and graphic design with media workers who have those skills and want to volunteer.

“We’re still finding our footing,” Hogness says. But in Florida, where the group contacted progressive churches and union retirees to get them to support the voting-restoration initiative, “we really found a niche we could fill without having to go down in person.”

*To get involved or learn more about Water for the Grassroots, email [water4grassroots@gmail.com](mailto:water4grassroots@gmail.com).*

## GLOSSOLALIA

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# THE BEST ALBUMS OF 2017

BY CHARINA NADURA & BRADY O'CALLAHAN

**A**s the old Confucian adage has it, it is a curse to be born into interesting times. But it is also a blessing, a blessing in the sense that some of the world's finest art is borne out of personal and political struggle. Fraught blessings indeed, but as this year in music proves, the world is full of them: stirrings, hope, dreams, resistance and joy. If, as the poet Diane di Prima once put it, "The only war that matters is the war against the imagination," then we can count many victories this year in its defense.

## VINCE STAPLES // *Big Fish Theory*

Vince Staples has spent the past couple of years carving out a special place in the rap universe all for himself. Perhaps the most charming and unreserved musician to offer cultural commentary for the likes of *GQ* and *Pitchfork*, he's never seemed to be one to hold back. With *Big Fish Theory*, Staples digs his heels deeper into his predilection for powerfully illustrating the black experience and the state of hip-hop, all while pushing his sound further into club and dance music. Of any album this year, *Big Fish Theory* is the one to really push your system's bass to its limits. The album title evokes the phrase "big fish in a small pond" and Staples is quickly establishing himself as a rapper with fewer and fewer peers.

## HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF // *The Navigator*

Hurray's lead singer, Alynda Segarra, a Nuyorican who currently calls New Orleans home, delves into her complex background on this bluesy record — a testament to soul-searching, radical transformation with a bit more of an electrical edge than her previous Americana records. The song "Rican Beach" is a subtle ode to Puerto Rican resistance. "Living in the City" finds Segarra singing of the joys and struggles of urban existence. The lyrics are simultaneously somehow abstract and intimate and are matched with a guitar part that perfectly evokes a line of taxi engines growling at a red light.

## CONVERGE // *The Dusk In Us*

Storied metalcore band Converge released their first album in five years in 2017, and it found them at possibly their most accessible. *The Dusk In Us* is loud, fast and full of wild time signatures, but moments of clarity bubble up through the noise. Lead vocalist Jacob Bannon made it a personal priority to be heard and understood this time around, while still pushing his vocals into cord shredding territory. Every instrument is mathematically precise and the band syncs together almost mechanically. When Bannon screams, "You don't know what my pain feels like," you want to scream it along with him. *The Dusk In Us* is a masterful metal album that plays with the ideas of fatherhood, pacifism and empathy. The result is a beautiful, emotionally fulfilling and absolutely cathartic record.

## LAS CAFETERAS // *Tastes like L.A.*

Las Cafeteras can certainly entertain a crowd and this album is perfect to punch on when you have your friends over for beer and tacos,

but pay attention to the lyrics. They tell the stories of the Latino community in Los Angeles in a blend of Son Jarocho, Afro-Mexican and Zapateado musical stylings. Songs like "If I Was President" and a dance-inducing, mixed English-Spanish cover of "This Land is Your Land" speak to the Trump era.

## BAMBU // *Party Worker*

A certain school of Filipino musicians have tendency to mimic Celine Dion. This Filipino emcee could not be farther from that camp. He raps raw and from the heart.

## FOUR TET // *New Energy*

Kieran Hebden spent the first half of 2017 on social media channels dropping cryptic, puzzling hints at new music. He likes to keep his audience guessing. With *New Energy*, he does it again. The album is a hybrid of his early ambient work with his more recent forays into club-style beat mastery. The result is a lush, exquisite work of a sound collage artist with complete control over his elements. *New Energy* is an exciting chapter in the story of Four Tet that hints at even more exciting work yet to unfold.

## BENJAMIN BOOKER // *Witness*

Booker's raspy voice is remarkably soothing. The lead single on *Witness* (which shares its title with that of the album) is a collaboration with R&B legend Mavis Staples. The song's lyrics could have been pulled right from the headlines: "See we thought that we saw that he had a gun. Thought that it looked like he started to run. Am I gonna be a witness?"

## BATHS // *Romaplasm*

Baths historically has made some of the most beautiful, ornate and lively music filled with existential dread, meditations on loneliness and stark explorations of the conflicted mind in interpersonal relationships. For *Romaplasm*, Will Wiesenfeld looked for joy and found it in video games and anime. Escapism can be a powerful and healing tool for individuals in times of suffering and stress, and we find Wiesenfeld here lost in love among airships, shedding social anxieties on the dance floor. The dense, rich synths and drum machines of past Baths releases are still present, but unbridled delight is tagging along.

## DAYME AROCENA // *Cubafonia*

If you want to hear Cuban tunes with extremely high notes and sexy lyrics, this is the album. It will make you want to hop on a flight to Havana before Trump reinstates the U.S. embargo in full.

## COLTER WALL // *Colter Wall*

Colter Wall sounds like the weathered troubadour strumming old folk songs in the back of a smokey Montana truck stop bar. His voice is an impossibly low drawl that evokes a pain and longing that can only come from deep down. His self-titled debut full-

length album sounds like a record most country and folk musicians dream of making after decades of world-weary experience. How did Wall do it after just 22 years on this earth? He's a traditionalist in nearly every sense of the word and this record makes an incredibly strong argument for the timeless quality of a good folk song.

## LEYLA MCCALLA // *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey*

Somehow folksy and elegant at the same time, McCalla alternates between English and French on this meditative album, singing as she strokes, strums and occasionally plucks her cello, generating a deep delta sound you wouldn't imagine possible from the instrument.

## YUNA // *Chapters*

This Malaysian diva, trendsetter and Usher collaborator sings with confidence and joy while allowing herself to experiment on this sultry R&B record. It's the album to listen to if you want to put on headphones and step into an audio bubble for a little while.

## CHARLY BLISS // *Guppy*

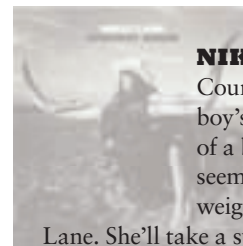
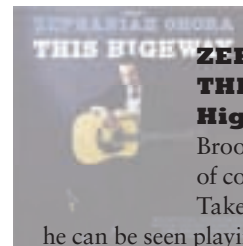
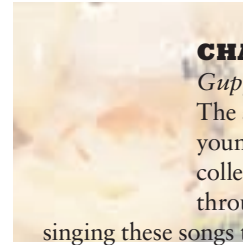
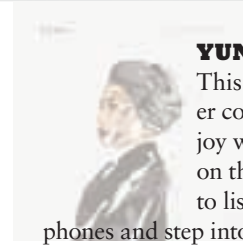
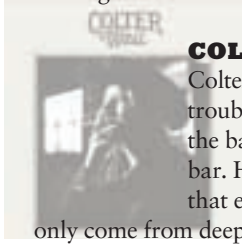
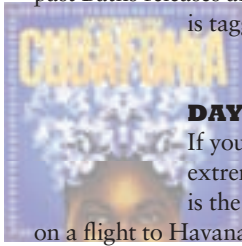
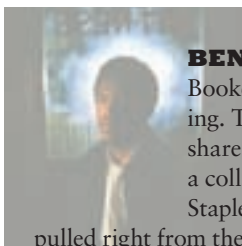
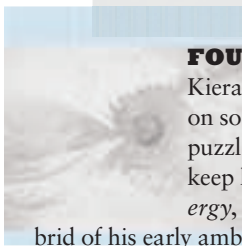
*Guppy* oozes with youthful exuberance. The album sounds like the result of your younger sister rifling through your record collection, putting Weezer on, blasting it through the speakers and having more fun singing these songs than Rivers Cuomo ever did. *Guppy* is in-your-face college pop-rock, and it's one of the most fun records of the year. Frontwoman Eva Hendricks squeals and screams over sharp guitars and peppery drums, evoking the full range of early twenties emotional experiences. It's a tight and accomplished debut LP.

## ZEPHANIAH O'HORA WITH THE 18 WHEELERS // *This Highway*

Brooklyn is a bit of an unexpected hub of country music these days, but it's true. Take Zephaniah O'Hora. On most nights, he can be seen playing at Skinny Dennis in Williamsburg with The Round Up Boys or spinning Grateful Dead tunes in the backs of bars. In 2017, however, he released *This Highway*, an absolutely impeccable roots country record that hearkens back to a bygone era. O'Hora's deep, honey-smooth voice is the perfect instrument for his songs of love, loss and longing, and the 18 Wheelers provide a perfect backdrop with steel guitar, piano, fiddle and sparse honky tonk drums.

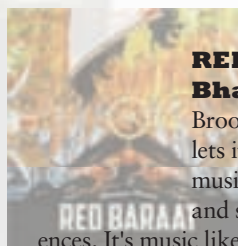
## NIKKI LANE // *Highway Queen*

Country music was never meant to be a boy's club. Thank God. There's been a bit of a bad attitude in country crowds that seem to think women aren't pulling their weight in the genre. Tell that to Nikki Lane. She'll take a swig of whiskey, flip you the bird and play for anyone else worth her time. *Highway Queen* finds this first lady of outlaw country at the top of her game. She's got all the attitude of Loretta Lynn and she gives even less of a damn what you could think about it.





SARRAH DANZIGER



**RED BARAAT // Bhangra Pirates**

Brooklyn-based Red Baraat lets it rip — wild Bhangra music with a pounding beat and ska and punk influences. It's music like nothing you have ever heard.

**ROOTS-YORICAN:**

Bronx-born Alynda Segarra of the groundbreaking Americana outfit Hurray for the Riff Raff.



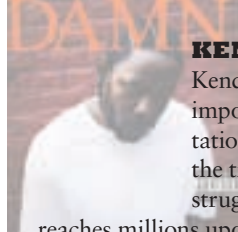
**CHICANO BATMAN // Freedom is Free**

*Freedom is Free* conjures the smooth rhythms of '70s soul and the loungey vibe of tropicalia, while its wild-toothed guitar riffs are reminiscent of psychedelic rock. Bardo Martinez, the band's lead singer (who also helps out on guitar and tickles the organ) sings about romantic relationships, as well as wider social issues, as on "La Jura" (The Police) — a story of a neighbor shot by police. The record possesses what the poet Garcia Lorca might have called *duende*, "a mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains."



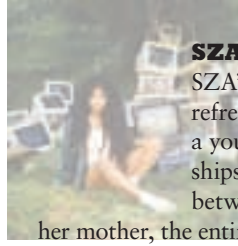
**LA SANTA CECILIA // Someday New**

La Santa Cecilia is one of those bands that infuse their music with the spirit of political struggle. Their jazzy, cumbia rock rhythms make it sound exciting too.



**KENDRICK LAMAR // DAMN.**

Kendrick Lamar is, at this point, potentially the most important voice in all of music. He defies the expectations set in hip-hop while still paying respects to the traditions that paved the way. He speaks to the struggle and experience of real people in a way that reaches millions upon millions. Technically, he's a master. Lyrically, he's unmatched. Creatively, he's miles ahead. *DAMN.* is Lamar's finest work to date, which seems impossible and yet par for the course with him, as both *To Pimp a Butterfly* and *good kid m.A.A.d. city* stand among some of the best rap records ever made. *DAMN.* will be heralded as a time capsule of the fortitude of people in the nightmare that was 2017.



**SZA // Ctrl**

SZA's debut record *Ctrl* feels deeply personal and refreshing in its honesty and candor. It documents a young woman navigating the world of relationships, love, sex and every insecurity that surfaces in between. Peppered with nuggets of wisdom from her mother, the entire album feels like a meeting of the minds of strong, independent women. Even when men show up for support, SZA never loses her place in the spotlight. This is probably the first instance that I've encountered where Kendrick Lamar is present on a track and comes even close to second. SZA's talent is too big to be held back. *Ctrl* should instantly insert her into the conversation with Frank Ocean as the best and most inventive in the genre, whatever genre that may be. (R&B doesn't really seem to fully encapsulate the lengths to which they're taking their sounds.) SZA is the future.

# RANDOM CHANGE RECORDS

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## BANG BANG

*Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*  
NEW MUSEUM  
235 BOWERY  
THROUGH JAN. 21

By Gena Hymowech

Those who deviate from gender norms threaten, though gender itself isn't an actual weapon. It may be seen as an affront to religion, politics or biology, but regardless of how you feel about it, stopping change is a useless hobby. Queer and women's liberation were huge movements, and those begot others. In 1995, gender's patron saint David Bowie released a song called "Hallo Spaceboy." "Do you like boys or girls? It's confusing these days," he sang. Even David Bowie could not imagine how much more confusing gender and sexuality would get. Or maybe gender and sexuality have become less confusing because now at least we have an expansive vocabulary to describe who we are.

That's the result of one specific gender war. There have, of course, been others. Many have been fought via art — whether it was the Guerrilla Girls (active for over 30 years now) protesting the lack of women artists in museums; Judy Chicago inviting us to remember crucial feminist figures while we get comfortable with women's genitalia in *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979); or Yoko Ono allowing random people to treat her body like an object in the 1964 performance work *Cut Piece*. None of these artists are in "Trigger," though the exhibition shows the next generation is carrying the torch.

"Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon" explores how gender is used against us, and celebrates gender wins. It shows how flouting gender rules can be a tool to build greater understanding.

The exhibition consumes almost the whole building of the New Museum, from the cellar through the fourth floor. Art is placed pretty much anywhere there is room for it, stuffed into the museum like so many toys in a stocking on Christmas Eve.

Mickalene Thomas is an exhibit highlight, but that shouldn't surprise anyone who has followed her. Known for her pop art style and celebration of black women's beauty, the lesbian artist traveled back to various time periods for her 2016 multimedia piece *Me as Muse*. "A man has always wanted to lay me down, but he never wanted to pick me up," Eartha Kitt confesses in an audio interview that is the piece's heart. She speaks of discrimination from mothers who "would rather [their boys] marry trash than marry someone of color." As Kitt is talking we see Thomas, Grace Jones and Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman (a Khoisan woman who performed for white audiences in various 19th century Eu-

ropean "freak shows") displayed on 12 screens. Visually, the piece reminds one of looking into a kaleidoscope. The contrast of Kitt's story against images of Thomas and Jones — women who were able to come after her because of her — is moving. Thomas is speaking to us, but it also feels like she's speaking directly to her late idol, showing her how beautiful and worthwhile she is.

Gender-fluid performer Justin Vivian Bond found an icon in Karen Graham, a former model for Estee Lauder, and created two pastel and pencil artworks of her in 1979 and 1980, when Bond was just a teen. The artist also went on to reference her in *My Mother | My Self* (2014-present). The museum shows watercolors, wallpaper, a recreation of a living room, and a performance space decorated like the outside of a movie premiere, all from that same project. Bond is next to Graham in portraits that have a creepy *Single White Female* edge to them. These practically dare the viewer to look for the difference between cis and trans beauty, and the conclusion you reach is that there is no difference. Beauty is beauty. Close your eyes as you sit in the living room and you can see Bond there too, sketching those pieces of Graham, yearning for a more authentic life. There is a record player and the album on tap is by Bond, showing the dream came true for this gender warrior.

Despite these and other excellent pieces, "Trigger" as a whole does not deliver — not with a thorough investigation of feminist and lesbian movements, not with a long, hard look at current events and gender. There are two sculptures from 2011. *Table for One (at the sad cafe)* and *I'm Every Woman I Ever Met* by Anicka Yi. In *Every Woman* pearls have been vacuum-packed, a commentary on Chelsea Manning. I would have never in a million years guessed Yi's was the subject.

The exhibit is crying out to be separated by theme. Editing would have been welcome, too. When there are so many artistic voices, it starts to feel like a talk show in which everyone is speaking on top of each other.

When you come right down to it, "Trigger" is a pat on the back, a way to show how cutting edge the New Museum is. If that's all you want from your art, fine. I'm going to need a lot more.



COURTESY THE ARTIST



COURTESY THE ARTISTS ELLEN DE BRUIJNE PROJECTS, AND GALERIE MARCELLE ALIX



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND FRANÇOIS GHEBALLY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Justin Vivian Bond, *My Barbie Coloring Book*, 2014. Watercolor on archival paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in (36.8 x 29.2 cm).

Justin Vivian Bond, *My Barbie Coloring Book*, 2014. Watercolor on archival paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in (36.8 x 29.2 cm).

Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Toxic*, 2012 (still). Super 16mm film transferred to HD, 13 min.

Candice Lin, *Divinations Upon the Outcome of War*, 2012. Etching with hand coloring, 8 1/2 x 11 in (22 x 27.9 cm).

## RIGHT HOOKS

*Alt-Right: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*  
BY DAVID NEIWERT  
VERSO, 2017

By Michael Hirsch

Think of this book as a basket of deplorables. It's thick on illuminating descriptions of resurgent white nationalists, gun-enamored militia poseurs, conspiracy-theory mongers, Ku Klux Klansmen and women, Christian Identitarians and proto-Nazis benefitting from and legitimized by the sordid presidency of Donald Trump. It's thin on explaining why such phenomena persist or have arisen as political thuggery in 21st-century America.

Journalist David Neiwert's *Alt-Right: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* is certainly required reading. He's a widely respected expert on the American far right, author of five previous books on the right and repression of immigrants, as well as a frequent guest on CNN and MSNBC and a contributor to the *Washington Post*. The book's breadth of detail is exhaustive and almost singular in focusing on the racist far-right movement that has often been presumed dead, but got a jolt of growth hormones from the Trump campaign, who mainstreamed what Neiwert calls their "eliminationist rhetoric" as applied to immigrants, people of color and Jews. Some even refer to Trump as "Glorious Leader," language the author doesn't harp on but that harkens back to the *fuhrerprinzip*, or notion of the leader as above all law. Neiwert also notes the munificent funding of far-right causes from wealthy grandees like the Coors family and the Koch brothers.

Where Neiwert is at his best is in charting and quantifying the mainstreaming of white-nationalist ideas, where even Nazis were free to join and lead Tea Party efforts. Teabagger ideology was broadcast not just by lunatics like Alex Jones, obvious racists like David Duke and pervasive social-media trolls, but by seemingly respectable Fox News. The Oathkeepers, in effect a revived '90s-style militia, could masquerade and be accepted as "just another community-watch organization."

Trump's condemnation of "dangerous Mexicans" and his fancied immigrant crime wave won him unwavering support from white nationalists, including Nazi wannabe Andrew Anglin, who wrote on his website "The Daily Stormer" (named after a fanatical 1930s Nazi newspaper), "I urge all readers of this site to do whatever they can to make Donald Trump president." (Luke O'Brien also ably profiles Anglin in the December 2017 *Atlantic*.) Peter Brimelow's white-nationalist website, *vdare.com* followed suit, headlining "We Are All Donald Trump Now," while Richard Spencer's *Radix Journal*, in acknowledging it considered Trump "a troll," claimed he was their troll. "We need someone who can break open public debate," Spencer wrote. "The fact that Trump himself is part of this same farce is utterly irrelevant."

"White people are realizing they are becoming strangers in their own country and they do not have a major political voice speaking for them," Rachel Pendergraft, a national organizer of the Knights Party of the Ku Klux Klan, told Neiwert. "Trump is one example of the alternative-right candidate [whom] Knights



OLIVER MARTINEZ

Party members and supporters have been looking for. And we feel that through continued grassroots mobilization, more candidates will arise who will speak out for white Christian America."

As Neiwert commented, "All the long-suppressed hatreds and resentments, all the deep anger and black fears about the nation and the changing shape of American society, came bubbling up and bursting into public view in predictably ugly ways. Trump's rhetoric seemingly gave permission for the unleashing of an eliminationist flood." Meanwhile, the right-wing media set the scene by "creating a self-affirming community."

*Alt-Right: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* is a thorough review. It's not the first work to posit the connection between Trump and the mainstreaming of white nationalist movements; Neiwert and Sarah Posner anticipated some of the book's revelations in an October 2016 article in *Mother Jones*, as did Andrew Marantz's October 2017 *New Yorker* profile of fascist shock-jock and virulent Jew-hater Mike Enoch. But Neiwert's book masterfully exposes so many of the interstices between Trump, the far-right nationalists and the toxic manipulators of social media, each feeding off the others.

The book, however, never tries to give a theoretical explanation of why such banal ideas fester. Why, for example, does a movement so tied to Christian Identitarianism ignore Jesus's key injunction that "what you do unto the least of them, you do unto me?" Why the fetishistic clinging to a "white" identity and a "white European" heritage? Neiwert does digress briefly to explore a useful distinction by the psychologist Robert Altmeyer between authoritarian "followers" and "dominators," the former looking only for order and peace, while the latter lust for power. That might be the beginning of a useful discussion, but it would be aided by referring to some standard works on authoritarianism, such as Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* and Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

For all its keen attention to right-wing movements—much of Neiwert's sourcing is augmented by the excellent work of the Southern Poverty Law Center — the book is decidedly apolitical. It does not acknowledge a left-wing movement arising precisely as resistance to Trump and the far right. It rejects the idea of physical opposition to a mobilized far right, despite a proud leftist history of such resistance. Nor does it give credence to the idea that mainstream liberalism has failed, making great cultural strides since the 1970s but being beaten back politically and economically by international capital. Trump may be a false solution to a real problem, but Neiwert doesn't acknowledge that capital, its depredations and its enablers in the two major parties are the cause of that problem.

Neiwert's only attempt at a political solution to an emboldened far right is for liberals — he makes no mention of a left — to talk nicely and persuasively to right-wing neighbors and associates, starting with family members at the Thanksgiving table. If only it were that simple.

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# REVEREND BILLY'S TRUMP HELP HOTLINE

Dear Reverend Billy,  
I'm stunned by the greed and the destructiveness of the Republicans and their big money backers as they pursue their tax cut scam. What is wrong with these people?

— Harold, Dyker Heights

They want us to be afraid all time, because they are afraid all the time. Barely able to breathe, they drive through suburbs of traumatic stress, worship today's stock price on Bloomberg screens, and keep their children in a state of utter confusion as they prepare for the mass death of Christ's Eternal Life.

But love is poppin' out all over. When Colin Kaepernick's knee hit the grass, concussions of hate began to heal. Let's dream with the Dreamers who look deep into the eyes of the immigration cops, listen to the chorus of the #Metoo women (and men and non-binary folks). They speak of terrible wounds, but they are giving us a new, honest world.

• • •

Dear Reverend Billy,  
In December, I see Christmas tree stands all over New York. The smell of fresh trees in the city air is quite pleasant. Is the city dweller's fondness for placing a Christmas trees in their home one more example of consumerism run amok? Or does it reflect a

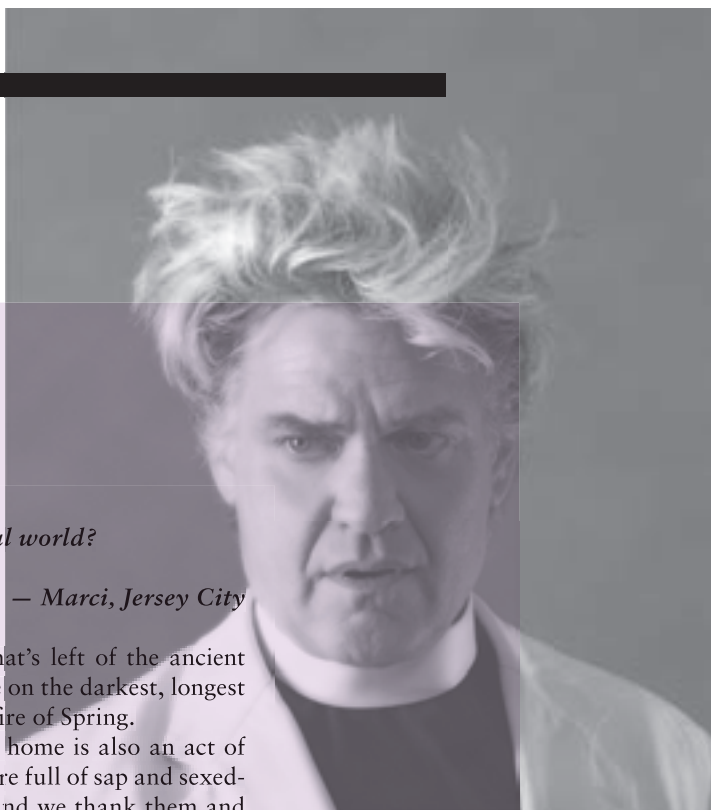
healthy impulse to connect with the natural world?

— Marci, Jersey City

The fading smell of factory pine trees is what's left of the ancient ritual of the Winter Solstice. The birth of love on the darkest, longest night of the year is the spark that makes the fire of Spring.

Bringing the forest into the center of your home is also an act of honoring last year's Spring, when the trees were full of sap and sexed-up birds. Our lovers gather in our memory and we thank them and then we look out into the Fabulous Unknown and we accept gratefully the responsibility of life!

**REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. GOT A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REVBIILLY@INDYPEN- DENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.**



JON GUILTY

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