

# THE INDYPENDENT

#239: SEPTEMBER 2018 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

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## THE FREE COLLEGE HUSTLE

**GOV. ANDREW CUOMO DANGLED A CHANCE**  
**AT OPPORTUNITY BEFORE STUDENTS' EYES.**  
**THEN HE PULLED IT AWAY, P4**





**THE INDYPENDENT, INC.**  
388 Atlantic Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
212-904-1282  
www.indydependent.org  
Twitter: @TheIndydependent  
facebook.com/TheIndydependent

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

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John Tarleton

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:**

Peter Rugh

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:**

Ellen Davidson, Alina  
Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas  
Powers, Steven Wishnia

**ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR:**

Frank Reynoso

**DESIGN EMPEROR:**

Mikael Tarkela

**DESIGNERS:**

Leia Doran, Anna Gold

**DIGITAL MEDIA DIRECTOR:**

Elia Gran

**NEWS FELLOW**

Georgia Kromrei

**GENERAL INQUIRIES:**

contact@indydependent.org

**SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:**

submissions@indydependent.org

**ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:**

ads@indydependent.org

**VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:**

Linda Martín Alcoff, Sam  
Alcoff, Charlyne Alexis,  
Camille Baker, Gino Barzizza,  
Bennett Baumer, Pooja  
Chopra, Valerio Ciriacci,  
Rico Cleffi, Anne Derenne,  
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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**THU SEP 6**

5:30PM • FREE  
RALLY: NEW YORK RISE  
FOR CLIMATE, JOBS AND  
JUSTICE

Days before the Global  
Climate Action Summit  
convenes in San Francisco,  
people across the country  
and around the world will  
take to the streets demand-  
ing elected officials commit  
to the most far-reaching  
and effective policies  
possible.

Battery Park, Mnhtn

**SAT SEP 8**

10:45AM–5:30PM • FREE  
CONFERENCE: TAÍNO: A  
SYMPOSIUM IN CON-  
VERSATION WITH THE  
MOVEMENT

Celebrate the exhibition  
Taino: Native Heritage and  
Identity in the Caribbean on  
view at the National Muse-  
um of the American Indian  
through October. Explore  
the history of the Taíno  
movement in dialogue with  
Taíno/Indigenous Carib-  
bean community leaders  
and cultural workers.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF  
THE AMERICAN INDIAN  
One Bowling Green, Mnhtn

**SAT SEP 8**

11AM–7PM • FREE  
FESTIVAL: SOULFEST 2018

The diverse population of  
Medgar Evers College and  
Central Brooklyn gather to  
share their culture. Tickle  
your taste buds with the  
flavors of Brooklyn and  
soothe your soul with art.  
Play a few games while  
you're at it and support  
student scholarships.

MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE,  
CUNY  
1650 Bedford Ave., Bklyn

**SEP 8–SEP 9**

1PM–2AM SAT, 1PM–  
11PM SUN • \$35–\$75, 21+  
FEST: BUSHWIG

Twenty-three hours of non-  
stop drag performances,  
live music & DJs.

KNOCKDOWN CENTER  
52-19 Flushing Ave., Queens

**SAT SEP 8**

5:30PM–8PM • FREE  
BOOK LAUNCH: *UNAPOL-  
OGETIC*: CHARLENE A.  
CARRUTHERS & MAURICE  
MITCHELL

Join Maurice Mitchell,  
the new national director  
of the Working Families  
Party in conversation with  
Charlene A. Carruthers,  
founding national direc-  
tor of the BYP 100 to talk  
about *Unapologetic: A  
Black, Queer, and Femi-  
nist Mandate for Radical  
Movements*, her guide as  
a 21st-century activist  
to upending mainstream  
ideas about race, class and  
gender.

STARR BAR  
214 Starr St., Bklyn

**SEP 8 & SEP 15**

SAT 7PM–11PM • \$15  
FESTIVAL: DISSENT ARTS  
FESTIVAL

A showcase of revolution-  
ary creativity on stages in  
Williamsburg (Sept. 8) and  
the East Village (Sept. 15).  
Featuring jazz virtuosos and  
spoken word prophets, the  
festival will raise funds for  
organizations fighting for  
social justice: the Rosen-  
berg Fund for Children, Alli-  
ance of Families for Justice  
and the NYC Jericho Move-  
ment. Visit dissentarts.  
com for a full program.

17 FROST THEATRE & GAL-  
LERY  
17 Frost St., Bklyn  
&

**5C CAFÉ & CULTURAL  
CENTER**

68 Avenue C, Mnhtn

**THU SEP 13**

6:30PM–8:30PM • FREE  
LIT: PUBLISHING AMERI-  
CAN SIGN LANGUAGE  
POETRY

The deaf community  
boasts an incredible roster  
of poets who use the  
creative capabilities of  
American Sign Language to  
develop visually captivat-  
ing worlds and express the  
nuances of deaf experi-  
ences. Join poets, scholars  
and cultural writers for a  
reading and performance  
of signed poetry, followed  
by a discussion on linguis-  
tics, translation, publishing  
and poetics.

THE GRADUATE CENTER,  
CUNY  
365 5th Ave., Mnhtn

**FRI SEP 14**

7PM–9:30PM • FREE  
BOOK LAUNCH: GRAFFITI  
GRRRLZ: PERFORMING  
FEMINISM IN THE HIP  
HOP DIASPORA

Jessica Nydia Pabón-  
Colón explores over  
100 women artists in 23  
countries to make a com-  
pelling case that graffiti  
subculture is a place where  
feminists come into their  
own. Pabón-Colón will be  
in conversation with Claw,  
an NYC-based street artist.  
BLUESTOCKINGS BOOK-  
STORE, CAFE & ACTIVIST  
CENTER  
172 Allen St., Mnhtn

**MON SEP 17**

7PM–8:30PM • FREE  
PANEL: SHOULD I STAY OR  
SHOULD I GO?

Writers from in-state,  
out of state, upstate and  
downstate tell five-minute

stories about the deal-  
breakers that have led to  
their departures or their  
commitment to never leave  
NYC ... yet!

HOUSING WORKS BOOK-  
STORE CAFE  
126 Crosby St., Mnhtn

**MON SEP 17**

7PM–8:45PM • FREE  
PANEL: DON'T GET  
CAUGHT

Join *Texas Observer* civil  
rights reporter Michael  
Barajas, Marshall Project  
reporter Eli Hagar, and  
WNYC's Kai Wright for  
a discussion about the  
school-to-prison pipeline  
moderated by *The Appeal's*  
Sarah Leonard.

THE NEW SCHOOL–STARR  
FOUNDATION HALL  
66 W 12th St., Mnhtn

**MON SEP 17**

7:30PM–9PM • FREE  
BOOK LAUNCH: EVERY-  
THING FOR EVERYONE

A new feudalism is on the  
rise. From the internet to  
service and care, more and  
more industries expect  
people to live gig to gig,  
while monopolistic cor-  
porations feed their spoils  
to the rich. But as Nathan  
Schneider shows through  
years of in-depth reporting,  
there is an alternative to  
the robber-baron economy  
hiding in plain sight; we  
just need to know where to  
look: Co-ops.

GREENLIGHT BOOKSTORE  
686 Fulton St., Bklyn

**TUE SEP 18**

5:30PM–8:30PM • FREE  
TALK: FOR US BY US: THE  
FUTURE OF MOVEMENT  
LAWYERING

Come hear short, inspiring  
talks by Black & Brown  
movement lawyers with

visionary ideas about how  
law can build power in  
these difficult times. Food  
provided. Music by DJ  
Lumumba AKA Revolution.

320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn

**TUE SEP 18**

7PM–10PM • FREE

FILM: AUDRY FUNK: A  
DOCUMENTARY ON HIP  
HOP, WOMANHOOD AND  
SOCIAL JUSTICE

This short film looks at  
the life of Audry Funk, a  
feminist rapper and social  
activist from Mexico now  
living in the United States.  
Although she has gained  
a large audience in South  
America, she has to rap  
on the train and work in a  
restaurant to make a living  
in New York City. There  
will be a music perfor-  
mance and Q&A session  
with Audrey following the  
screening.

PEOPLE'S FORUM  
320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn

**THU SEP 20**

6PM–9PM • FREE  
VIGIL: BORICUAS REMEM-  
BER  
Hurricane Maria survivors,  
along with advocates and  
allies, are staging mass  
vigils across the country to  
mourn the victims of Hur-  
ricane Maria and demand  
justice for Puerto Rico. .  
Union Sq., Mnhtn

**FRI SEP 21**

9PM • \$20  
PERFORMANCE: STAYING  
ALIVE

A cabaret hour of Bee Gees  
tunes and ribald tales of  
coping with traumas both  
personal and political  
through dancing, doping  
and domming.  
JOE'S PUB AT THE PUBLIC  
425 Lafayette St., Mnhtn

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# THE INDYDEPENDENT

# SEPTEMBER



MARO HAGOPIAN & SASHA ZABELINA

**SAT SEP 22**  
11AM-4PM • FREE  
SCIENCE: SUBMERGE: NYC MARINE SCIENCE FESTIVAL

A daylong science extravaganza devoted to raising awareness about our coastal waters. Celebrate local marine science through hands-on activities, catch-and-release fishing, kayaking and interactive demonstrations.  
**PIER 84**  
555 12th Ave, Mnhtn

**THU SEP 27**  
6PM-10PM • FREE  
MUSIC: ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO'S REMAIN IN LIGHT/RESISTANCE REVIVAL CHORUS

Angélique Kidjo, the Grammy Award-winning Beninese songwriter, is touring the world in anticipation of *Remain in Light*, a cover album of the Talking Heads' 1980 album. She is joined by the Resistance Revival Chorus, who performed with Kidjo at the Women's March on Washington.  
**RUMSEY PLAYFIELD**  
Central Park, Mnhtn

**SAT SEP 29**  
9AM-4PM • \$15-\$45  
CONFERENCE: TROUBLEMAKERS SCHOOL

A day of skill-building workshops, education and strategy discussions to put some movement back in the labor movement. Hosted by

Labor Notes magazine.  
**THE JAMES BALDWIN SCHOOL**  
351 W. 18th St., Mnhtn

**SAT SEP 29**

2:30PM-4AM • \$50-\$225  
FEST: BROOKLYN COMES ALIVE  
Bringing together some of the best and most talented musicians to deliver one jam-packed day filled with unique collaborations, all-star tribute sets and one-time-only super-groups at three renowned music venues: Brooklyn Bowl, Music Hall of Williamsburg and Rough Trade, all within a six-block radius of each other along Wythe Avenue. Details at brooklyncomesalive.com.  
**Williamsburg, Bklyn**

**SUN SEP 30**

11AM-5PM • \$3-\$5  
MUSIC: THE VINYL REVOLUTION RECORD SHOW  
Thousands of rare and collectible vinyl records, door prizes • Record Supplies • DJ Spag 69 spins all day. Authentic Czech and Slovak delicacies. Beer!  
**BOHEMIAN HALL & BEER GARDEN**  
29-19 24th Ave., Queens



CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

**CRAZY COSTUMES:**  
Dance, drink and drag at Bushwig, Sept. 8-9.

**ONCE IN A LIFETIME:**  
Angélique Kidjo brings funky beats and a soaring voice to Talking Heads classics and Beninese originals in Central Park on Sept. 27.

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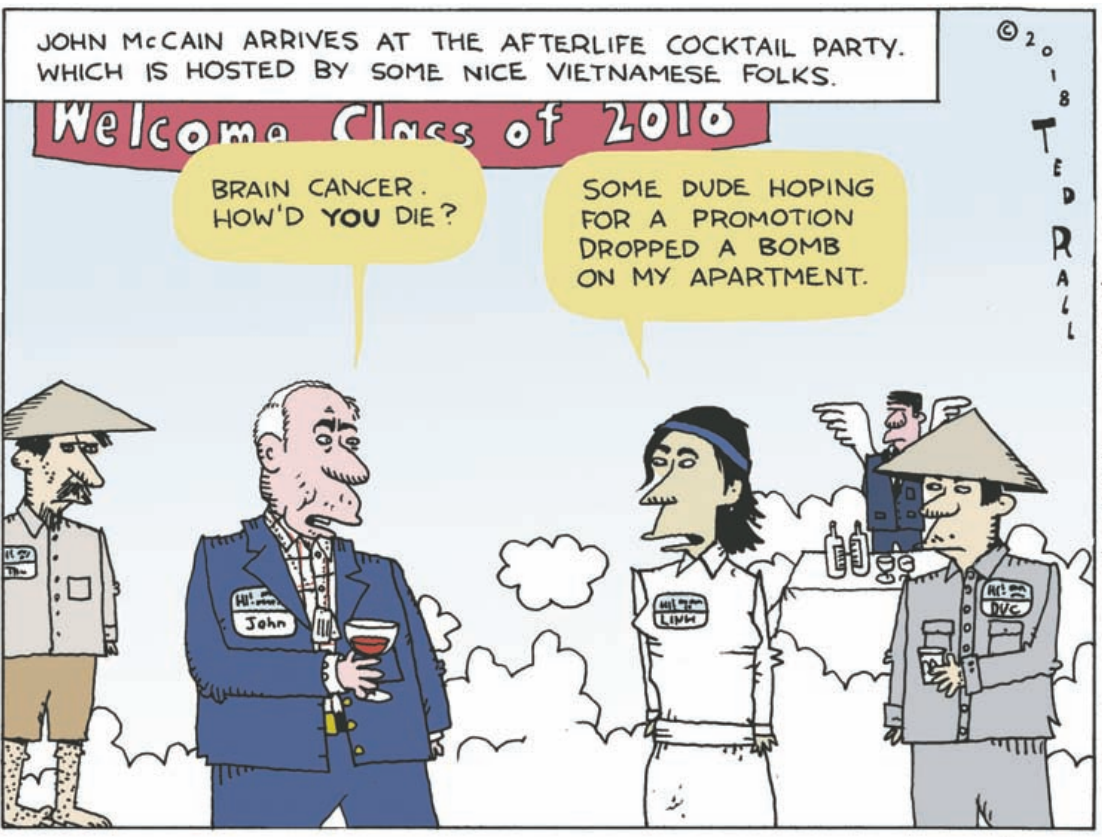
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8-28-18

# FAIL!

## ANDREW CUOMO OFFERED FREE COLLEGE TO NEARLY ONE-MILLION STUDENTS. THEN WHY ARE THEY DROPPING OUT IN DROVES OR GRADUATING IN DEBT?

By PETER RUGH

Television ads featuring starry-eyed millennials thanking New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo for a chance at higher learning cropped up on screens across the state this summer. The ads, paid for by the governor's campaign, tout him as a "proven leader who gets real results."

Yet as Cuomo campaigns against the left-leaning primary challenge from actress Cynthia Nixon, the results of his free college-tuition program, the Excelsior Scholarship, aren't as real as he would have New Yorkers believe. Defectum might be a more appropriate Latin moniker for the program.

After presiding over years of funding cuts and tuition increases for New York's public universities, Cuomo announced the free-tuition plan in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential campaign and invited Bernie Sanders to share the stage with him when it was inaugurated in January 2017.

When the details were rolled out three months later, the governor's office claimed that "940,000 middle-class families and individuals making up to \$125,000 per year" would qualify to attend schools in the City University of New York (CUNY) and State University of New York (SUNY) systems. That 940,000 figure was picked up by news outlets that are now quoted in Cuomo's campaign ads. "Nearly 1 million students eligible for free college," reads text attributed to *Inside Higher Ed* that flashes across the screen in one video.

But a closer look at the program, now beginning its second year, reveals that far fewer students are receiving the scholarships — barely 20,000. A mere 64,000 or so applied.

"It's ridiculous how much he is trying to take credit for something that has delivered so little so far," said Stephen Brier, a professor of urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Reinforcing the perception that Excelsior is an elaborate public-relations ploy, Cuomo's campaign has also been accused of breaching confidentiality laws in order to feature students in ads. The governor's office invited scholarship recipients to his State of the State address in January. Then his campaign staff used the invite list to obtain their contact information and solicit their participation in television commercials.

Students who rallied outside Borough of Manhattan Community College on Aug. 24 presented a different narrative.

"I find it ironic, not to say insulting" how few students "were given something by this scholarship while the rest of us had our tuition raised," said Enrique Peña, a Queens College student and DREAMer who worked two jobs this summer to be able to afford school. (Undocumented students are not eligible for New York State or federal aid.)

Other students described being ineligible for Excelsior due to its strict course-load requirements, which demand students be on track to graduate from community colleges in two years and receive a bachelor's degree in four.

When Razieh Arabi first heard of Excelsior, she felt like it was a "miracle." A single mother studying accounting at Baruch College, Arabi had needed three years to complete her associate's degree. When she applied for the scholarship to help her finish her bachelor's degree, she was rejected because of the extra year it had taken to earn her associate's.

"Many students are dealing with the same issue," she said.

According to an August study by the Center for an Urban Future (CUF), just 20,086 students, 3.2 percent of the 633,543 undergraduates enrolled in public colleges statewide, received Excelsior funding last year.

The numbers are even lower at CUNY. Overall, the study found, 3,335 students attending CUNY's 11 senior colleges received awards from the Excelsior program, only 2.3 percent of those enrolled. Meanwhile, 820 students attending CUNY's seven community colleges benefited from the program, just 0.9 percent of the 95,951 enrolled.

Any way you crunch the numbers, they are far short of a million.

Cuomo spokesperson Don Kaplan chided the study's authors, telling the *Daily News* the CUF "shouldn't stand in the way of that program."

The low number of students receiving aid is not the only complaint about the Excelsior program. "We have gone months without formal written guidance," Sarah Buell, a financial aid officer at SUNY's Erie County Community College, complained on Aug. 1 during a meeting with the state's Higher Education Services Corporation, which administers Excelsior. Buell was speaking on behalf of the statewide association of financial aid officers. She said the aid officers at SUNY's 64 campuses were essentially "establishing 64 different versions" of Excelsior.

Similar confusion has spread on CUNY's campuses, but to a lesser degree, because fewer students are applying. Many students described being rejected without being told why.

"It is shocking that financial-aid officers do not yet understand this program," Kaplan told the *Albany Times Union*, which first reported Buell's remarks. "The Excelsior Scholarship is now a year old, and New York has devoted an enormous amount of resources towards explaining its policies and procedures."

CUF senior researcher Tom Hilliard, the lead author of its Excelsior study, told *The Independent* that CUF still thought the program was a good idea, but "design flaws in this program are causing it to sharply underperform."

Excelsior covers the last-dollar amount of tuition, the bill not already picked up by state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) or federal Pell grants — neither of which are available to part-time or undocumented students — and, in some cases, private funding. In order to receive Excelsior money, Hilliard notes, "students have to take what is in effect a super-full-time course load" — 15 credits. A typical full-time course load, the minimum required to receive TAP and Pell grants, is 12 credits a semester. Students already enrolled in college (in some cases before Excelsior existed) who want to join the program are required to have taken 30 credits a year previously in order to qualify.

"Two-thirds of the people who applied for Excelsior were denied," said Hilliard, whose study relied on data provided by the state. "Of those, 83 percent were denied because they had insufficient credits. That's well over 30,000 students" — 36,095, to be precise — "almost twice as many as actually received Excelsior grants."

"When you first go into school, planning 15 credits a semester is kind of overwhelming, especially when you have to work," Brooklyn College senior Isaac Uriburu, a graphic-design student who was denied an Excelsior scholarship last year, told *The Indy*. Uriburu receives some TAP money but not enough to cover his expenses. He said he would have taken the required credits had he known it would mean he would attend college tuition-free. But the program hadn't even been announced when he began attending school.

Contrary to the hype, Excelsior is not designed to help New York's working-class and low-income students, but rather its middle class. The top household income for eligibility was raised to \$110,000 this year and will go up to \$125,000 in 2019. Because the program provides aid on top of TAP and Pell grants, students from households closer to the limit stand to receive the most money.

At CUNY, 60 percent of undergraduate students and 71 percent of those enrolled in associate-degree programs come from households with incomes below \$30,000. Most full-time students already attend either tuition-free or nearly free, with TAP and Pell dollars. Yet graduation rates are abysmal. Just one in five students enrolled in CUNY's community colleges receives an associate's degree after three years. At the senior colleges, 55 percent of students fail to graduate after six years.

The problem for many students isn't so much going to CUNY as it is staying there, says Professor Brier. "Many poor and work-



### SCHOOL OF HARD

**KNOCKS:** Demonstrators rally at Borough of Manhattan Community College to demand the governor do more to help students struggling to graduate, Aug. 23.

### BOXED IN:

CUNY students ineligible for Excelsior scholarships make pose with DREAMer and state Assembly candidate Catalina Cruz (third from left).

ELIA GRAN



ing-class students don't have to pay tuition, but they still have to struggle to go to school. It is very expensive to live in New York, and many of them come from families where they have to work either part time or, in some cases, full time. Many of them have families of their own" (see page 6).

Both Brier and Hilliard argue that there are better ways to devote funds. Money could be put toward helping students with costs other than tuition, such as books and transportation, and hiring more full-time faculty, including guidance counselors — who currently are responsible for an average of 900 students each.

Adjusted for inflation and factoring in financial aid, per-student spending at CUNY is down 15 percent from pre-recession levels. Gov. Cuomo has vetoed bipartisan "maintenance of effort" legislation approved by state lawmakers in three of the last four years — bills that would require the state to appropriate enough aid for SUNY and CUNY to cover annual increases in operating costs such as salaries, rent, heat and electricity.

In an email, Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, the union representing professors and adjuncts at CUNY, praised Cuomo for focusing national attention on public higher education, but added that "the real problem is that CUNY is desperately underfunded."

"New York State could offer national leadership on higher education by restoring per-student funding at CUNY to sufficient levels and addressing the crisis of academic staffing," said Bowen. "Most CUNY courses are now taught by adjunct instructors on short-term contracts and minimal pay. An investment in CUNY would be an investment in the future of a half-million New Yorkers, largely from low-income communities and communities of color."

The limited programs that give CUNY students resources beyond tuition aid have proven successful. Graduation rates for community-college students who take part in its Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which combines access to books and free Metrocards with close academic guidance counseling, are double those of their peers. ASAP is funded by the city, which covers 38 percent of CUNY's community-college operating budget. But even with plans to expand it from 21,000 students last year to 25,000 this fall, ASAP will still reach barely a quarter of community-college students.

Meanwhile, Excelsior doesn't even appear to be working for the middle-class families it was designed to assist.

Corrinne Greene's parents are public school teachers and her household falls under the state's income threshold for the scholarship. The Brooklyn College theater major, now in her senior year, was rejected for not having taken enough credits to qualify. She described working two jobs over the summer in order to pay off hefty student loans.

"I want to be able to graduate and go to grad school, and I want to be able to afford to live in New York," she said. "But instead of thinking about grad school, I'm thinking about how to pay back my private loan debt from my undergraduate education."

At the same time that the state is reducing spending, tuition is going up. The CUNY Board of Trustees, the majority of whom have been appointed by Cuomo, has repeatedly raised it, including a \$200 increase in July. It now costs full-time undergraduates nearly \$7,000 a year to attend the university, a 26 percent increase since 2011. The rising cost puts a particular strain on part-time students, who make up 40 percent of those seeking associate's degrees and one-third of those in bachelor's degree programs. The cost increase is also borne by undocumented students, who are not eligible for TAP, Pell or Excelsior.

"There's lots the governor could do" to improve both access to and quality of education at CUNY, says Brier, who noted that the physical infrastructure on many CUNY campuses has fallen into disrepair. "But you can't run ads on TV saying that you repaired the roof and fixed the leak at the Lehman College library. You can't run that kind of ad, but you can have a paraplegic African-American woman in an advertisement saying that Excelsior allowed her to go to college, and that's what people remember. It's so cynical."

DAVE SANDERS

**FOLK, BLUES, BRASS & JAZZ | LIVE MUSIC SERIES  
SUNDAYS AT STARR BAR**

**SEPT 9**  
8PM | **REV BILLY  
AND THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING CHOIR**

**SEPT 16**  
9PM | **ROOTS & BLUES**  
WITH FATBOY WILSON AND OLD VIEJO BONES

**SEPT 23**  
7PM | **SONGS OF RESISTANCE**  
A FUNDRAISER FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

**SEPT 30**  
9PM | **PIANO CABARET**  
WITH MITCH MARCUS, SHAYE TROHA, JEREMY FREER AND GUESTS

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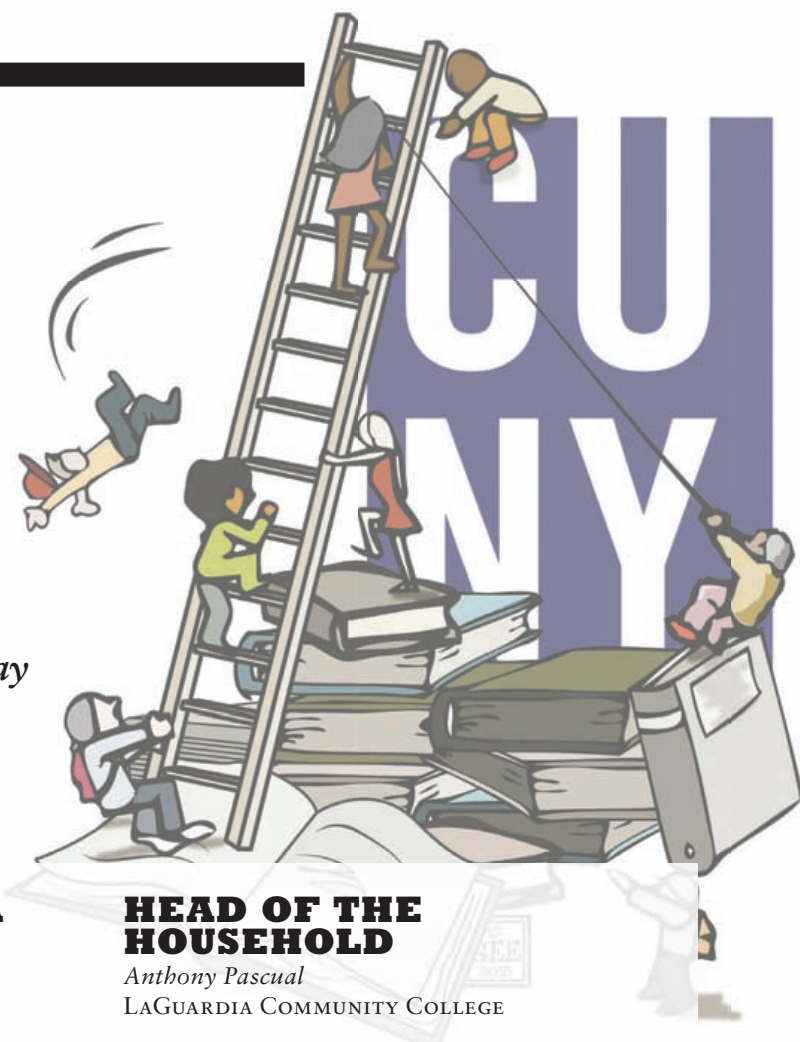
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# CLASS STRUGGLES

*For CUNY's working-class and immigrant students, making their way through college often means navigating challenges that extend well beyond the classroom.*



GARY MARTIN

## 'THE MARSHALS ARE HERE'

*Cheyenne Short*  
BROOKLYN COLLEGE

I'm currently in my sophomore year and am receiving TAP and federal aid to go to school. I'm a full-time student and work part time. I plan on going with a psychology major because I want to become a guidance counselor in order to help other students experiencing things like I've gone through.

My family always struggled with money like many other people do living in this city.

I remember when I was 14 my mom tapping my shoulder as I lay in bed one morning. "Wake up, Chey," she said. "We're being evicted. The marshals are here to change the locks. You have enough time to pack a bag."

My sister Katrina and I had soaked mom's shirt with tears by the time my dad walked into our bedroom. He just stood there watching us. "We don't have a lot of time," he mumbled. "Let's pack what we can." He must've felt the death stare in my eyes because he looked away and left the room.

When the marshals shut the door and walked us down the steps, little did I know this was the first time, but it definitely wouldn't be the last.

Without the help from some of the high school administrators I had supporting me through those years, I don't think I would've made it to where I am today. To be that person for another student in need would mean the world to me.

## CONFRONTING A MAGA BIGOT

*Mohammed Kabir*  
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The transition from the Obama administration to Trump's brought forth many radical right-wing conservatives. They're more inclined to express their views in public regardless of how others may feel, especially when it comes to immigrants like me.

I am in my first academic year and am working full time while going to school full time. I'm unable to take out any student loans since DACA recipients are not eligible. I'm one of the 800,000 DACA recipients, and under the Trump administration I'm labeled a criminal without ever committing a crime.

It's been a nightmare since Congress failed to pass immigration reform in March. Every day I walk through a fog of anxiety and uncertainty. I try to remain positive and constantly remind myself that life could be much worse. I use the internet as one tool to escape dreadful reality.

I'm never the one to comment on any immigration post because I wouldn't want to expose myself, but last month while riding the bus home I was on Instagram and I came across an illustration of a boot kicking a child through a doorway labelled "Make America Great Again." I was just going to ignore it, when a lone comment drew my attention. "Deport these job stealing kids out of my country, MAGA!" it read.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back. I created a fake profile in order to add my two cents. After looking through the commenter's profile, I was tempted to curse him out and poke fun at his double chin. I wanted to be as distasteful and hurtful as he was, but I couldn't come to do it. It wasn't me. I wanted him to confront his fear, his fear of me, to learn that I was just as American as he was.

We went back and forth. I informed him what criteria I needed to meet in order to be eligible for DACA. I told him my experience growing up in America. How I pledged allegiance to our flag, of my failed attempts to join the Army because I didn't have a Social Security number. I shared my joy of driving for the first time and at receiving my first tax-deducting paycheck.

Near the end of our debate, which turned into a conversation, he admitted that he crossed a line with his comment because he's never met a DACA recipient. He apologized and said he had started to see the flaws in our immigration system. I didn't know whether he was joking or not but I accepted his apology.

It could have been a Russian troll on the other end of that profile and I'd never know but for once in my life, I was able to share my journey while persuading others that DACA recipients are Americans too. I have chosen Computer Sciences as my major. I'm following my passion and hope to land a scholarship to continue my education at a four-year university.

## HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

*Anthony Pascual*  
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

It's spring break 2018! There I was, on my knees — sweat dripping, heart pounding, tears pouring. This moment of despair arose out of a need for drastic change.

For several years I had been the head of my household. My mother came to this country in 1992 from the Dominican Republic and has since claimed a corner of a couch as her throne, welfare and food stamps as her bread and butter. My older brother is currently in a shelter with my two nephews. He never finished high school and let his citizenship expire. My youngest brother hasn't finished high school either. When he was fired from Chipotle, my mother began one of her long, drawn-out speeches about responsibility.

I knew this time I had to intervene. So I took the most vulnerable position I could imagine; I kneeled and apologized for any disrespect I was about to express. I finally made it clear to them what this family unit has been missing all along is not the know-how, ability, or opportunity to do something toward positive change. What they lacked was the desire from within to get things done. As a son or a daughter you never want to cross any lines but the reality is my mother did not lead by the example which she preached so passionately.

The tension was so electrifying the lights seemed to flicker — although that could've been the result of my own eyes twitching from the conviction with which I spoke.

I thought I could free my own family from their mental slavery, but I was slapped with the unspoken bitter truth, I can't do it. Despite my efforts they looked me in the eyes and shrugged their shoulders.

These days I am living with my father. I work full time at the dining hall at NYU and was attending school full time too with TAP and Pell grants at LaGuardia until this year. I already have a certificate in audio engineering and production and plan to start my own business. All I'm missing is a car and more equipment. Eventually I plan to move on to mixing and mastering audiobooks and things. I do plan to go back to school eventually and I'm not knocking it, but you don't have to sit in a classroom for three hours staring at a board to learn something.

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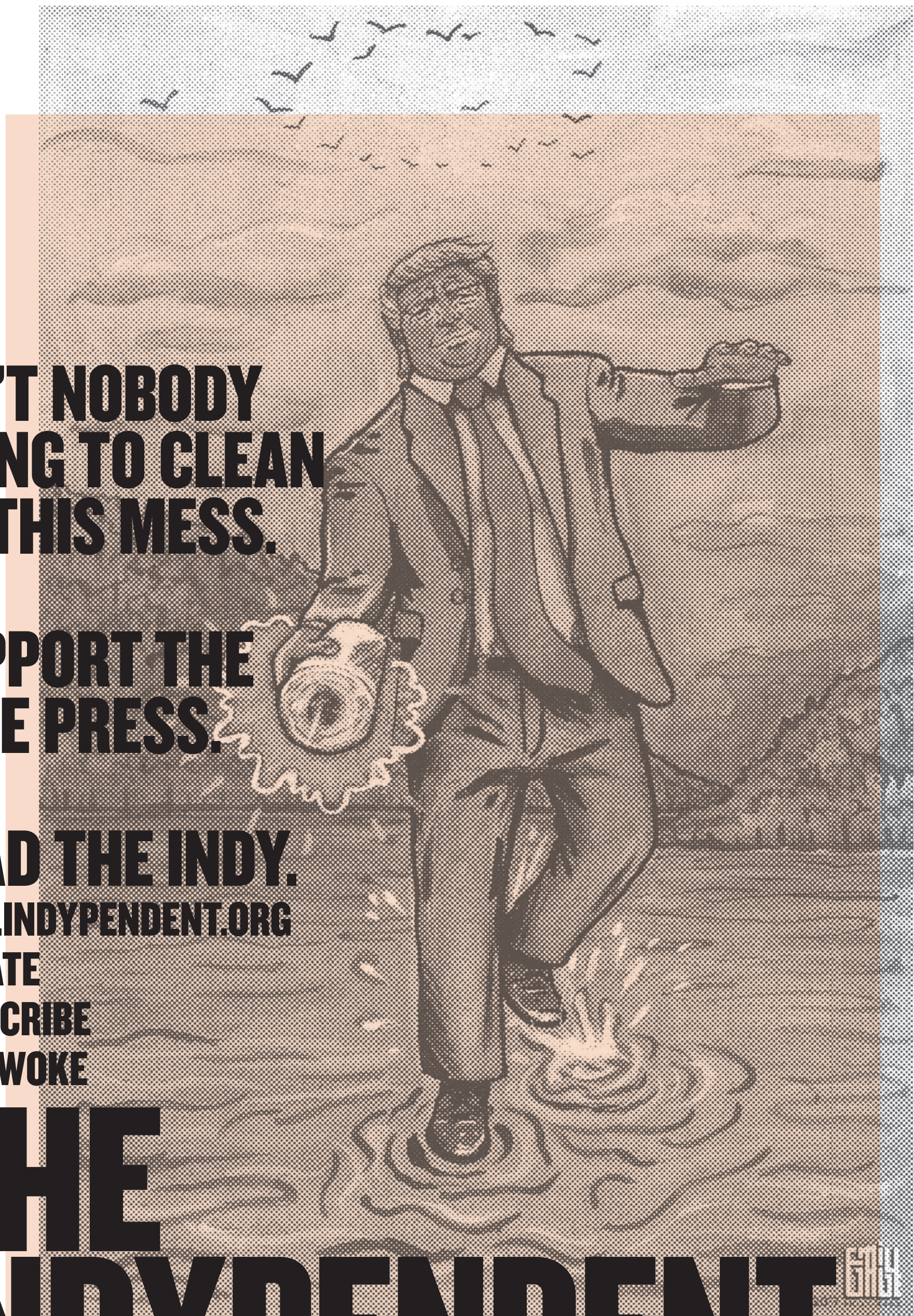
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# BLOCKING OUT THE SUN

## THE END OF 'NET-METERING' CASTS A SHADOW OVER THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK SOLAR POWER

BY LYDIA McMULLEN-LAIRD

**O**n a bright August afternoon in Brooklyn, the sun beat down fiercely as New Yorkers scrambled for slivers of shade. Except for Shaugh Dolcy. The 43-year-old software developer proudly basked in the rays on the roof of his four-story building and showed off the brand-new solar rig that glistened brightly against the blue sky.

Dolcy's wife, Tamara, chased their six-year-old son, Rhys, through the expanse of silver and black panels, some resting at a slant a few feet above the rooftop and others towering on 20-foot poles, creating an impressive metal canopy.

The solar project, which was installed in June, is now powering all eight apartments and the common areas in the building, an affordable-housing co-op. It has the potential to lower the residents' electricity bills from over \$100 a month to a mere \$15, said Annabelle Heckler, another tenant.

"We're all really excited about it," she said. A sunny day turns their rooftop into a mini-power plant, and means less money goes to Con Edison.

Affordable-housing units aren't generally the places you'd expect solar energy, as the cost of buying and installing the technology has associated it with eco-conscious suburbanites who have cash to burn. But low-income communities stand to benefit the most from the decrease in energy costs solar energy provides, said Stephan Roundtree, environmental policy and advocacy coordinator for WE ACT, an environmental-justice organization in northern Manhattan. Electricity is the highest bill low-income residents in the neighborhood pay after rent, he said.

Installing community solar—a collection of panels used by multiple households—was a simple process under net metering, which enables tenants like Dolcy and Heckler to sell excess electricity their solar-energy system produces to utilities for credit on their bill. However, several states, including New York, have either ended it or weakened it, under political pressure from large utilities.

In September 2017, the state Public Service Commission approved a new policy called Value of Distributed Energy Resources (VDER), which will phase out reverse metering in favor of a system where utilities set how much they will pay based on when and where the solar panels provide electricity to the grid. The commission proposed it after receiving criticism from utility companies that net metering oversimplifies solar pricing mechanisms.

New York has already lost over \$800 million in investments and thousands of potential green-collar jobs since VDER was put into effect, said Chris Carrick, the energy program manager for the five-county Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board. A co-op in Inwood that wanted to install a similar system abandoned it after the value of solar energy decreased.

Advocates worry that VDER will continue to have crippling effects on New York's growing solar industry and vow to make this a campaign issue if Gov. Andrew Cuomo fails to address it.

The governor said in 2015 that clean power would become available to all New Yorkers "regardless of their zip code or income." But his administration has yet to come up with a plan to reinstate net metering, which advocates say is crucial for keeping solar prices affordable, predictable and easy to understand.

"We need to acknowledge that utilities have been pushing back

against net metering," said Carrick. Con Edison, one of the largest utilities in the U.S., was one of the companies that submitted comments against net metering and in favor of VDER to the state Department of Public Service as early as 2016. The Con Edison Employees PAC has donated thousands of dollars to Cuomo's election campaigns over the past decade, according to the New York State Board of Elections.

States including Hawaii, Arizona, Maine, Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Wisconsin have also switched to other policies. However, net metering continues to be popular. An August 2017 survey by the University of Michigan found 76 percent of respondents supported it.

While VDER makes the valuing of solar energy more nuanced, it also makes it more complicated to participate in community solar projects, said Kelly Roache, director of inclusion at Solstice, an organization dedicated to promoting affordable community solar.

VDER only considers the market value of solar energy and decreases in greenhouse gas emissions, she explained. It fails to count other environmental benefits of community solar power, such as decreasing co-pollutants and particulate matter from fossil fuels and offering an affordable energy option to marginalized communities.

Low-income communities and communities of color "are on both ends of the experience of injustice," she added. They are more likely to experience pollution from the fossil-fuel industry and to spend a large portion of their income on utility bills.

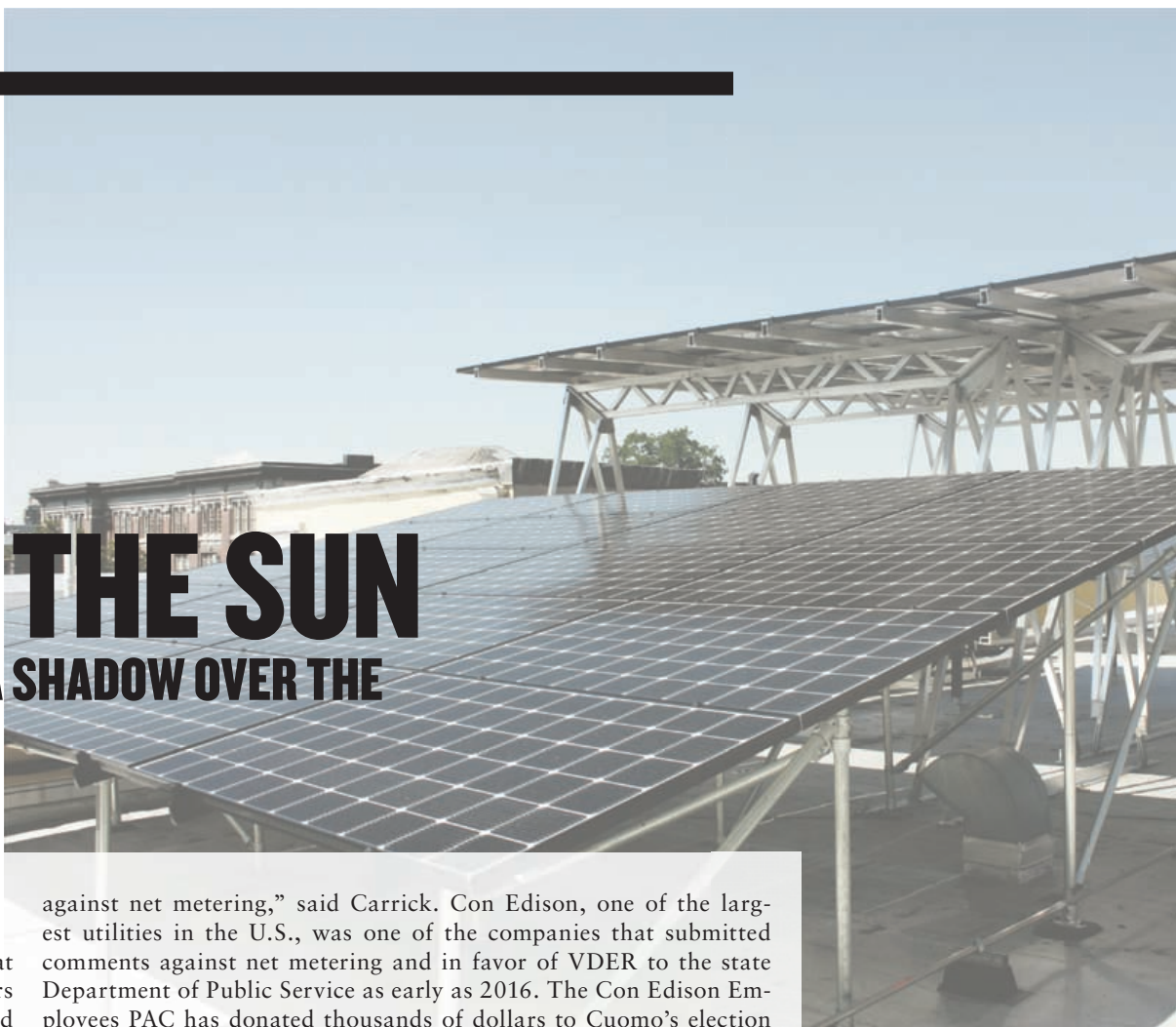
In other parts of New York State, community solar helps fill in the gap for those who aren't able to install rooftop panels and allows customers to buy a share of panels in another location, said Carrick. For those who can't afford to invest in shares, there are pay-as-you-go options that work like monthly cell-phone plans.

Solar currently provides over 9,000 jobs and powers more than 200,000 homes in New York State. Carrick said the energy program at the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board has approved 35 community solar projects that could provide power for up to 8,000 residents. Many were slated to be built on closed landfills—land that otherwise has no meaningful use.

But most of these projects will no longer be viable under VDER and are currently on hold, he said.

Facing pressure from community and environmental activists, the Assembly passed A.10474, a bill to reinstate net metering, by a large margin in June. But the state Senate version, S.08273, failed to make it through the Republican-controlled upper house.

Advocates are pushing for action from Cuomo's office. "We are fully prepared to do whatever we can to make this a campaign issue," said Carrick.



ELIA GRAN



ELIA GRAN

**BEAM ME UP:**  
A brand new solar rig sits atop a four-story affordable housing co-op in Brooklyn.

**WELCOME TO THE FUTURE?:** A mother and child visit their building's rooftop solar panels.

**A BOON FOR RESIDENTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**



# CUOMO'S DONORS GET THE GREEN

## THE GUV IS AWARDING RENEWABLE ENERGY GRANTS TO HIS BIG MONEY CONTRIBUTORS.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo is using the state's renewable energy funds, collected via surcharges on New Yorkers' utility bills, to award campaign donors with grants through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and its child organization, the New York Green Bank.

"Low-income households pay a disproportionate amount of their income to fund the Green Bank when compared to wealthy households," notes Jessica Azulay, Executive Director of Alliance for a Green Economy. "Because the Green Bank is using public money, it really should have a goal of equitable funding, with a strong focus on overcoming the barriers that New York's most vulnerable communities face when they want to implement renewable energy projects."

But the governor has primarily used NYSERDA's 10-year Clean Energy Fund, a pool of \$5.3 billion, and the Green Bank to finance donors' energy projects. Five renewable energy behemoths who have given tens of thousands of dollars to Cuomo have received grants in the millions.

- In June, NYSERDA announced NRG Renew would receive \$18 million from the Green Bank to support distributed community generation solar projects in the Hudson Valley. NRG Renew has given \$42,500 to Cuomo since 2010.
- Conifer Realty LLC gave \$45,500 to Cuomo over the same time frame and in June received \$75,000 to retrofit buildings in New York State.
- Brookfield Renewable, an energy subsidiary of the multinational asset management firm, Brookfield Group, gave \$100,000 through 3 different LLC's registered to the same address on Jan. 9, 2017. Three days later, in his State of the State address, Cuomo announced that NYSERDA was awarding \$360 million in grants to support renewable energy generation upstate. Brookfield Renewable and a subsidiary were among two of eleven recipients of the funding.
- Renew Financial, a holding of Nathaniel Simons' Prelude Ventures, received \$20 million from the Green Bank in 2015 to expand a lending program that finances green home

improvements. Simons' father, James, a hedge fund billionaire named in the Panama Papers, has given \$260,000 to Cuomo since 2010. The younger Simons made a \$65,000 first-time donation to Cuomo in January.

- NextEra Energy Transmission, which has donated \$10,500 to Cuomo, was among the recipients of a \$1.4 billion grant from NYSERDA to fund large-scale renewable development projects. The two grants NextEra received will go toward solar facilities in Mohawk Valley.

Though any solution for the climate crisis will necessarily include the kinds of renewable energy technologies that NYSERDA and the Green Bank support, the people that are benefiting most from its grants are wealthy hedge-fund managers not communities.

There is also a significant overlap between Cuomo donors and the boards that oversee the grants. John McAvoy, the CEO of Consolidated Edison Inc., gave \$7,000 to Cuomo in 2016 and again in 2017. He was appointed by Cuomo to NYSERDA's board in 2014.

NYSERDA is headed by former Goldman Sachs banker Robert Kauffman, himself a one-time Cuomo donor, though the \$10,000 donation was made in 2005 while the governor was running for Attorney General.

As chairman of NYSERDA, Kauffman oversees New York State's entire energy portfolio, including the New York State Department of Public Service, the New York Power Authority, the Long Island Power Authority, NYSERDA and its Green Bank. Kauffman's predecessor, Robert Catell, has been a bit looser with the purse strings, making \$32,000 in contributions to the governor between 2006 and 2018.

Cuomo-appointed Green Bank President, Alfred Griffin, is also Citigroup executive. In 2015, Citi extended a \$50 million line of credit to Nathaniel Simons' Renewal Financial, supplementing the \$20 million it received from the Green Bank.

Meanwhile, says Azulay, "The Green Bank hasn't done much in the arena of lending for projects that serve low-income communities or communities of color, the communities that struggle the most to find the upfront capital to build renewable energy projects."

NYSERDA declined to comment for this article. Gov. Cuomo's office did not respond to requests for comment.



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# FOR THE BIRDS

## UPTOWN ART PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS PERILS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

STORY BY NANCY HOCH  
PHOTOS BY ELIA GRAN

In May, a time when hundreds of migrating bird species drop by New York City to rest and refuel, someone on my Brooklyn block discovered a male Scarlet Tanager in his backyard and took a picture for the local listserv. To us, the appearance of this gorgeous red and black bird on its way to the forests of the Northeast was a sign of spring. It used to be, when I was a child, that the arrival of robins was another. But nowadays in my neighborhood robins can be found in the bare branches of street trees all winter long.

Everyone who saw the photo of the Scarlet Tanager was thrilled. What none of us knew is that future generations of New Yorkers most likely will never see this bird or many others we currently take for granted. In 2014, a study by the National Audubon Society, the Birds and Climate Change Report, concluded that over half of all the bird species in North America will be threatened or endangered by climate change by the end of this century and that many could face extinction. Nearly all of the Scarlet Tanager's summer range, mostly now in the United States, is projected to shift north into Canada by 2080. The report also found that the area of suitable climate for the Scarlet Tanager will shrink to three-quarters of the area it now occupies and that some of the bird's "new" suitable range will be in western Canada, where it will face competition from the Western Tanager, also on Audubon's climate-threatened list. "As a result," the report concludes, "the future may be grimmer for the Scarlet Tanager than depicted by the model."

The Audubon report studies only temperature, precipitation and seasonal variables, not whether a bird's new climate range will be viable in terms of vegetation, topography or food. "Trying to study how temperature lines up with the specific habitat that each bird needs is enormously complex," National Audubon Society's Jennifer Bogo explained to *The Independent*. "Even if the temperature further north is right, that habitat may not be a grassland or whatever it is that particular species needs." Another unknown is how different species will react to climate change. Some will attempt to shift into the new range, while others, even as the environment around them becomes less viable, will stay put.

Birds "are better studied than any other comparable group," making them, according to Patricia Zurita, CEO of BirdLife International, "an excellent means through which to take the pulse of the planet." In other words, what is happening to birds has serious implications for all life on earth. Last spring, BirdLife International published *The State of the World's Birds* which concluded that 40 percent of bird species worldwide are in decline and one in eight species is threatened with extinction. Agricultural expansion, pollution and urbanization are identified as major culprits. "Longer term," the group warned, "human-induced climate change may prove to be the most serious threat of all."

Deadly heatwaves and increasingly frequent "100-year" floods are one way climate change is making its presence felt. Another is what some environmentalists call "slow violence" — when change happens so gradually or so far from the public eye that the damage can scarcely be perceived. In the Arctic, for example, which is warming faster than elsewhere, insects are emerging weeks sooner than they used to, with the result that the chicks of shorebirds, which have flown thousands of miles to breed there, are starving in death.

The Audubon report identifies "strongholds," habitat areas across the United States and Canada that the study shows will be especially important to preserve or protect. Each of the threatened birds has its own map, and consultants are on hand at Audubon to help local conservationists work with the data. But while National Audubon Society President David Yarnold sees identifying these strongholds as a cause for hope, he says that waging an all-out fight against climate change now is even more important.

The problem is, for many of us, the news about what is happening to the planet is so overwhelming — especially given the failure of the world com-

munity to address the crisis — that it is hard not to tune out. Psychologist Robert Jay Lifton in his recent book *The Climate Swerve* calls this response "psychic numbing."

In northern Manhattan, a mural project is under way that aims to help people tune back in. Artists are painting images of the 314 North American bird species the Audubon report has so far identified as threatened or endangered by climate change.

The project is a collaboration between the National Audubon Society and local art gallery owner Avi Gitler. In 2014, when Avi opened a commercial art gallery in Hamilton Heights, Gitler & \_\_\_\_\_ on Broadway near 150th Street, he asked two artists to paint murals on nearby roll-down store shutters. The first artist chose a bird as his subject, so the second artist did too. Not long after, Mark Jannot, a staffer at the National Audubon Society who lived nearby, noticed the murals and began talking to Avi about Audubon's *Birds and Climate Change Report*, which had just been published. Out of this set of serendipities, the project was born.

Most of the murals can be found in the 140s and 150s along Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. "We've concentrated the murals to make it walkable," Avi, 38, told *The Indy*, "and we wanted to pay tribute to Mr. Audubon." John James Audubon, the naturalist who documented nearly 700 species of American birds through his drawings, lived the last 10 years of his life in Hamilton Heights. His 14-acre estate overlooked the Hudson River and upon his death in 1851 he was buried nearby in Trinity Church Cemetery. People often leave offerings at the base of the Celtic cross marking his grave.

So far 102 species have been depicted, every mural another example, as one participating artist put it, "of how many ways one can paint the same subject." I first viewed the murals on a Sunday morning in May when I joined an NYC Audubon walking tour. Riding the uptown #1 subway train, you can see the first murals around 133rd Street and Broadway, just before the train goes back underground. Two plump birds — a Bay-breasted Warbler and a Semipalmated Plover — face each other on adjacent roll-down store shutters, bright yellow orbs behind their heads as if they're little avian saints. Up at 163rd Street near Amsterdam, the mood is decidedly grimmer: on a five-story wall two Tricolored Herons fight each other for the last morsel of food — a snake — while below them a third heron drowns in the rising waters of the melting glaciers.

At 148th and Broadway, two Ovenbirds, whose normal habitat is the quiet recesses of a forest floor, perch atop a landscape of colorful graffiti-inspired shapes where the artist, a native New Yorker, imagines "the species' unheard song joining the noise of the urban world." According to the Audubon report, by 2080 a large chunk of the Ovenbirds' breeding range will shift north into what is now treeless tundra. Not far away, on a roll-down shutter, a turkey metamorphosing into a man — or perhaps it is a man turning into a turkey — is a reference to Roald Dahl's *The Magic Finger*, a story about inter-species empathy.

Many artists paint with the aesthetics of the neighborhood or the request of a storeowner in mind. One storeowner, who requested something "aggressive," got lightning in the background and a Peregrine Falcon, talons extended, coming straight for the viewer.

Each mural is marked with audubonmuralproject.org, a website where you can learn more about the birds and the artists and donate to help defray costs. There is also a link on the site to Audubon's *Birds and Climate Change Report* and to NYC Audubon, where you can sign up for a walking tour. If you want to head out on your own, the site supplies a map.

Since the project began in the fall of 2014, Avi has been its main organizer, soliciting most of the spaces — all donated by landlords or storeowners — and selecting the artists, a diverse group ranging from studio artists who have never painted on a public wall to graffiti artists who were "painting subway cars back in the day." Avi's first preference is for artists from northern Manhattan, but artists from across the United States and from as far away as Australia have also come to paint.



**EPIC:** "Endangered Harlem" by Gaia, at Amsterdam and 153rd St., considers the migration of humans as well as birds.

**PUBLIC ART:** Yumi Rodriguez at work on her mural of the Rufous Hummingbird, Broadway and 161st St.

**FEATHERED FRIEND:** Red-faced Warbler at 601 W. 162nd St by ATM, a London street artist who uses art to help inspire a "re-wilding" of our cities and countryside.

The project runs on a shoestring, mostly funded by the National Audubon Society. "The first conversation I have with artists," Avi says, "is that nobody does the Audubon mural project for the money." Artists receive supplies and some get a very small honorarium. For out-of-towners there is a "local hosting infrastructure" — families who will put an artist up for two nights and give them dinner. The project received a grant from the Rubin Foundation a year and a half ago, but is otherwise supported by small donations from fans of the project.

About six months ago Avi came to the realization that only 35 percent of the muralists were female. One reason for the imbalance, he thinks, is that "so many street artists have their roots in graffiti and there are definitely more men doing illegal graffiti than women" though "this may be changing." In terms of the mural project, Avi says things are "starting to balance out: the last four large-scale murals — those are the really coveted ones — were all painted by women."

On a sunny afternoon in June, I catch up with Yumi Rodriguez, 25, sitting on a clear plastic tarp at the corner of 161 Street and Broadway, where she is chatting with neighbors and passersby as she paints a Rufous Hummingbird on the shutter of Romulo's Barber Shop. Yumi is Dominican-American.

She grew up across the street, raised by her grandparents. A hand-written sign propped among the paint cans explains in English and Spanish that the mural is in honor of her grandfather, Odalis Alvarez, who worked at the barbershop until two years ago, when he suffered a heart attack. Now he is confined to his apartment. His pet name for Yumi, growing up, was Colibrí (hummingbird).

Like many these days, Yumi works several jobs including as a veterinary technician and an illustrator of spiders at the Museum of Natural History. Her scientific training is obvious: in the mural's center, a hummingbird, still just a sketch in black and white, hangs suspended in midflight surrounded by nine other endangered plants and animals including the Karner blue butterfly, Houston's goldenrod and the rusty patched bumble bee. In real life, the Rufous Hummingbird is three inches long, but in Yumi's mural it and all the other creatures loom large: "I'm magnifying these tiny creatures to raise awareness. People say, 'Oh my God, they're so beautiful,' and I go 'They're in danger of going extinct, we just never see them.'" One of the insects depicted, the American burying beetle, is currently under threat of being removed from protection by Republican lawmakers who say those protections are inhibiting oil and gas companies.

The plants and animals surround-

ing Yumi's hummingbird were chosen not because they are part of its normal habitat but because she finds them "aesthetically pleasing." She pulls up a photo of one of the plants — northeastern bulrush — on her phone to show me: "They have a brownish pinkish tinge of color which I like. I'm not sure if anybody pollinates these guys," she says, her voice trailing off. But, she asserts, the point the mural is trying to illustrate — that nature is a web — still stands: without pollinators like the hummingbird and the bee, the plants that depend on them to reproduce will also perish.

Yumi's sign encourages people to stop and talk. Some even end up helping out — mixing paint, or filling in between the lines. Every so often one of the barbers steps out to check on her. "They're my security guard," Yumi says. She's been hassled several times by men, an experience that is perhaps more common for female street artists than is generally acknowledged. Yumi says considerations of safety have slowed down her progress some, but so too have all the positive interactions.

Not long after I arrive, a woman with two young daughters stops by. The mother tells Yumi, "Just this morning my neighbor was saying that every year she sees less and less caterpillars

*Continued on next page*

## YEAR OF THE BIRD

This is not the first time North American birds have faced an existential threat — nor the first time that art has played a role in sounding the alarm. From the late 18th century on, feathers and avian body parts were the rage in women's fashion, adorning dresses, hats, jewelry and fans. By the 1880s, five million birds a year were being killed, many destined for New York City's "Ladies Mile," a high-fashion shopping district in downtown Manhattan. There you could buy earrings fashioned out of hummingbird heads or a hair ornament made from the wispy feathers egrets produce during breeding. Killing the adult egrets during breeding season meant their eggs and chicks also perished. By the late 19th century, many bird species were on the verge of extinction.

Then activists — led largely by women in local Audubon chapters — began to rally. One tactic protesters used was the "Audubonnet," a beautiful hat constructed out of ribbons, flowers and lace instead of the feathers of migratory or song birds. Wearing one became a proud political statement.

Their efforts led to what is still the nation's most important bird protection legislation — the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) passed by Congress in 1918. Protecting over 1000 U.S. bird species today, the law helped bring many species back from the brink of extinction. To mark the centennial of its passage, more than 100 organizations have declared 2018 The Year of the Bird.

"We thought it would be a year to celebrate the MBTA," Audubon's Jennifer Bogo told *The Indy*, "but it's turned out to be a year to defend it as well." That's because the Trump Administration has taken aim at the

part of the law that holds industries accountable for birds accidentally killed when precautions like making power lines and windmills bird-safe or covering waste pits with nets are not taken. Trump wants industry held accountable only for birds intentionally killed, a directive that would eliminate the incentive for companies to follow best practices. Also eliminated would be penalties for disasters like the British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon oil spill, where, under the MBTA, BP was found liable for the deaths of one million birds and fined \$100 million. "The money didn't bring the birds back, but it did a lot in terms of cleaning up the habitat and funding additional science that would let us figure out what the birds needed and what really is happening to those different populations," NYC Audubon's Susan Elbin told *The Indy*.

In May, the National Audubon Society filed a federal lawsuit — Audubon v. Dept. of Interior — in defense of the MBTA. Readers who want to learn more or to write to the Interior Secretary and their members of Congress in support of the MBTA can visit [action.audubon.org/mbta](http://action.audubon.org/mbta).

## FOR THE BIRDS

*Continued from previous page*

when she sits out on her porch.” A while later, a boy of about eight going by with his mom wants to stop but the mom pulls him on. “I want people to know why I’m doing this,” Yumi says after they go. “The adults are more on the defense about it. Educating the children is great, but they are the next generation. We have to get to the parents. Unfortunately, especially up here, a lot of people don’t have access to education so they don’t know how they are affecting the environment. We are running out of time.”

Some of the murals may be as ephemeral as the species they represent: a building with two large murals on it, for example, is slated for demolition sometime soon, a fact that was known even before painting there got under way. And when a store changes hands, the new owner sometimes decides to have the mural the previous owner had solicited removed. These changes reflect the fact that, like many parts of New York City, northern Manhattan is gentrifying. While most of the artists have chosen to depict only birds, one mural by Gaia entitled “Endangered Harlem” takes up the theme of human displacement as well, referencing European colonialism in the 17th century and the flight of African Americans from the South during the 20th. “The greatest irony of it all,” Gaia concludes on the mural project’s website, “is raising ecological awareness whilst the people of Harlem are endangered of significant gentrification.”

This is Avi’s first public art project, and he’s clearly learning on the job. “I didn’t think about gentrification when I started this project,” he says, even though he grew up just 25 blocks north of his gallery. “I thought, if we paint birds how wonderful that would be. We were focused on beautification, on fixing up dirty walls.” Once, though, “two women told me they felt it was being done by a bunch of intruders who don’t know the history here.” Now, he’s more sensitive to these concerns, which is one of the reasons the project has begun to partner with more organizations, including a city playground, a public school and a community garden.

Still, developing a consensus is not easy. A proposed mural for the Sugar Hill Project, a Broadway Housing Communities (BHC) building for low-income and formerly homeless families at 155th and St. Nicholas Avenue illustrates the point. The mural will overlook a gas station and a children’s museum. “We want to be sensitive. Do the gas station guys like it, does the architect like it, does the Sugar Hill Children’s Museum like it, does the BHC, whose building we are painting, like it?” Choosing an artist for the next mural raises another set of questions. “Some people will be upset that we aren’t choosing the best artist, others will be upset that we aren’t choosing an artist who lives between 135th and 210th streets.”

Stefen Reed, 39, is an African-American artist who was born and raised in the neighborhood. Currently he works with the Children’s Art Carnival, an arts education program that he began attending when he was eight. In the art world, Stefen goes by the name Ayobe, a transcription of the greeting “Hey, yo B!” His painting of an American Oystercatcher, its red bill plunging into a mussel, is one of 10 small canvases displayed in the windows of the Mobil service station at 155th Street and Broadway. There are also two building-size murals on either side of the plaza where people pump gas. In total, 23 birds are represented. Sitting on a stoop nearby, Ayobe and I agree there is a kind of irony in having the spirits of all these climate-endangered birds overlooking a gas station.

Before the Audubon mural project, Ayobe didn’t know

there was a bird crisis. He felt good about getting involved, but “then it just reminded me of how people are mistreated and endangered, especially in this neighborhood. It’s a great cause fighting for humanity and for animal rights too. I’m just wondering how we can do both at the same time.”

If you ask people in the neighborhood what they think of the murals, the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. People just love them. But if you ask what the murals are about, almost no one will say climate change. Putting only the Audubon url on the murals seems to have been a mistake. “We didn’t put a hashtag because we felt that’s just a selfie-related instruction,” Avi explains. “We felt if people logged in to the website they could really learn. What we’ve learned over the last few years is that most people don’t open the website.”

Audubon’s Jennifer Bogo sees the murals working on a more subtle level. “Even if it hasn’t raised awareness about how birds are threatened by climate change, it’s maybe caused people to think about their own relationship with birds in their own neighborhoods a bit differently. The murals are a great reminder that people and birds use the same spaces and that we both need those spaces to be healthy.”

Ayobe thinks of the project as a sort of back door through which the difficult information of climate change may eventually slip in. Artists, he says, “have a responsibility not just to tell our truth but to tell the truth of the environment we live in.” Still, he acknowledges that these days “people are tired of hearing sad stories constantly. After a while, even with myself, it’s like ‘Ok. I don’t want to hear it anymore.’ We just need to find some different ways of reaching people.” For his part, Ayobe plans to help improve his neighbors’ lives by working through the Children’s Art Carnival. “Once that work has some traction,” he told me, “I’ll be able to introduce other ideas like what’s happening to birds to people who don’t know. Maybe seeing a familiar face like mine, they’ll be more receptive to it.”

Back in May when I joined NYC Audubon’s walking tour to see the murals for the first time, most of my fellow tour goers were birders, many with binoculars slung around their necks. All of us knew that the project was about climate change because it was advertised as such when we signed up for the tour, but even so we started out in high spirits, enjoying the art and the camaraderie. When we reached the Mobil gas station and were surrounded by the images of so many birds, however, the group fell silent. A woman near me said quietly, “Seems like all the birds we know are endangered.” Someone else wiped away a tear. For a few moments on that windy spring morning, the art made us stop, look up and see something larger than ourselves.



### THE MURALIST:

When Yumi Rodriguez isn’t painting her mural at 161st and Broadway, she works as a veterinary technician and illustrates spiders for the Museum of Natural History.

**WHERE JOHN J. AUDUBON ONCE ROAMED, MURALISTS NOW PAINT LARGER-THAN-LIFE IMAGES OF 314 ENDANGERED NORTH AMERICAN BIRD SPECIES.**

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



GOVERNORANDREWCUOMO/FICKR

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

### DEATH TOLL FROM HURRICANE MARIA MUCH HIGHER THAN INITIAL ESTIMATES

Officials in Puerto Rico revised the death toll from last year's Hurricane Maria to 2,975, following the release of a study by George Washington University on August 28. The government's initial estimate put the figure at 65. President Donald Trump, who was accused of neglecting the island in the wake of the category 4 storm, pointed to the initially low death count to defend his administration's response, which he rated 10 out of 10, citing lives saved. Vigils and protests marking the anniversary of Maria are planned in Washington, D.C., Mar-a-Lago, Fl. and NYC's Union Square on Sept. 20.

### CALIFORNIA BURNING

California state officials warned in August that climate change will greatly increase the severity of forest fires in the coming years. The amount of acreage burned in the state could climb by 77 percent by the end of the century, as warmer weather leads to drier conditions, according to California's Climate Change Assessment report, the first in six years. This year 810,000 acres have been consumed by flames, 90,000 acres above the annual average. The Mendocino Complex Fire in northern California this summer was the largest in the state's history, consuming nearly 300,000 acres. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue have played down the role of global warming in the fires and have called for California's forests to be thinned by logging and prescribed burns.

### STUDENT LOAN WATCHDOG RESIGNS IN DISGUST

Seth Frotman, head of the Consumer Financial Protection Agency's (CFPA's) student loan oversight wing, stepped down on August 27, accusing the acting head of the bureau, Mick Mulvaney, of using CFPA "to serve the wishes of the

most powerful financial companies in America," in a resignation letter obtained by NPR. CFPA's student loan oversight arm has won a total of \$750 million dollars in restitution for

borrowers since the bureau was created in the wake of the 2008 financial crash. Just days before President Trump's inauguration, Frotman's office filed a lawsuit against Navient, one of the nation's largest student lenders for inflating the cost of loan repayments for millions of borrowers. Navient Chief Executive John Remondi wrote a letter to Mulvaney in February asking him to drop the suit. Observers expect Mulvaney's decision to be bellwether of CFPA's approach to regulation. Americans hold \$1.4 trillion in student debt.

### LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH & HEINOUS

Billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch and their allies plan to spend \$400 million backing right-wing politicians by the time the midterm elections are over. But swaying democracy with outsize campaign donations isn't the Koch's only expensive hobby. When David Koch and his wife Julia attended a home decor show on the Upper East Side earlier this year, they admired the mansion where it took place so much they bought the building outright, paying \$40.25 million in cash for the 15,000-square-foot home at East 76th Street.

### THIS KILLER COP WILL DO TIME

A Texas jury has found former police officer Roy Oliver guilty in the killing of an unarmed African American teenager and sentenced him to 15 years in prison. On April 29, 2017, Oliver was dispatched to investigate a report of underage drinking at a home in Balch Springs, Texas, a Dallas-area suburb. When he saw a car with five teens inside driving away he grabbed his patrol rifle and opened fire into the car killing Jordan Edwards, 15. "This is a start," said Charmaine Edwards, the victim's step-mother.

**AS DEADLY AS 9/11:** Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

"*Citizen Illegal* is right on time, bringing both empathy and searing critique to the fore as a nation debates the very humanity of the people who built it."  
—EVE L. EWING, author of *Electric Arches*

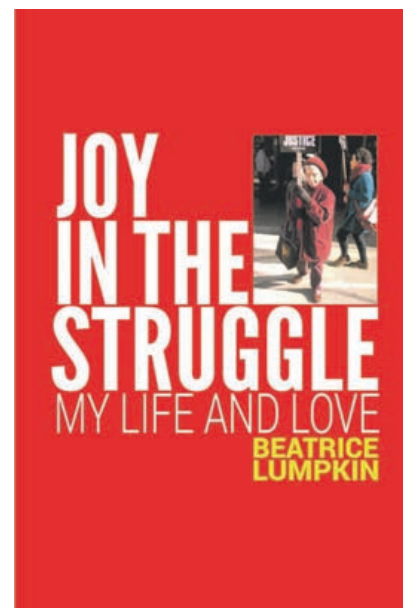
"Incredible . . . Olivarez gives us the poem as incantation, using language to transcend the limits of social constructions and the physical, temporal world."  
—*The Rumpus*

HaymarketBooks



In this stunning debut, poet José Olivarez explores the stories, contradictions, joys, and sorrows that embody life in the spaces between Mexico and America. He paints vivid portraits of good kids, bad kids, families clinging to hope, life after the steel mills, and gentrifying barrios. Drawing on the rich traditions of Latinx and Chicago writers like Sandra Cisneros and Gwendolyn Brooks, Olivarez creates a home out of life in the in-between.

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# RUMBLINGS IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

PRISONERS IN MULTIPLE STATES CARRY OUT PRISON STRIKE

BY LIBBY RAINEY

**N**ews of the nationwide prison strike spread slowly at first. After a flurry of media coverage on August 21, the first day of the nearly three-week long prisoner-organized demonstration, there was nothing to do but wait for information to emerge from behind bars.

But then stories started to trickle in from across the country. In Washington, at least 60 detained immigrants at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma declared a hunger strike. In North Carolina, prisoners at the Hyde Correctional Institution hung three banners on the prison fence there, demanding better food and earlier parole dates. By the second week of the strike, organizers announced that prisoners from at least 10 states had protested from behind bars to demand improved conditions behind bars, the right to vote, greater access to rehabilitative programs and the end to “modern-day slavery.” By the time the strike is through, incarcerated people in at least 17 states are expected to join the demonstrations through work stoppages, hunger strikes, and commissary boycotts.

“This is quickly becoming the largest and most recognized prison strike in U.S. history,” said strike organizer Amani Sawari, speaking on behalf of the prisoner group Jailhouse Lawyers Speak in the second week of the strike.

The strike began August 21, on the anniversary of the 1971 killing of Black Panther George Jackson at California’s San Quentin State Prison. Soon after, prisons in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Indiana saw strike activity, according to organizers. Individuals in Texas, California and Ohio went on hunger strike, including some in solitary confinement. Prisoners communicated their activities through a network of prison activists and outside organizers using family contacts, contraband cell phones, letters and other methods to tell the outside world about their demonstrations.

“It’s prisoners that have called for this strike, it’s prisoners that have drafted this list of demands, and it’s prisoners that continue to communicate with us and relay to us the conditions they face, the retaliation they face,” said organizer Cole Dorsey, a member of IWW’s Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, in a video promoting the strike. “Listen to these prisoners... and take their direction.”

The seeds of what would become a nationwide protest were planted in the days after violence broke out at the Lee Correctional Facility in South Caro-

lina this April. A riot left seven prisoners dead. Six of them were black. Witnesses reported seeing bodies stacked on top of one another as the violence dragged on. Correctional officers failed to stop the bloodshed quickly, instead allowing the riot to continue for hours. Outrage mounted as prisoners and advocates around the country recognized the conditions that led to the Lee riot could lead to another riot like it in any prison in America.

That’s when Jailhouse Lawyers Speak declared a national strike. They issued 10 demands in late April, among them calls for the elimination of racist policies that disproportionately affect black and brown communities and the end of “prison slavery” in which prisoners receive pennies per hour for their labor including work for corporations such as AT&T, Verizon, McDonalds, Kmart and Victoria’s Secret. The strike is set to run until September 9, the anniversary of the legendary Attica prison uprising. It is expected to be larger than the previous nationwide strike in 2016, when more than 20,000 prisoners protested around the country.

But as news of the strike began to emerge, so did

by the public eye. The prison strike is putting the voices of people behind bars at center stage — and also highlighting how difficult it is for them to be heard and seen in the first place.

This will remain true after September 9, when the strike will officially finish, but the response to prisoner activism will only be beginning, according to Professor Heather Ann Thompson, the historian and author of *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*.

“Eyes on what’s happening on the inside is critical,” Thompson said in a recent interview on *Democracy Now!* “It’s highly likely that there will be folks that will experience some serious retaliation from prison management, and we’ve got to watch what’s going on, demand entry, provide lawyers and make sure that folks on the inside are protected.”

**THE STRIKE IS PUTTING THE VOICES OF PEOPLE BEHIND BARS AT CENTER STAGE — AND HIGHLIGHTING THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE TO BE HEARD AND SEEN IN THE FIRST PLACE.**

reports of lockdowns and what organizers say are attempts at prisoner suppression. The New Mexico Corrections Department shut down prisons across the state the day before the strike began. Kevin Rashid Johnson, a prisoner in solitary confinement in Virginia, wrote an op-ed for the *Guardian* describing the retaliation striking prisoners face.

“Because of my refusal to work, and the efforts I’ve made to organize strikes and publicize the horrors that go on behind bars, I have faced regular reprisals,” he wrote. “In recent years I’ve been bounced around from state to state in an attempt to silence me: they sent me from Virginia to Oregon, from there to Texas and Florida, then back again to Virginia.”

A prison strike can look many different ways. From outside the walls, it can often look like nothing at all. This is makes it hard to know exactly how many prisoners are involved and what their participation looks like. It also means that the blowback from taking a stand can be brutal and unregulated



CHARLYNE ALEXIS

## REBELS IN CORSETS

*Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism*  
MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
THRU JAN. 6

By Isobel Van Hagen

In 1845, more than a century before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama, Elizabeth Jennings Graham, a 24-year-old school teacher, boarded a streetcar in New York City. She forgot to check whether African Americans were allowed to ride it. When she was asked to dismount, she refused because she was running late for church. She clung to a window frame before a police officer threw her off. Graham filed and won a lawsuit against the Third Ave Railroad, receiving \$250 dollars in damages. Her actions led to the eventual desegregation of railroads in the city.

Graham has been identified as one of the “Rebel Women” of Victorian-age New York City — a new exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. The exhibition is small, concise and well designed, the walls painted a unique dark green that showcases 19th-century portraits and prints.

‘Rebel,’ is often associated with our pop culture references to it: a leather jacket-clad, cigarette-smoking James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, David Bowie’s memorable line, “Rebel, rebel, you’ve torn your dress,” or Bikini Kill’s early ’90s punk hit, “Rebel Girl.” It is hardly the character-type we associate with the Victorian women of the New York bourgeois scene.

From this exhibition, we learn that rebellion comes from even the smallest transgressions of social norms — no need for fishnet stockings or leather of any kind. While many of the things the featured women did would not be considered “rocking the boat” today, women in that era could be considered rebellious simply by speaking out in the public sphere.

In the first half of the 19th century, due to Queen Victoria’s strict moral code, “true womanhood” was marked by four core components: domesticity, religious piety, sexual purity and submissiveness.

The exhibition begins with an examination of this “true womanhood,” a concept many women still struggle with today. Many of the fashion expectations, for example, seem shocking. There is a display of a rib-crushing corset, gloves that needed



“stretchers” to put on, dresses so heavy that the wearer would have to lean far forward in order to keep balance (then known as the “Grecian Bend”).

In an opposing example, there are a pair of bright red, button-up shoes displayed. To wear these during the day would have been a sign of rebel status, as women were meant to be demure and not attract attention.

While at first, the fashion sense of “true womanhood” seems outrageous to the modern person, we still consistently grapple with women’s clothing choices: whether we are allowed to vie for physical attention or if doing so means we are “sluts”; whether wearing “fashionable” clothing means we’re adhering to a certain type of patriarchy or if it means we can find a certain kind of personal empowerment in it; whether certain ‘non-feminine’ clothing shows our rebelliousness against mainstream notions of femininity or if our choices in clothing ultimately mean very little.

The most fascinating aspect of this exhibition is the way in which it makes the viewer feel far away from what we perceive as crazy, antiquated misogyny and then quietly shows parallels to modern-day gender issues. In two long lines down what feels like a hallway, the exhibition goes through various “rebel women,” their names scrawled in over-the-top Victorian fonts. The women contend with birth control issues, being in control of their own bodies and being taken seriously in the workplace and in politics.

Some of the women chosen to represent the rebels are commonly read about in history textbooks: social reformer heavyweights like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony are included — their attitudes toward women’s suffrage are considered some of the most rebellious of their time. Of course, we also find Nellie Bly among the rebels, looking cool and calm while doing her investigative reporting for *New York World*.

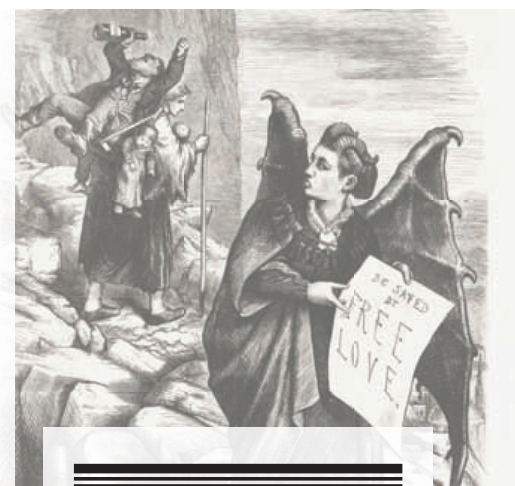
But the exhibition also crucially includes less known, nonwhite, lower-class rebels who are often forgotten but were no less important to the 19th-century female-rebel movement.

Mary Jones, born as Peter Sewally, was an African-American woman who, as the exhibition explains, asserted her right to

wear “feminine attire despite the rigid gender binaries that governed Victorian society.” Madame Restell made her reputation as the most successful, and infamous, birth control provider of her era. Margaret Fuller, a leader of the Transcendentalist movement of the 1830s, took a virtually unheard-of intellectual, anti-religious stance and also became one of New York’s first national news columnists. Actress Adah Isaacs Menken wore scandalous (body-hugging) outfits and hung out with the likes of Walt Whitman and Charles Dickens. She noted, in reference to the times in which she lived, “Good women are rarely clever and clever women are rarely good.”

The news media openly reinforced a standard of exclusion of “unfeminine” women who were too opinionated or who defied Victorian values. Many of these women were villainized in sexist prints in newspapers (a means of public shaming), featured throughout the exhibition. Madame Restell, after making an income from her abortion services, was described as “The Wickedest Woman in New York,” depicted as having a satanic bat in place of hands. The bat is eating an aborted fetus. Victoria Woodhull, a “Free Love” advocate who believed women had the right to marry — and divorce — whomever they chose was depicted as a devil by *Harper’s Weekly*.

An uneasy feeling permeates the exhibition, a subtle nagging that overarching, repressive social norms are still essentially the same for women two centuries later. But it also offers hope. We often view Victorian women as demure and rule-following, yet this exhibition shows how cracks in social fault lines can spread in even the most oppressive of societies.



*Age of Brass or The Triumph of Women’s Rights.* Published in *Currier & Ives*, 1869. On view at the Museum of the City of New York.

Photo of Elizabeth Jennings Graham

Thomas Nast, *Get Behind Me (Mrs.) Satan.* *Harpers Weekly*, 1872.

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FEMINIST THEORY

SEP 8 • 7-9:30PM  
HISTORY: Author Don Mitchell discusses his book *Revolting New York*, the story of New York's evolution through near-continuous uprisings.

SEP 17 • 7-9:30PM  
HEALTH: Nutritionist Dr. P.K. Newby encourages us to vote with our forks to create a more sustainable, equitable and just society.

OCT 1 • 7-9:30PM  
WORKSHOP: As an author and a survivor of sexual assault, Genevieve Pfeiffer helps students overcome the traumatic experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment through writing.

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## WORK'N IT

*Work: The Last 1,000 Years*  
BY ANDREA KOMLOSY  
VERSO BOOKS, 2018

*Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*  
BY DAVID GRAEBER  
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 2018

By Lauren Gurley

In early August, Kaniela Ing, a candidate for Congress in Hawaii, released a campaign ad that broke down the basic tenets of democratic socialism in just over two minutes. Ing, 29, who grew up working in pineapple fields of Maui and the aisles of Walmart before being elected to the state House at the age of 22, laid out a vision where ordinary people don't have to "live just to work." "Everyone's working two jobs or three jobs and that's a choice in politics," he said, playing a ukulele on a park bench overlooking the Pacific Ocean — an activity he and his working-class friends rarely have time for these days. "Native Hawaiians were some of the most productive people on the planet. We were able to get everything we need within just four or five hours in the day, and then have the rest of the time to surf, to do art... that's how it should be."

Ing lost the Democratic primary Aug. 11, but his video went viral (*The Cut* called it the "chillest campaign ad you've ever seen"). Its message resonated with viewers, despite the fact that conservatives and progressives alike espouse the idea that a working society is necessary and desirable.

How did this "gospel of work" become so ingrained in modern life? That's the question at the heart of two recent books, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* by Andrea Komlosy and *Bullshit Jobs* by David Graeber. American adults spend the majority of their waking hours working, and our jobs have come to be seen as inextricably linked to our identities and our self-actualization. But as technology has advanced far enough to automate hundreds of millions of jobs, the questions Komlosy and Graeber pose about work are important and timely. The current conditions under capitalism force most of us to work while the owning class hoards the profits of our labor, but in a more equitable society where everyone had access to health care, housing and food, would a fully employed society be necessary, or even desirable?

In *Work*, Komlosy, an economic and social history professor at the University of Vienna in Austria, provides a sweeping overview of how ideas and definitions about work have evolved over the last 1,000 years, calling out the very limited conception of work offered by traditional labor studies and Marxist perspectives. She lingers on the shortcomings of the grand narrative of labor history that focuses on the production of goods, but excludes

the informal economies of "shadow work," (prostitution, peddling illicit drugs, playing the guitar on the subway platform) and social reproduction (raising children, washing laundry, cooking dinner). "Unpaid labor," she writes, "whether domestic and subsistence work or social and political activity — played no role in the work discourse of industrializing European countries."

Komlosy's book is ambitious in its brevity: she condenses a millennium of global history into just 225 pages, justifying her far-reaching geographic and historical scope as necessary for avoiding the Eurocentric and patriarchal biases in traditional conceptions of work. The book travels from the Silk Road to the Balkans to the Third Reich, with a particular focus on Central Europe, her area of expertise. While the ancient Greeks looked down upon work as a distraction from higher pursuits, she writes, our attitudes about it are largely defined by the strong work ethic developed within the Judeo-Christian tradition in the Middle Ages, which would later evolve into the Protestant work ethic.

In *Bullshit Jobs*, Graeber, the author of *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* and an anthropologist by training, takes his critique of work closer to home — honing in on the proliferation of a massive sector of "bullshit jobs" since the 1980s. Telemarketers. Middle managers. University administrators who have so little to do that they end up making cat memes and listening to podcasts to kill time. Marketing consultants tasked with creating services like "airbrushing" that only exist to make the public feel ugly and inadequate.

Graeber defines "bullshit jobs" as those deemed to be "so completely pointless that even the person who has to perform it every day cannot convince himself there's a good enough reason for him to be doing it." A self-identified anarchist, he argues that the so-called efficiency of capitalism is a falsehood, that the proliferation of bullshit jobs "appears to have everything to do with the growing importance of corporate finance" and the rise of the FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) sectors in the latter half of the 20th century.

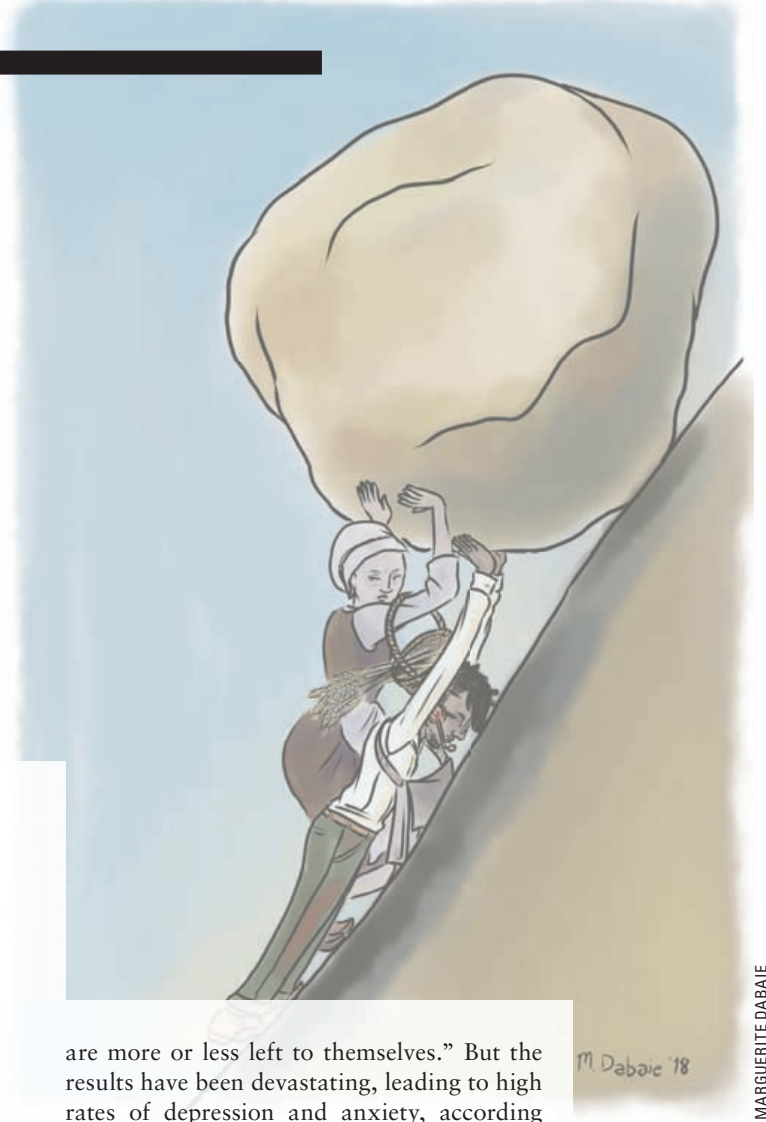
Graeber estimates, based on a YouGov survey, that one in every two jobs today is a bullshit job or in service of a bullshit industry. "One might imagine," he writes, "that those being paid to do nothing would consider themselves fortunate, especially when they

are more or less left to themselves." But the results have been devastating, leading to high rates of depression and anxiety, according to hundreds of testimonies that he received, nearly exclusively from white-collar workers. He attributes this to the fact that humans are driven by their ability to influence others. Tasked with filling out paperwork ad nauseum, writing progress reports that no one will ever read and passing the time in office cubicles "pretending to work" — we lose a sense of purpose, an experience Graeber describes as "spiritual violence."

"We could easily all be putting in a 20- or even 15-hour workweek," he writes. "Yet we as a society have collectively decided it's better to have millions of human beings spending years of their lives pretending to type into spreadsheets or preparing mind maps for PR meetings than freeing them to knit sweaters, play with their dogs, start a garage band, experiment with new recipes or sit in cafés arguing about politics and gossiping about their friends' complex polyamorous love affairs."

Graeber believes many workers — elementary school teachers, sci-fi novelists, bus drivers, hair stylists, rappers, farmworkers — add social value to the world. But perversely, the jobs that contribute the most social value often receive the least compensation, or no compensation at all. "The more one's work benefits others, the less one is likely to be paid for it," he says. By challenging the value of work for work's sake and eliminating these bullshit jobs, he argues, we could devote more resources to the jobs that add actual meaning and social value to people's lives, while letting more people pursue their interests outside of the constraints of the 40-hour workweek.

Graeber's vision looks a lot like the utopian world that Ing describes in his campaign video. Both challenge the reactionary view that humans are lazy couch potatoes who need financial incentives to create anything of value in the world. "There's this conservative myth that says that if everyone had their basic needs cared for, that they would just sit around all day," Ing says, "but that's just not the reality."



MARGUERITE DABAIE



# CAPITALISM FOR THE PEOPLE?

*From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs*

JOSHUA CLARK DAVIS

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017

By Steve Sherman

People in leftist social movements rarely argue that they should create a network of business enterprises that advance their goals. Yet as documented by historian Joshua Clark Davis in his new book, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs*, a number of social movements have adopted that practice over the last few decades.

Although the title points to the disheartening reality that the health-food behemoth Whole Foods, hated by many activists and now owned by Amazon, has made perhaps the greatest impact of any U.S. business born from those roots, the history the book explores is quite a bit more ambiguous. Even as they struggled to survive without entirely compromising their values, activist enterprises sometimes embodied the values of movements, provided space for activists to congregate, raised money for important causes, and more. While this may sound like a strategy that is overall accommodating the values of American capitalist society, they at times incurred the wrath of the state.

Davis devotes one chapter each to four kinds of enterprises associated with social movements — African-American bookstores, headshops, businesses spawned by the women's movement and natural-food stores — from the late 1960s to the present. In all cases, they at first served movements as meeting centers, information outlets and more. (Headshops purveying paraphernalia to enjoy marijuana served both the peace movement, which then had strong connections to the counterculture and the marijuana-legalization movement, as well as selling “underground” newspapers and comics.) But as those movements slowed down, their enterprises suffered. Economic downturns produced strains on businesses that often struggled to break even in good times.

Repressive authorities added to their problems. At one point, Black bookstores were regarded as second only to Black Panther headquarters as dangerous centers of Black radicalism. Headshops were confronted by aggressive crackdowns. Journalists killed stories on Liberation Enterprises, a mail-order clothing and jewelry shop in Brooklyn, when they saw an apron declaring “Fuck Housework” for sale.

Such enterprises could also cause divisions within social movements. Davis describes the high hopes accompanying the opening of the Feminist Women's City Club in Detroit, which housed half a dozen businesses, including a credit union and a bar and cafe where women could “go for a drink alone without being harassed by men.” But those hopes were accompanied by accusations that the center exploited its workers. Describing an attack on Diana Press in Oak-

land, which resulted in \$100,000 of damage, Davis lends credence to the employees' suggestions that the culprits might have been women enraged by the idea of feminist businesses.

In order to survive, these enterprises often broadened their missions to include less directly movement-oriented activity. For example, Black bookstores sold more Black-themed romance novels as interest in revolutionary theorists slackened. More significantly, large corporations moved in on territory previously written off as marginally profitable. Black authors were increasingly published by major presses and sold in mainstream bookstores. Feminist credit unions struggled to survive while major financial corporations reduced the discriminatory practices that had inspired their founding. Chain stores sold the same rolling papers and pipes as headshops, which were decimated in the 1980s after state and federal laws banned marijuana paraphernalia.

But nothing quite compares to the rise of Whole Foods. Founder John Mackey originally participated in co-op groceries and came to believe that “business and corporations were essentially evil because they selfishly sought only profits.” When he opened a store himself, calling it Saferway (to mock the Safeway supermarket chain), he soon developed the practice of doing high volume to effectively compete in Austin's crowded natural-food market.

Mackey's personal philosophy soon moved toward a libertarianism that became more belligerent and even paranoid as Whole Foods' fortunes improved. Although he highlights the efforts of customers and neighbors in getting the store back in shape after a flood caused massive damage in 1981, he never mentions that Whole Foods received an emergency disaster loan from the Small Business Administration. While the store had retained some “horizontal” practices, it has remained highly hostile to unions. Notwithstanding some employee ownership, Whole Foods brought in venture capital firms. Mackey filled the company newsletter, “The Whole Story,” with rants about how critics of capitalism were filled with envy and resentment. (Davis' narrative ends before Whole Foods was acquired by that ultimate corporate octopus, Amazon.)

The evolution of the natural-food industry, once a hotbed of cooperatives and hounded by the government as quacks, into Whole Foods, the pre-eminent symbol of upper-middle-class distinction, is disheartening and might call the whole idea of social-movement enterprises into question. That would be a mistake. In their heyday, all of the movements described produced spaces where those with alternative



ideas and practices could come together with others. Their storefronts also punctured the capitalist narrative reiterated on every retail strip: That the only thing that matters is making a profit by meeting individual consumers' demands. Instead, they provided a way into a world where other values mattered and ordinary people made history.

If anything, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods* could be expanded to include examples like independent weeklies and anarchist infoshops. But in a world of ever-rising commercial rents, are the storefronts whose motto might be “Another world is possible—step inside” possible any more? Even in college towns and major cities, corporate homogenization rules, punctuated only by hipster storefronts that celebrate the “creativity” of their owners and customers, but no wider agenda of social change. Corporate “social” gestures touting their fair labor, diversity or environmental standards are no substitute.

Some enterprises have survived. The Park Slope Food Co-op continues to thrive, even as the hippies who moved to the area in the 1970s have long been superseded by finance-industry flotsam. Other enterprises open in neighborhoods like Bushwick, far from the center of the city but still playing the same role. Those cities, suburbs and rural areas largely abandoned by capital may also provide relatively fruitful terrain for new types of social-movement enterprises. The extensive network of community farms created in Detroit might be one model, although even they are now threatened by new waves of gentrification. Similarly, some independent media hold strong, although they also face serious challenges in the internet age.

The book also does not mention that the legalization of marijuana in several states has produced numerous self-styled “activist enterprises,” a phenomenon pot activists have dubbed the “Green Rush.” Their actual practices, however, range from donating to movement organizations to using the cause as self-promotional branding, from encouraging their employees to join unions to outright wage theft.

The terrain has dramatically shifted since the late 1960s and early 1970s, but the strategy of creating enterprises that disseminate the message, embody movement values and serve the people is one that is likely to resurface.

# REVEREND BILLY'S TRUMP HELP HOTLINE

*Dear Billy,  
As the revelations of child abuse and cover-ups within the Catholic Church keep mounting, I find myself wondering how the guilt and shame the church attaches to sex and its insistence that only men can hold positions of authority ties into these scandals. I don't see why we can't enjoy sex with other consenting adults and have rich spiritual lives at the same time. Why would someone want us to think otherwise?*

— KAREN, Bayside

KAREN, I THINK you are answering your own question, and the answer is sex is spiritual. Another question is how did enjoyable sex and rich spirituality become separated in the first place? The split of the spirit from the body is key to the hold that this old institution has over its people. Our desire is forced back into us, away from our lover. A priest appears in that gap, offering help. He demands fear, shame and the gratification of God's desires, which are easily transferred to the priest's own hidden fetishes. A Catholic who falls in love is crossing a border more heavily guarded than the border around Texas.

Why would someone want us to be afraid of love?

The Roman Catholic Church is the first multinational corporation. Turning the desires of the flesh into a profit center made as much money for Rome as all the gold in the Andes.

When love and the spirit are united, we are one whole person again. We are facing the memories of the abuses of the false holy fathers — and we are healing from that. We are no longer debilitated by this cleaving in half. We are crossing that border! Power based on fear can endure for centuries, but we are in love and we can overtake it in one hot moment.

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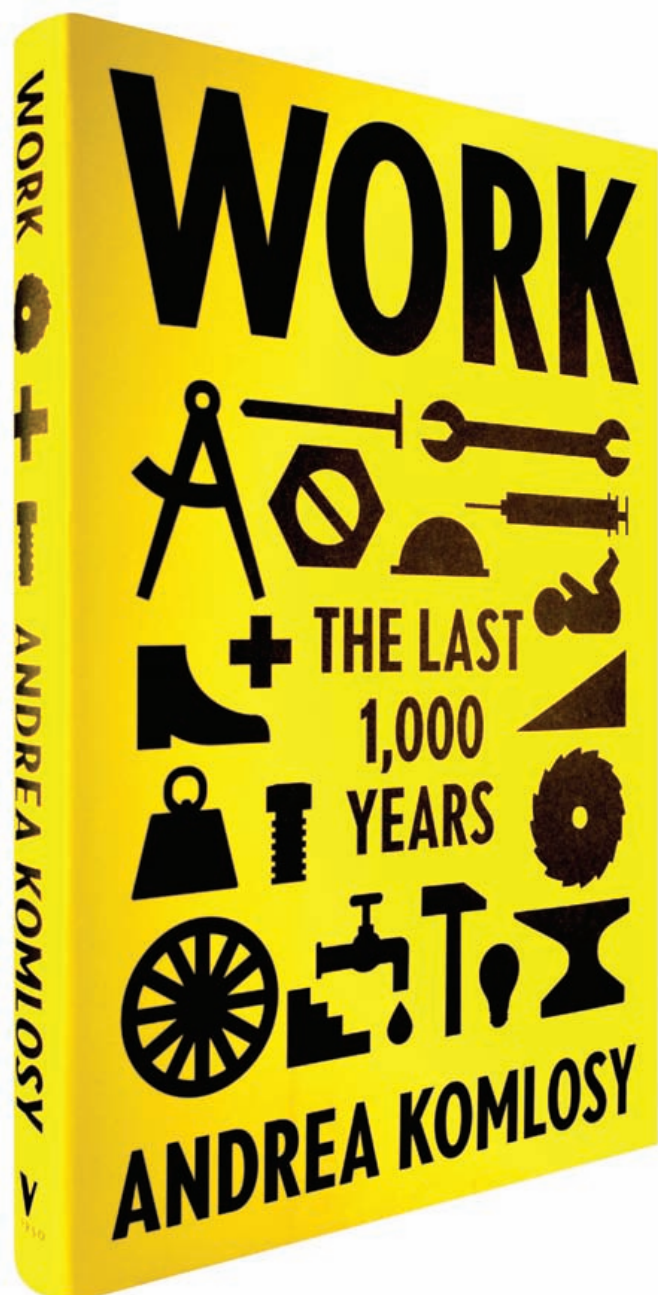
*Dear Rev,  
All I see on the news is the Russiagate business. It's a big deal since it could bring down the President. But mass deportations, the passes polluters are getting from the EPA, growing inequality — all kinds of other important stuff is getting passed over. Where should we focus our attention?*

— EARL, West Village

ROBERT MUELLER IS A COLD-FISH Republican but he's

Trump-proof. In this apocalyptic summer we are fake-news-ed, over-apped and evil-ized. But Mueller grows every day like the big oak tree in the forest, impervious to it all. The slow, thorough march of his investigators is reassuring. Democracy needs to pull back from the brink. I'm glad about the investigation. I want Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to run it, but in lieu of Alexandria, Mueller is a glorious wrecking ball.

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By Andrea Komlosy

“By showing that ‘work’ may exist without wages, a boss or a workplace outside the home, Komlosy’s analysis allows us to think more broadly about what we value, and whether we want to continue to separate work and life.”

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VERSO

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