

THE INDYPENDENT

#241: NOVEMBER 2018 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

AMAZON'S NYC
POWER PLAY
P5

THE MEXICAN
BERNIE SANDERS
P14

FILM: GAY
SOCCER HEROES
P19

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

HOW MUCH LONGER CAN TRUMPUBLICANS
HOLD BACK THE FUTURE? BY NICHOLAS POWERS



DAVID HOLLENBACH

REVEREND BILLY
The StopShopping Choir

LOVE NO BORDER

SUNDAYS AT 2PM \$15 NOV 25 DEC 2, 9, 16, 23
JOE'S PUB AT THE PUBLIC



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Liam Reilly, and Carol Smith.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR



THRU NOV 24
WED-SUN 1PM-6PM •
FREE

ART: A CONFLICT OF INTEREST
Featuring six artists whose interpretations of the phrase "conflict of interest" range from political to surreal. Not to be missed: Stephen Hall's urgent animal portraits and the work of Robert Ross — a builder, writer, actor, filmmaker, bon vivant, raconteur and man about town who is exhibiting his disturbing dioramas for the first time.
WESTBETH GALLERY
55 Bethune St., Mnhtn

THRU DEC 22
SAT, 4PM-5:15PM • \$5 suggested donation
WELLNESS: RAGE YOGA
Stretch, move and rage while listening to punk, hip-hop, metal, hardcore and industrial music.
THE DREAMHOUSE
10-22 Wyckoff Ave., Bklyn

TUE NOV 13
6:30PM-8PM • FREE
PANEL: BUILDING FROM THE LEFT: STRATEGIES TO DISRUPT THE RIGHT
How can the left develop more robust strategies to undermine and disrupt the powerful ascendance of the U.S. right? In the aftermath of the midterm elections, Barnard College Activists-in-Residence Cara Page and Tarso Luis Ramos and Director of the National Lawyers Guild Pooja Gehi, discuss.
DIANA CENTER, BARNARD COLLEGE
3009 Broadway, Mnhtn

TUE NOV 13
6:30PM-9PM • \$7

SCREENING: AT HOME IN UTOPIA
In the 1920s, thousands of immigrant Jewish factory workers escaped New York's slums into the community of their dreams; four apartment houses they built in the Bronx that they owned and ran cooperatively. *At Home in Utopia* focuses on the United Workers Cooperative Colony, also known to local police as Little Moscow because it was dominated by Communists.
LMHQ
150 Broadway, Fl 20, Mnhtn

WED NOV 14
6:30PM-8:30PM • \$30-\$40
FOOD: COOKING AS INHERITANCE: BEYOND SOUL FOOD IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
Join chefs Carla Hall and Pierre Thiam as they discuss intersections of food, diaspora, memory and cultural inheritance from Tennessee to Senegal. Compare okra stews provided by each chef and taste the lineage for yourself.
MUSEUM OF FOOD & DRINK
62 Bayard St., Bklyn

THU NOV 15
7PM-9PM • FREE
ART: AN EVENING WITH POLITICAL CARTOONIST MOHAMMAD SABAANEH
The renowned Palestinian political cartoonist discusses his life as an artist, current projects and his work an educator at the Jenin Freedom Theatre. The evening will also include a silent auction of two original works by Sabaaneh.

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

NOV 16-JAN 31
TUE-FRI, 11AM-6PM, SAT by appointment • FREE
PHOTOGRAPHY: AUNT Y! AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE FRAME, 1890 TO THE PRESENT
Featuring a trove of original, archival, vintage and contemporary images spanning the African continent, this exhibition centers images of African women and engages with the nuances of the "Aunt Y" as both a colonial construction and honorific of African womanhood. Opening reception on Thursday, Nov. 15 from 6 to 9pm.
UNITED PHOTO INDUSTRIES
16 Main St., #B, Bklyn

SUN NOV 18
2PM-7PM • FREE
MARKET: SOCIAL JUSTICE HOLIDAY MARKET BY GREEN WORKER COOPERATIVES
Green Worker Cooperatives is based in the South Bronx and serves immigrants and communities of color. It builds, grows and sustains worker-owned green businesses to create a local and democratic economy rooted in racial and gender equality. Support this and other coops and small businesses from around the city at this holiday market.
SWEET WATER DANCE & YOGA
876 Gerard Ave., 2nd Fl, Bronx

SUN NOV 18
1PM-6PM • FREE

GIVING: VEGAN THANKSGIVING BONANZA
Help share vegetarian groceries and gourmet vegan meals with thousands in need at the world's largest vegan Thanksgiving. In addition to giving out 100,000 pounds of groceries, clothing and books, the folks with Community Solidarity will also be dishing up a vegan feast made up of dozens of delicious appetizers, entrees, desserts and beverages. To get involved write to volunteers@communitysolidarity.org or call 631-223-4370.
COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY
99 W. Columbia St., Hempstead, NY

SUN NOV 18
4PM-6PM • FREE
MUSIC: SIXTH ANNUAL WOODY GUTHRIE BROOKLYN HOOT
A round-robin songfest featuring six folk artists performing songs that the great American troubadour and Brooklyn resident Woody Guthrie sang. Come prepared to sing along.
OLD STONE HOUSE OF BROOKLYN
336 3rd St., Bklyn

NOV 18-20
7PM, SUN-TUE • \$65
MUSIC: THE PIXIES
The post-punk influencers are going back to their roots, celebrating their first releases three decades ago, *Come Pilgrim* and *Surfer Rosa*.
BROOKLYN STEEL
319 Frost St., Bklyn

MON NOV 19
7:30PM-10:30PM • FREE
FILM: WAVES OF BLACK

Six short films by black creators, each demonstrating different narratives of black culture. Talk to the directors after the screening.
STARR BAR
214 Starr St., Bklyn

TUE NOV 20
7PM-9PM • FREE
MEMORIAL: TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
Come reflect on and honor the lives of trans and gender-nonconforming community members lost to oppression, stigma and violence. Dinner will be served and mental health clinicians will be on site for emotional support. There will also be a separate quiet room for reflection.
THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER
208 W 13 St., Mnhtn

NOV 25-DEC 23
SUN 2PM • \$20
PERFORMANCE: REVEREND BILLY & THE STOP SHOPPING CHOIR: AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ALL OF US
The title of Reverend Billy and The Church of Stop Shopping Choir's new performance piece refers both to the familiar poem by Martin Niemöller and to the detainment of choir member Ravi Ragbir, director of the New Sanctuary Coalition and a target of Trump-era fear-mongering.
JOES PUB
425 Lafayette St., Mnhtn

TUE NOV 27
7:30PM-9PM • \$8
SCREENING: JULIO GARCÍA ESPINOSA'S THIRD

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THE INDEPENDENT

NOVEMBER



TRAVIS SHINN

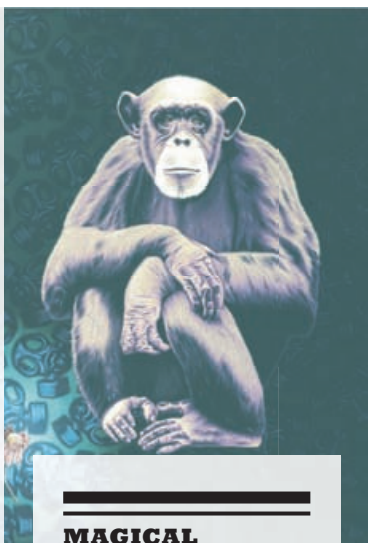
WORLD, THIRD WORLD WAR
Shot in North Vietnam in 1968, the film contrasts the inhumanity of the American war machine with the simple humanity and ingenuity of the Vietnamese peasants forced to take up armed struggle in order to survive.
LIGHT INDUSTRY
155 Freeman St., Bklyn

THU NOV 29
7PM–8:30PM • FREE
TALK: TOWARD A GREEN NEW DEAL
A wide-ranging discussion on how to fight for a Green New Deal.
LEONARD LIBRARY
81 Devoe St., Bklyn

THU DEC 6
6:30PM–8:30PM • FREE
HISTORY: MUSLIMS IN BROOKLYN LISTENING PARTY
For well over a century, Muslims have lived, worked and prayed in Brooklyn, making it a major center of Muslim life for NYC and the nation. Celebrate the online publication of Brooklyn Historical Society's Muslims in Brooklyn oral history collection, which brings to light the stories of Muslims from all over the Borough.
BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
128 Pierrepont St., Bklyn

FRI DEC 7
6PM–10PM • \$25–\$30
PARTY: BLACK TIE "SCHOMBURG ANGEL" HOLIDAY PARTY
Groove the night away with beats by DJ Poison Ivy. Proceeds benefit the Schomburg Center's work preserving and presenting global black history and culture.
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd, Mnht

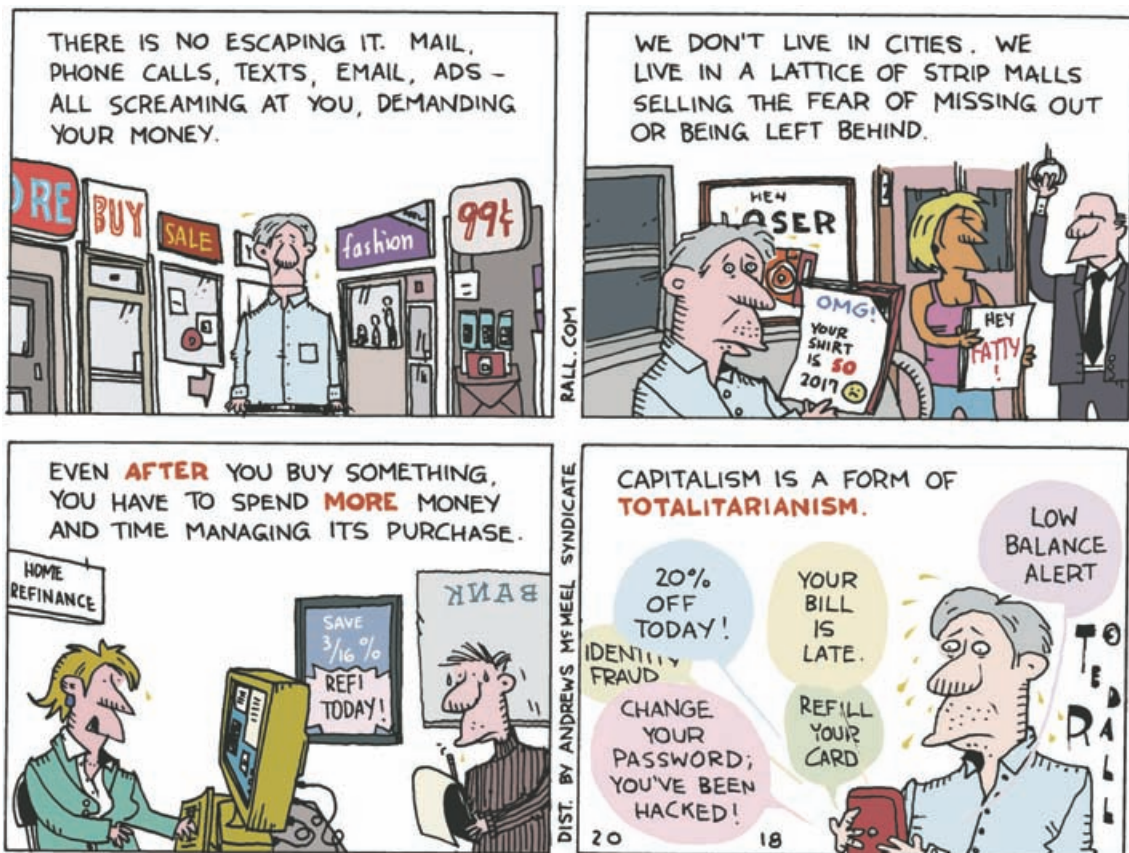
FRI DEC 7
7PM–9PM • \$25
POETRY: ANNE CARSON: ON CORNERS
Poet, translator, and professor of Ancient Greek, Anne Carson delivers an illustrated lecture, "On Corners." Presenting a range of texts and figures both classic and contemporary, Carson will touch on inspirations from Homer's *Odyssey*, Aristotle and Sophokles, to Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, James Turrell and many more.
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave., Mnhtn



STEPHEN HALL

MAGICAL BEINGS: The Pixies current line up (from left to right): David Lovering, Paz Lenchantin, Joey Santiago, Black Francis. Catch them at Brooklyn Steal this month.

GORILLA WARFARE: *APE* (Anyone Protecting The Environment?) from Stephen Hall, on view at Westbeth until Nov. 24.



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...if your skin is the wrong color.

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Unlike the U.S., Europe and much of Latin America, our neighbors to the south are venturing leftward.

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Mario breaches the topic of homosexuality in men's sports.

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The Soviet Bloc wasn't all collective farming and party meetings. Women had great sex!

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She captured the intimate moments behind the lesbian liberation movement of the 1970s.

TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE, P22

How to speak in public and save the world.



ORPHANED BY HATE

BY CHELSEY SANCHEZ

On Halloween eve, President Donald Trump, clad in a black and white striped jumpsuit, was handcuffed and led behind bars into a facility in East Harlem.

Except it wasn't really Trump, but a demonstrator in a mask. The bars were composed of seven strands of black duct tape fastened to the rod of a clothing rack. The facility, however, was genuine. The demonstration, staged by the Movement for Justice in El Barrio occurred on the sidewalk outside the Cayuga Center, which currently holds children separated from their parents at the southern border.

The demonstration was the Movement for Justice in El Barrio's fourth protest in front of the Cayuga Center, where the community organization demanded the reunification of children and parents separated as a result of Trump's "zero-tolerance" policy. There, on the sidewalk across the street from a line of garbage trucks and near an overpass for the Metro-North Railroad, about 25 Movement members gathered to stand in solidarity with children still being held inside.

City officials said that approximately 40 children were in custody in New York City as of September — three months after a federal judge ordered the reunification of separated children with their parents within 30 days. Approximately 120 children out of a peak of 2,300-plus in June are still in U.S. government custody, according to an October report from the American Civ-

il Liberties Union, which is suing the Trump Administration for the children's release.

For the youth held in New York, there is currently no publicly available data on how many are being held or in which facilities. Members of the state legislature introduced the SCAR Act earlier this summer, a piece of legislation that aims to increase the transparency of facilities like the Cayuga Center.

At a press conference in front of the Thurgood Marshall Courthouse on Oct. 15, Claudia, a 32-year-old immigrant from Mexico, tearfully recounted her attempts to retrieve her son, who she said is being held in New York, after the two entered the country together.

"I don't know what I am going to do," a translator communicated on her behalf. "I have complied with all [...] that they are asking me to provide them and they just don't know when I can have my child."

She was joined by State Senator Brian Benjamin and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein, two Democrats who co-sponsored the SCAR Act. It would require every federally-contracted child welfare agency in the state that is holding impacted children to report to the state's Commissioner of Children and Family Services every 15 days.

This report would provide essential information on the detained children, such as how many of them are currently in the system and how many have thus far been reunited with their parents. Reported information would be made available to the public.

"We need to save families like this from future scars,"

Epstein, who represents neighborhoods on Manhattan's east side, said during the press conference. "Unfortunately, Claudia's son is gonna be scarred from this four-month experience and who knows how much longer? How much can we endure?"

Members of Movement for Justice in El Barrio are not completely sold.

"We don't believe that that tackles the root of the problem," said Maria Mercado, a member of the organization.

Benjamin and Epstein say their bill is a step toward transparency but agree that it isn't a comprehensive solution for the children and their parents. Even reunification is just the beginning.

"You can't just return them after you separated them and just let them off on their merry way," Benjamin said. The children need to be provided with resources, he added, including mental health care and access to education, "given the fact that we created this mess."

For now, however, all that parents like Claudia can do is wait.

FOR FREEDOM: Members of Movement for Justice in El Barrio rally outside a foster center in East Harlem that houses migrant children separated from their parents.



CHELSEY SANCHEZ



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THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW



PRIME TARGET

CONCERNS GROW AS AMAZON SET TO PLACE 2ND CORPORATE HQ IN QUEENS

BY PETER RUGH

The people who occupy the new luxury towers springing up in Long Island City love their glittering views of the Manhattan skyline across the East River. When I look at Long Island City's skyline, I see coffin nails.

Sure, some of them reach 50, 60 stories high, and they're just as chic and glittery as anything Manhattan has to offer. But they are coffin nails nonetheless. It takes awfully big nails to bury a city like New York alive after all, and an awful lot of them too. But the city's wealthy developers have been busy. Forty-one new buildings containing over 12,500 new rental units went up in the Queens neighborhood just last year. And if these nails in New York's casket happen to be glittery, well, all the better for pricing out the poor and working class.

When the news broke on Nov. 5 that a whopper of a coffin nail could be headed all the way from Seattle to Long Island City, it promised landlords and developers one hell of a payday.

"It's the biggest success for New York in ten years," Eric Anton of the brokerage firm Marcus & Millichap told the *Real Deal*, assuming Amazon, which has Queens in its scopes as it prepares to launch its second North American headquarters, pulls the trigger.

Jonathan Bailey of the Queens Anti-Gentrification Network had a slightly different take. "We're going to see massive displacement and grave damage to our democratic institutions as well," he told *The Independent*.

Amazon's 500,000-square-foot sarcophagus-inducer will likely split in two as it hurdles this way from its northwestern launchpad, with one half busting into Crystal City, Virginia, across the Potomac from Washington, D.C. and the other hammering down near the eastern terminus of the Queensboro Bridge.

The asking price for rents in Long Island City has already practically doubled over the past ten years, from \$35 to \$65 a square foot. But Bailey is concerned not only about gentrification, but the political power Amazon and the developers who stand to profit from its arrival will wield. When Amazon's hometown of Seattle enacted a so-called "head tax" of \$275 per employee on businesses that gross more than \$20 million a year, the company threatened to spend lavishly to unseat City Councilmembers who backed the measure, and an Amazon spokesperson hinted that it might even leave Seattle. The tax was repealed in June.

Here in New York, Amazon's arrival will further enrich our moneyed real-estate lobby, already the object of much kowtowing by local and state politicians, just as rent regulations come up for renewal next year.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Nov. 5 offered to rechristen himself "Amazon Cuomo" to bring the company to New York, as well as renaming Newtown Creek, the polluted waterway that separates Long Island City from Brooklyn's Greenpoint neighborhood, in its honor. He has also offered Amazon hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies.

Exactly how much taxpayer loot the trillion-dollar company and its multibillionaire CEO Jeff Bezos would receive is not public knowledge. Nor has there been the slightest suggestion from Amazon Cuomo that he might consider chopping those hundreds of millions in half. That would seem a reasonable expectation, given that Queens would receive only half of the proposed HQ2 and, presumably, only half the 50,000 mid-

that it includes incomes from the affluent surrounding suburbs. Last year, Mayor Bill de Blasio called for Long Island City to be upzoned as a part of his "affordable housing" plan — more luxury housing in return for a pittance of units available to low-income renters.

Long Island City residents have the added misfortune of living in an "opportunity zone." Instituted as part of President Donald Trump's tax cut last year, the opportunity zones offer lucrative federal tax breaks to companies that invest in poor neighborhoods.

The idea goes back to Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, but in its current U.S. iteration, university campuses, military bases and even a golf course owned by the president have fallen under opportunity-zone status. So has 60 percent of New York State, including much of Long Island City, based on plans submitted by the Empire State Development Corporation and approved by

HAMMERED:

Amazon's expected arrival could be another nail in New York's coffin.

NEW YORK'S GOVERNOR HAS OFFERED TO RENAME HIMSELF AMAZON CUOMO TO BRING THE COMPANY HERE. HE HAS ALSO OFFERED HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN SUBSIDIES.

dle- and upper-income jobs that will allegedly come along with our dough — "mostly jobs for people who could already get jobs," points out Samuel Stein, an urban planning specialist at the CUNY Graduate Center.

"We're actually subsidizing the process of creating more homelessness, paying to create the conditions in which our current homeless crisis will become much worse," Bailey warns.

Amazon-fueled gentrification is widely blamed for a homelessness epidemic in Seattle, where rising rents have led to about 12,000 people living on the street or in shelters. In New York, one in 128 people are homeless on a typical night.

Ironically, the conditions that have helped spawn the luxury buildup in Long Island City — which made it an attractive target for Amazon — were created in the name of affordability.

At a cost of \$1.4 billion in forgone taxes, developers have been taking advantage of the state's 421a program, which grants them tax-exempt status for 10 to 40 years as long as 20 percent of the new units are "affordable," based on the city's area median income — a dubious metric, given

Gov. Cuomo.

When Amazon sets up shop, it will pay zero capital gains tax for seven years. Neither will developers in the surrounding area, whose property will skyrocket in value thanks to Amazon's presence. Once they sell, they won't have to pay taxes on their profits either. Nor will they be required to hire union labor.

Speaking on the *Brian Lehrer Show* on Nov. 7, state Sen. Michael Gianaris of Queens declined to take a position on HQ2, but said he had "real questions" about the subsidies Amazon would receive, the company's impact on housing and the burden its arrival would place on the city's transit system.

It's not just its views of Manhattan that make Long Island City an attractive place to live and work, but the 13 bus lines, eight subway stations, two Long Island Railroad stops and the ferry dock it harbors. There's also a potential tramline, the Brooklyn-Queens Connector, that the mayor has touted and which would likely get a political

Continued on page 17

HOPPING THE TURNSTILE WHILE BLACK

THE NYPD REALLY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW RACIST THEY ARE

BY PETER RUGH

If you are caught hopping a subway turnstile in New York City, you are four times more likely to be booked if you are black than if you are white. That is according to a new analysis of long-awaited enforcement data released by the New York Police Department, conducted by the Community Service Society of New York (CSSNY) and provided to *The Independent*.

People of color bore the brunt of fare evasion summons, 78.2 percent, and of arrests, 93.9 percent, CSSNY found. Just 3 percent of white individuals stopped for fare evasion were arrested, compared to 14 percent of African Americans.

The analysis is the result of City Council-approved legislation that passed last year and went into effect in January. It requires the department to disclose the race, gender and age demographics of riders ticketed or cuffed at each subway station in the city for turnstile-hopping. Lawmakers were compelled to act after a 2017 CSSNY report, drawn from arrest data maintained by Brooklyn Defender Services and the Legal Aid Society, confirmed the daily experiences of black straphangers and exposed a strong racial bias on the part of the NYPD in Brooklyn.

The law is intended to bring transparency to the department's enforcement tactics citywide and, by shining a light on its behavior, curb and ultimately halt the department's systemically racist policing practices. Only when City Councilmember Rory Lancman, who introduced the legislation, filed a lawsuit against the NYPD and the city in September did the NYPD publish its data.

Though what was finally released on Oct. 3 points to the continued persistence of racist enforcement on the part of the NYPD, the information available remains vague and incomplete. If nothing else, the department's critics say, it further indicates the lengths the police force will go to prevent the public from gauging just how racist it is at an institutional level.

"I don't even think they [the NYPD] would say they are in compliance," Councilmember Lancman told *The Indy*. "The police department is afraid the full disclosure of the data would reveal the extent to which fare evasion enforcement is discriminatory toward people of color and poor people. They dread the reckoning that will come from that."

The data available covers the final three months of 2017 and the first six months of this year. It gives demographic breakdowns for the total number of summonses and arrests, but omits exact numbers for most of the city's 472 subway stations — the exception being a "top 10" where the most arrests occurred. It also provides demographics for the bottom 90 out of the top 100 sta-

tions, yet, without explanation, this data only appears in percentages.

Confused? That appears to be the point.

"What are they hiding?" asks CSSNY researcher Harold Stolper. "That's impossible to say for sure but there is documented evidence of racial targeting."

The NYPD did not respond to requests for comment from *The Indy*. It has previously claimed that the delay in the data's release was due to logistical issues but later shifted its argument, saying that its publication would endanger public safety.

"It is an absurd contention," said Lancman. "And it is one that the police did not bring up during the hearing or bill-drafting process even once."

The NYPD has also contended that it is simply going where the crime is, the neighborhoods with the highest number of criminal complaints.

"No," says Stolper, who co-authored CSSNY's previous report based on Brooklyn public defender "theft-of-service" arrest data from 2016. Even within high-crime and high-poverty neighborhoods, there were considerably higher arrest rates in neighborhoods like East New York and Brownsville that were predominantly black as opposed to white or Hispanic.

NEGLECTING TO SWIPE CARRIES VERY DIFFERENT CONSEQUENCES DEPENDING ON THE COLOR OF A PERSON'S SKIN AND WHERE IT TAKES PLACE.

The NYPD "might be going where the crime is but a lot more so if the neighborhood is predominantly black," said Stolper — at least in Brooklyn, the focus of CSSNY's initial study. That's why station-by-station data from across the city is so important. It is needed in order to determine which communities the NYPD is targeting across the board. In Brooklyn, it is African-American communities, in other parts of the city the populations targeted might be different.

Yet, as of now, it is impossible to develop a complete, ground-level picture. In one particularly glaring example of just how vague the data the NYPD provided in October are, there are four stations located along 125th Street in Manhattan, but only one 125th Street station is listed in the published spreadsheets. Each of the stations located along the thoroughfare inhabits a separate neighborhood with a unique racial composition: from El Barrio to the east through central and west Harlem with its pockets of heavy gentrification and, further west, up to the predominantly white area surrounding Columbia University. To which 125th Street is the NYPD referring? So far, that's anyone's guess but the NYPD's.

Incomplete as it is, the data does show signs of change.

Arrests for turnstile hopping fell by 70 percent from the last quarter of 2017 to the second quarter of this year. The drop is likely due in part to increased public scrutiny on the NYPD and because Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, whose office oversees the city's most heavily-trafficked subway stations, has declined to prosecute fare evasion in most cases.

But racial disparities in terms of enforcement have persisted. Neglecting to swipe a MetroCard carries very different consequences depending on the color of a person's skin and where it takes place. A black person stopped for fare evasion in Brooklyn is 30 times more likely to be arrested than a white person in Manhattan, according to CSSNY's analysis.

The reason behind the disparity in arrests likely stems from the department's policy of detaining so-called "transit recidivists," individuals given summonses or arrested previously in the transit system — even if the case was later dismissed in favor of the accused. Critics charge that the NYPD's recidivist database serves to ensnare people of color in the criminal justice system, simply for the being unable to afford a \$2.75 subway ride.

Arrests and summonses will likely go down further



DANIEL FISHEL



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The Right To Know Act took effect this October. Passed by the New York City Council last year, it requires officers to tell members of the public why they are being questioned and to obtain consent before conducting searches in instances where they lack probable cause. Most legal scholars believe the latter provision is already granted by the U.S. Constitution, although advocates say the law is necessary given the NYPD's history of flouting the 4th Amendment through its now largely defunct stop-and-frisk policy. Officers must inform the public they have the right to refuse to be searched and receive documented consent before conducting a search. With the exception of traffic stops and stops at subway entrances (which comprise a large portion of NYPD encounters with civilians), officers are required to distribute business cards listing their name, rank and other basic information and provide a reason for the encounter.

32 YEARS AFTER IT WAS INTRODUCED, BILL TO PROTECT SMALL BUSINESSES GETS HEARING

Every City Councilmember loves mom and pop, but if they were drowning, the councilmembers are not sure if they would save them. That is the takeaway from the hearing on the Small Business Jobs Survival Act (SB-JSA) held last month at City Hall, during which councilmembers and city officials hemmed, hawed and equivocated over the bill, first introduced in 1986 and amended seven times since. SBJSA is essentially a bill of rights for commercial tenants. It mandates binding arbitration in lease disputes and 10-year leases — necessary for many small businesses to recoup startup costs and pay off initial debts. The bill is opposed by the powerful Real Estate Board of New York, a major campaign donor to Small Business Committee Chair Mark Gjonaj, Council Speaker Cory Johnson and others. Nonetheless, SBJSA has enough votes to send it to the mayor's desk, though to the chagrin of its backers it will likely undergo amendments. Nearly 20 percent of Manhattan's storefront space

is vacant, according to a September survey conducted by realtors Douglas Elliman, up from 7 percent in 2016.

IF YOUR TRAIN IS LATE, CHANGE YOUR SCHEDULE

NYC Transit is having a better than average autumn. According to September data published by the MTA on Oct. 24, major incidents fell by nearly 35 percent from the same period last year and delays dropped by 4.4 percent. Improvements to on-time performance, however, are partly the result of NYCT adjusting schedules to factor in habitual delays. That's the (somewhat) good news. Here comes the other kind. MTA Chair Jo Lhota is threatening fare hikes — in addition to those set to be announced in December — and service cuts due to shortfalls in the authority's operating budget post-2019.

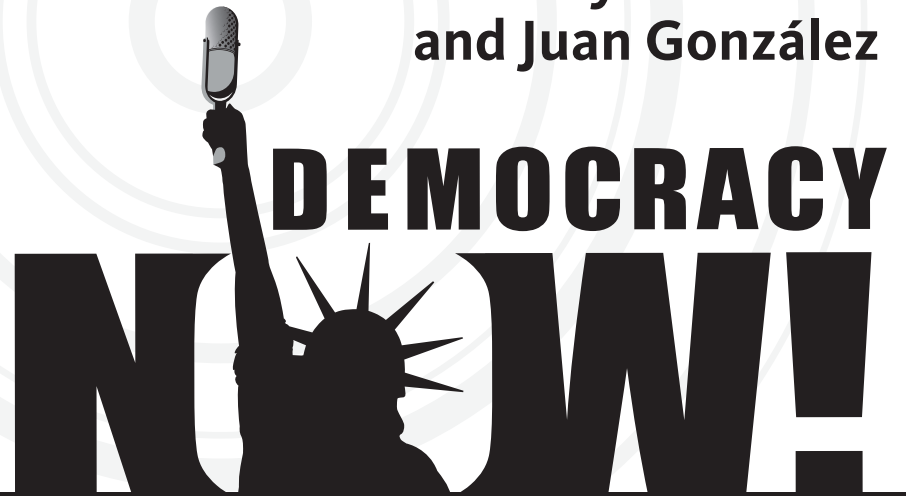
FAIR THEE WELL, RULE OF LAW

We never thought we'd print this, but liberals in New York and across the country hit the streets in protest after Attorney General Jefferson Beauregard Sessions was forced by President Trump to resign on Nov. 8. Rallies were held the following day in hundreds of U.S. localities from Pensacola, Florida to Anchorage, Alaska. Due to his ties to the Trump campaign, Sessions, a virulent xenophobe, recused himself from overseeing Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian meddling during the 2016 U.S. election. In his place, the president installed White House loyalist Matthew Whitaker as Acting AG. Whitaker has criticized the special counsel for looking into Trump's finances as part of his probe and is personal friends with Sam Clovis, co-chair of Trump's 2016 campaign and a witness in Mueller's investigation. Unlike Sessions, Whitaker has not recused himself and poses a danger to the Mueller probe.

THE VERDICT IS IN: A fan of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg makes her views known during a Nov. 8 emergency rally in Times Square to protest President Trump's firing of Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

ELIA GRAN

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



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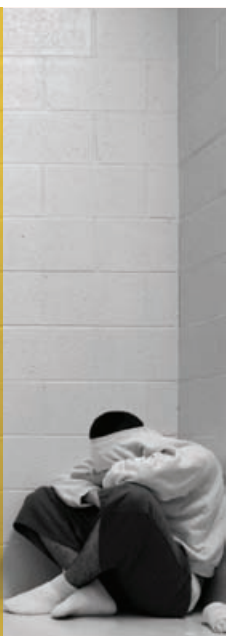
"A deeply moving and profoundly unsettling wake up call for all citizens. The use of solitary confinement is deeply immoral and we must insist that it be banned in all of our nation's prisons. Immediately."

—Heather Ann Thompson

SIX BY TEN

STORIES FROM SOLITARY

EDITED BY TAYLOR PENDERGRASS AND MATEO HOKE



WHEN THEY HATE YOU FOR BEING A JEW

AN ANCIENT HATRED REBOOTED FOR THE INTERNET AGE

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The first things I learned about politics as a child included that we were drinking powdered milk so me and my brothers wouldn't get leukemia from nuclear fallout like my friend Philip with the nasty dog, that whatever prosperity my parents had was because my grandparents were in labor unions, and that people I thought were called the "Knotsies" had murdered our relatives in Europe.

So I was not shocked that some putz in Pittsburgh decided to be a one-man Einsatzgruppe and killed 11 Jews in a synagogue. I was bitterly fatalistic. In 1942, Einsatzgruppe B, one of the Nazi "special action" squads that followed the Wehrmacht east, burned 1,100 Jews alive inside a shul in Slonim, Belarus, including most of my grandfather's family.

So what else is new? People have wanted to exterminate Jews for millennia, from Haman in ancient Persia to the drunken Russian mobs in the pogroms of 1905. I have lived virtually all my conscious life with the knowledge that there were people who would have loved to smash my newborn-baby self's soft skull against a wall — with the attitude, as Colonel John Chivington said to justify his 1864 massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho children at Sand Creek, Colorado, that "nits make lice."

Two things are distinctive about Jew-hating (a term I prefer to "anti-Semitism," which was a late-19th-century euphemism intended to give it some pseudo-anthropological respectability). It's far more exterminationist than most other varieties of racism; Latino immigrants face more insults and oppression than American Jews do, but people who hate them say "Send them back," not "Hitler was right." And it behaves like a lethal variant of herpes — a virus that is often dormant, but never goes away, and flares up episodically.

That persistence surprises some people. World War II forced Americans to start treating Jews like white people, as Adolf Hitler had shown the logical extreme of things like "restrictive covenants" that prohibited property from being sold or rented "by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay or any Asiatic Race." But it didn't go away, from Richard Nixon's Oval Office mutterings about how "the Jews are an irreligious, atheistic, immoral bunch of bastards" who "totally dominated" the media to the circa-1990 street peddlers with *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in between the patchouli oil and *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman*.

The nexus for its current resurgence is conspiracy theory. In the Internet era, bizarrely ludicrous ideas have become widespread; you no longer have to write away to an obscure post-office box to find them. A 2016 NBC News poll found 41 percent of Republican respondents believed that President Barack Obama — whose birth announcement was printed in both Honolulu newspapers in August 1961 — was not born in the United States, and only 27 percent accepted that he had been. "Birtherism" is an analogue of Holocaust denial, an obvious falsehood used as a "factual" argument to cover attitudes too blatantly racist to express in public.

The deeper conspiracy-theory worldview is that the world is secretly controlled by an infinitely powerful and infinitely evil cabal. The intellectual template for this comes directly from late-19th-

century anti-Semitism, which responded to the rapacious power of robber-baron capitalism by blaming "international Jewish bankers." Its blaming a despised ethnic-religious minority for systemic exploitation inspired the German social-democrat August Bebel to dub it "the socialism of fools." That socialism of fools also set the intellectual template for the right-wing demagoguery commonly mislabeled "populism," which draws mass support with tirades against "elites," but intensifies the power of the rich while condemning demographic scapegoats.

Codified in the czarist-Russian forgery of *The Protocols* and later by Nazism, this anti-Semitism's core myth is that Jews are using their control of finance and media for world domination, as well as manipulating rebellion by inferior races not smart enough to do it on their own. One far-right meme circulating recently is that according to *The Protocols*, one of their top tactics is undermining Western countries by flooding them with immigrants from inferior nations. That was the Pittsburgh putz's imagined grievance.

Donald Trump has promoted a diluted version of that myth, with his claims that George Soros — the current avatar for the "international Jewish banker" villain — is financing the caravan of Honduran refugees wending its way through southern Mexico.

Trump's policy of separating children from their parents at the border was both racist and proudly sadistic, two of the core elements of Nazism. But it was like a local Stage 1 cancer, not an aggressively metastasized Stage 4.

I fear we are entering Stage 2. There are millions of people who are proud to be racist sadists, and trumpet any nonsense that backs their beliefs.

"In the cruel and terrible time in which our generation has been condemned to live on this earth, we must never make peace with evil," wrote Vasily Grossman, the Russian-Jewish novelist who covered the battle of Stalingrad and was the first reporter to write about the Treblinka extermination camp. "We must never become indifferent to others or undemanding of ourselves."

THE NEXUS FOR ANTI-SEMITISM'S CURRENT RESURGENCE IS CONSPIRACY THEORY.



NO TO HATE: Jewish protesters sit shiva outside the Metropolitan Republican Club at 122 E. 83rd Street on October 31 to honor the memory of the 11 victims killed at a synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh. The protesters demanded that club members renounce white nationalism after previously hosting the Proud Boys, a hate group that advocates political violence.

MAKING A STAND: Fourteen of the protesters were arrested after blockading the entrance to the Metropolitan Republican Club.

cafe culture community



COMING EVENTS NOVEMBER

25

MARIELLE FRANCO + BERTA CÁCERES, PRESENTE! ONE DAY SUMMIT ON GENDER AND STATE VIOLENCE

9:00am - 7:00pm

Commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

27

FASCISM IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION: REFLECTIONS ON TODAY'S STRONGMEN

7:00pm - 10:00pm

Release of *Strongmen: Putin, Erdogan, Duterte, Trump, Modi*. Kirkus review says: 'readers seeking a literate crash course in bottom-of-the-barrel geopolitics will quickly devour this book.'

SPEAKERS: Eve Ensler, Ninotchka Rosca, Lara Vapnyar and Vijay Prashad.

30

WORLD UNDER SIEGE: BUILDING A GLOBAL PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

6:30pm - 9:00pm

Panel discussion from leaders tied to struggles in the Philippines, Palestine, Brazil, and Puerto Rico on what it means to build an anti-imperialist and anti-fascist movement today, rooted in local people's struggles.

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THE DIVIDE DEEPENS

THE MIDTERMS CONFIRMED THE REPUBLICANS ARE A MINORITY PARTY DESPERATELY CLINGING TO POWER

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

How bad could it get? Every day it seemed the President joked about violence or threatened it. Speaking at rallies or on TV, he poured his authority into the deepest fears of his followers and told them to attack his enemies. They heard him. In Pittsburgh, a right-wing fanatic killed 11 in a synagogue. In Manhattan, the white nationalist Proud Boys hit protesters like punching bags. I got hate mail calling me an “ugly nigger”.

Hate crime spilled blood across America. It made voting, feel like a life or death act. Standing in line at the polling place, a heavy urgency emanated from the Black poll monitors, gay couples, liberal gentrifiers and Latino construction workers. We were saving our own lives. And the life of the nation. I voted and left, knowing it was just one turning point in a long, drawn-out struggle of what it means to be American.

HOUSE OF CARDS

Two Americas are on a collision course. The conservative one erected a wall around itself, the progressive one is growing fast and needs more space. Every election, they smash against each other because Republicans already built Trump’s wall, just not at the border. They built it around the voting booth.

The Republican Party rigs elections it can’t win. They’ve created interlocking walls to stop Democrats. The oldest is felony disenfranchisement. Nearly six million people who served time have been stripped of the vote. After that, the next wall came in 2013, when the Supreme Court gutted the Civil Rights Act that forced states with a history of racism to clear any voting changes with the Federal Government. In less than 24 hours, politicians, tripped over each other to enact laws to stop Black voters. Texas, Mississippi and Alabama enacted voter ID laws. They purged voters from the rolls. Thousands of polling sites were closed.

Republicans want to destroy democracy because if let be, democracy would destroy them. It seems odd to say. They have the White House, the Senate and a majority of state legislatures. If you look closer, Republican power is a chimera. The red state base is shrinking and dying. In 2016 Trump received almost three million fewer votes than Clinton but won the electoral college. In this year’s midterms, the Democrats won the cumulative national vote from all 435 congressional races by about seven to eight points and narrowly flipped the House. In the Senate, which confirms all federal judges, Democratic candidates won 45 million votes to the Republicans 33 million, but the GOP actually gained seats.

The Republican Party is dying and so is the America they represent. They are mostly white, two-thirds Christian and many are evangelical. They are aging. They are less educated in a hi-tech era. They are slipping backward in time as the world moves on. When they see the future, it frightens them. Trump and the party elite have nothing to offer them but a wall. It doesn’t have to be real, just a metaphor to express the siege mentality of Red State America. If they keep building it, one day they’ll discover themselves trapped inside.

BLUE STATE BLUES

The nail-biting night of the midterms, I studied the political map of America and saw cities erupting like blue volcanoes in red plains. Every state, had this rural-urban divide where the future bubbles up from the chaotic mix of peoples in the cities trying to break the nostalgia for the past in white rural areas.

Future America is Democratic. Millennials, the largest generation since the Baby Boomers, are decidedly more liberal. They are more diverse, secular and increasingly socialist. They are Black, Latino and Asian. Democrats are deeply favored by women. They are more edu-

cated. Future America is a rising, demographic, cultural and generational wave on the horizon.

The future is here but it can’t break into the present. Two main reasons explain why. First, the Democrats get more votes but don’t win beyond the urban bubbles. In six of the last seven presidential elections, Democrats won the popular vote by millions. The gap between parties will grow. It’s the geography of Future America that holds it back. Clustered in cities, it leaves vast swathes of heartland out of reach and in the red.

Future America is also kept back by the inner dynamics of the Democratic Party. Thomas Frank, mapped how from the 70’s, Democrats shed the working class to chase the white collar crowd. The courtship was fulfilled by Bill Clinton. Obama put a ring on it. In this neoliberal era, cultural identity was more palatable to college-educated voters, not working class politics. It caused a divide to grow that Democrats papered over with rhetoric and milquetoast reforms. Increasingly, frustrated workers were caught in a voting trap; vulture capitalist Republicans on one side, technocratic centrist Democrats on the other. Terrified of Republicans, they gave money, time, work and votes to the Democrats, who splurged on consultants who seemed to be really good at losing.

And they lost. Big. Obama left a skeletal party in his wake. During his terms, conservative Democrats, especially on race and immigration, left for the Republicans. Early in the 2016 campaign, reports were coming out that union members eyed Bernie or Trump for help, not Hillary Clinton.

Now, Future America is slowly, resurrecting a progressive wing in the broken Democratic Party led by figures such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It is more liberal on race. It is more liberal on social spending. Yet, it faces downward pressure from the nucleus of centrist elites embodied by Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi. It faces the arduous work of transforming non-voters into voters to build a new base that will send progressive policy into the halls of power.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

The day after the midterms I found that every face, every conversation had a mix of relief and disappointment. Sure, it was better than before. Who wants Trump rampaging through the White House with no chill and nearly zero resistance? Even so, where was the god damn Blue Wave? Liberals on shows, podcasts and articles said it came but

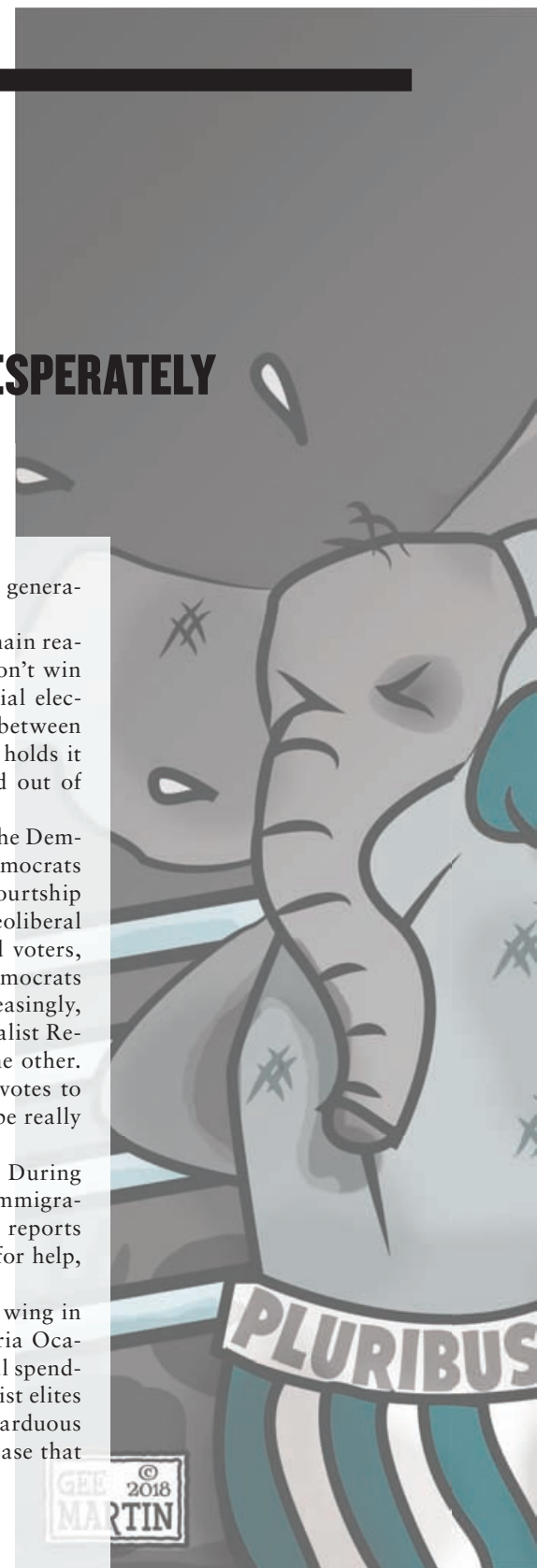
IN EVERY STATE THE FUTURE BUBBLES UP FROM THE CHAOTIC MIX OF PEOPLES IN THE CITIES TRYING TO BREAK THE NOSTALGIA FOR THE PAST IN WHITE RURAL AREAS.

I looked at the map and saw red everywhere.

But it was better. As the new reality set in, I realized with this small victory came a chance to size up what the past two years of one-party government had been. I could sum it up in one word. Fear. Increasing every day. Fear.

Seeing Trump on TV, rage against refugees, threatening to shoot them or take away birthright citizenship; all of it sent volts of fear through us. His every wild whim was magnified by the halls of power like a bullhorn. And his followers — from rally MAGA hat fans to neo-Nazis to the Proud Boys — sprang up to terrorize the majority, the Future America. Strutting in 19th Century beards or black leather or Trump 2020 shirts, they looked tough and scary, so much so, it was easy to miss how terrified they were.

Behind the wall, Red State America tears itself apart. It’s like a



GARY MARTIN

Tracy Chapman song. They are poisoned by a reactionary ideology that abets a racist projection of their worst fears on to us. When they beat us, shoot us, vote against us; they are attacking their own shadows but we live with scars.

We are faced with multiple crises. Both political parties are being upturned by an internal class war. In the Republican Party, the working class won a pyrrhic victory. They embarrassed the elite by thrusting a blowhard village idiot into the White House but were betrayed just the same. The “beautiful” new healthcare system and the robust defense of Social Security Trump promised, well Senator Mitch McConnell just said they were on the chopping block to pay for the tax cut he pushed for GOP’s billionaire donor class.

In the Democratic Party, the millennial working class faces a neo-liberal consensus that has been rattled but not broken. They have the deep work ahead of bringing the millions of non-voters, the young, the poor, people of color and the less educated into the voting booths. It is a new base that if it materialized, could support real progress. They have to work a corporate media that is suspicious of socialism at best and hostile to it at worse.

All this political work comes amidst the increasing devastation of climate change, increasing automation as artificial intelligence becomes our co-worker and as white America continues its downward spiral into panic. The United States will drift from the global center as a multi-polar world rapidly emerges in the wake of Trump’s na-

tionalism. The dollar may not be the international reserve currency. Our growing national debt could break the federal budget. Somehow amidst all of this chaos, progressive forces have to steer the nation.

I remember when I first had hope after Trump’s election. Not just rage. Hope. It was when he tried to enforce the Muslim Ban and thousands showed up at airports to protest. It felt like a new social contract was being written in the chants and signs and actions. Every protest since from the ones to stop family separation at the U.S.-Mexican border to the ones to stop Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation has been done in a similar spirit.

Every wall creates a spillover. The wall rising in Brazil, Hungary, Britain, wherever they rise, the people do too.

SIGNS OF A BLUE WAVE

As *The Indy* goes to press, Democrats are on track to gain more than 30 seats and flip the House of Representatives while the Republicans have increased their Senate majority. The split decision garnered most of the headlines in this year’s midterm elections. Compared to the expectations shared by many, it felt like a Blue Splash. Journey further down the ballot, however, and you will find many places where all that canvassing, phone banking, text banking and small-dollar donations made for the Blue Wave hitting hard.

NEW YORK REPUBLICANS ROUTED

New York Republicans have controlled the State Senate almost continuously since the mid-1960s. It is their last bastion of power as the state trends more Democratic and they have made it a place where progressive legislation goes to die. Not any longer. Eight Republican seats were flipped on Nov. 6 and the Democrats turned a one-seat disadvantage into a commanding 39-24 majority, their largest since 1912. The lingering question now is whether Gov. Andrew Cuomo will pit suburban state senators against the city to stymie sweeping rent law reforms, universal health care, better MTA oversight and more.

MORE STATE HOUSE GAINS

Democrats added roughly 330 state legislative seats across the country this after losing more than 900 seats during the Obama years. In addition to winning the New York State Senate, Democrats have also flipped the state senate in Colorado and Maine Senate and the New Hampshire Senate and House, the Connecticut Senate and the Minnesota Senate. Democrats are now in full control in New York, Illinois, Colorado, Maine and New Mexico where they hold both the legislature and the governor’s chair. “These ‘laboratories of democracy’ can now begin to forward progressive alternatives on everything from money in politics to climate change, said Robert Borosage, president of the Institute for America’s Future.

OCASIO, FOR THE WIN

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 29, officially became the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. Ocasio-Cortez shocked the

political world when she knocked off 10-term incumbent Rep. Joe Crowley in their June primary contest. This time she won her Bronx-Queens district with 78 percent of the vote. She will be joined in Congress in January by her fellow democrat socialist Rashida Tlaib who was elected with 84 percent in her Detroit, Michigan district. The only other socialist in Congress is Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. In 2018, more than 40 members of the Democratic Socialists of America were elected to offices at the federal, state and local level.

FACES OF THE FUTURE

Rashida Tlaib will be joined by Ilhan Omar as the first two Muslim women elected to Congress. Deb Haaland of New Mexico and Sharice Davids of Kansas became the first two Native American women elected to Congress. 2016 National Teacher of the Year Jahana Hayes of Connecticut and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts became the first two Black women to be elected to the House from a New England state. In New York, Leticia James became the first Black woman to be elected the state’s Attorney General.

WALKER TAKES A HIKE

Wisconsin voters finally fired Republican Gov. Scott Walker, the two two-term incumbent famous for stripping the collective bargaining rights of the state’s public sector workers in 2011. Despite millions of dollars in backing from the Koch Brothers, Walker lost by one point to Tony Evers, the head of the state’s public school system.

KANSAS VOTERS REJECT VOTER SUPPRESSION MASTERMIND

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach has been the architect of many of the voter suppression laws that Republican-controlled states have enacted over the past decade. Seeking a promotion, Kobach ran for governor this year on a hard-right platform in normally conservative Kansas but was defeated by Democrat Laura Kelly by 48-43 percent. Kansas schools have been decimated in recent years by Republican tax and budget cuts. With Kobach offering more of the same, Kansas voters decided they had had enough.

RED STATE REFERENDUMS

Conservative red state voters are known for voting against their material interests. However, voters in Nebraska, Idaho and Utah all voted in favor of expanding Medicaid benefits for low-income adults after their Republican-dominated state legislatures refused to do so. Meanwhile, voters in Arkansas and Missouri both overwhelmingly approved minimum wage increases. In Florida, a ballot measure to restore the voting rights of 1.4 million ex-felons was approved with more than 64.5 percent of the vote.

THIRD PARTY UPDATE

In New York’s third-party Olympics, the Working Families Party garnered 106,000 votes with Andrew Cuomo on its ballot line. In doing so, it surpassed the 50,000 vote threshold required to maintain its ballot line status for another four years. The WFP originally backed actor and activist Cynthia Nixon in the Democratic primary before opting to support Cuomo in the general election. The Greens, who refuse to cross endorse major party candidates, also preserved their ballot line with their gubernatorial candidate Howie Hawkins receiving 96,000 votes.

— JOHN TARLETON

SAUDI INC.

FROM TIMES SQUARE TO TRAIN LINES TO DAILY NEWSPAPERS, THE U.S.'S CONTROVERSIAL ALLY IS INVESTING BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN AMERICA.

BY RICO CLEFFI

Developers are getting ready to break ground on a massive retail/entertainment complex that could be one of the most significant transformations of Times Square since Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's Disneyfication crusade purged the porn shops and theaters.

TSX Broadway, touted by its backers as "the most compelling consumer destination on earth," promises a "state-of-the-art, experiential, global branding platform" with a hotel and a "smart" retail environment that will track visitors' consumer data. The builders plan to elevate the landmarked Palace Theater 30 feet in the air and promise an 18,000-square-foot LED screen, potentially the largest in Times Square, on the mall's exterior, presumably for beaming selfies and advertisements. The project has tech and real-estate reporters salivating.

Little scrutiny, though, has been paid to one of the project's main financial backers, Fortress Investment Group, a shadow bank owned by a Japanese investment bank largely reliant on Saudi Arabian money.

After journalist Jamal Khashoggi was apparently killed and dismembered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, President Trump mused to reporters about the importance of the kingdom's "\$450 billion" investment in the United States. Trump wasn't just placing an exaggerated price tag on a murdered journalist. He was also offering a rare bit of honesty: Billions of dollars in Saudi capital are tied up in the U.S. economy.

The Japan-based SoftBank, which owns both Sprint and Yahoo! Japan, has used its \$93-billion Vision Fund to acquire majority stakes in Uber (and many of its global competitors), as well as WeWork and companies like Mapbox (which makes the navigation platform for Lyft). The Vision Fund, called "the largest private pool of money ever raised" by the *Financial Times*, is also a major investor in Slack, DoorDash, the Virgin Galactic private space operation, and GM's self-driving car unit, Cruise.

Last year, Andrew Ross Sorkin of the *New York Times* wrote that the "Vision Fund could reasonably be described as a front for Saudi Arabia and perhaps other countries in the Middle East." (The United Arab Emirates, a close ally of the Saudi crown, is also an investor.)

While the Vision Fund isn't SoftBank's only cash pool, it represents a major chunk of investment power for a company with total revenues in the \$80 billion range. Other Vision Fund investors include Apple, which famously kicked in \$1 billion, Foxconn and Qualcomm. But Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — the country's de facto ruler, architect of its famine-inducing war in Yemen and the man widely suspected of having ordered Khashoggi's assassination — recently bragged to Bloomberg, "We are the creators of SoftBank Vision

Fund... without the PIF [the kingdom's Public Investment Fund], there will be no SoftBank Vision Fund."

SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son visited Trump Tower in December 2016, where he told the President-elect he would commit \$50 billion to the U.S. economy. Son, who later reportedly helped broker a \$4.1 billion subsidy for Foxconn to build a factory in the key swing state of Wisconsin, told reporters at the time: "This is great. The U.S. will become great again." Trump declared the Japanese CEO "one of the great men of industry."

SoftBank also happens to be the largest venture-capital investor in New York City real estate. Using data from research site Pitchbook, the *Real Deal* recently put the figure at \$4.5 billion in direct investments.

Late last year, SoftBank bought Fortress Investment Group with the explicit intent of using the private-equity firm to complement the Vision Fund.

Fortress management has been known to refer to themselves affectionately as "garbage collectors," owing to their strategy of gobbling up "distressed" assets. This practice garnered the firm negative press coverage after its mass foreclosures on New Orleans homeowners following Hurricane Katrina. Fortress's holdings have been wide and varied: hundreds of regional newspapers across the country (through its Gatehouse Media subsidiary); until recently, thousands of senior-living facilities; billions of dollars in student loan debt; and, at one point, a portion of the debt accrued by Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. Its portfolio also includes one of the country's largest mortgage lenders, New Residential Investment. It holds the debt for the scandal-sunk biotech company Theranos, and it owns multiple freight lines, a fleet of airplanes, an oil-refining terminal and the United State's only private light-rail system, in Florida — a recent source of scandal for outgoing Florida governor, Rick Scott, who killed a federally-funded rail project only to invest in Fortress's.

Fortress's post-financial crash investment strategy was best described in a 2011 profile in *Institutional Investor*:

The unhappy crosscurrents that are igniting protests against capitalism and causing political dysfunction in Washington are creating the best investment opportunities that [Fortress co-chair Peter] Briger and the credit team at Fortress have ever seen. The credit crisis in Europe, populist uprisings in the Middle East and the debt downgrade of the U.S. are among the economic and geopolitical factors that have set the stage for a global fire sale. Debt-laden nations like Greece and Portugal have to sell assets to raise capital. Banks and other

lenders have begun the process of getting illiquid assets off their balance sheets to meet heightened capital requirements. Among the few providers of financing in the risky sectors of a capital-constrained world, Briger and his team stand to make billions of dollars for themselves and for their investors.

Fortress's top leadership became billionaires, despite the company's poor performance, including a disastrous run as the first publicly traded private-equity firm, during which its stock fell to \$1 per share.

How did firms like Fortress and Softbank become ascendant in New York and the world at large? Financial journalist Rana Foroohar, author of *Makers and Takers: How Wall Street Destroyed Main Street*, describes a process of "financialization," where "financial markets have become the tail that wags the dog."

"What I mean by that is the traditional role of financial markets in our economy is to be a kind of facilitator or a helpmeet to real businesses," she told *The Independent*, "to allocate capital to help owners of capital make investments into the economy. We now have a system that has changed radically in the last four or five decades. If you look at the capital flows coming out of the largest financial institutions, only about 15% of them actually go onto Main Street. The rest of it exists in a kind of a closed loop of buying and selling existing assets, stocks, bonds, mortgages, etc."

"You can hardly buy a cup of coffee without lining the pockets of one of these firms," says Eileen Applebaum, an economist and codirector of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, who co-authored a comprehensive treatise on financialization, *Private Equity at Work: When Wall Street Manages Main Street*. "When these firms first emerged, we called them leveraged-buyout [companies], barbarians at the gate." Now, she explains, they "spruced up their image, they call themselves private-equity firms as opposed to leveraged-buyout companies, although their main activity is still buying up Main Street companies using tons of debt, and [those same companies'] equity."

For the most part, these equity firms generally don't produce anything.

"In a particular industry, they might be a very big player," says Applebaum, "but as a part of the economy, they're not that big. It's easy to exaggerate them. In the greater scheme of things, in a country with an economy as large as ours, they are not that large." Yet alternative lenders like Fortress have parlayed their financial capital into political capital. "The 1 percent is populated by hedge-fund and private-equity fund owners. They have a lot of money, they're using it for lobbying in their own interests. They are a big force in politics."



ESTEBAN GUERRA

Fortress and companies of their ilk, such as the Blackstone Group, have gained increasing clout in the New York region by their willingness to fund development projects deemed too risky by bigger banks.

"The financialization of New York City rental housing really took hold in the mid-2000s real-estate boom, though we could arguably say this process began much earlier, when real-estate investment trusts became more popular after the early 1990s recession," Desiree Fields, a lecturer at the University of Sheffield in England who specializes in the relationship between finance and real estate in New York, told *The Indy* via email. "In the mid-2000s, investors were pursuing all kinds of opportunities in real estate, and as the boom got closer to the bust, they got into riskier strategies. Asset-management firms like Blackstone and Fortress play a crucial role in directing surplus capital."

Fields notes that these firms profited from "a broader context where it is acceptable to treat housing in financial terms, where these financial logics come to outweigh social ones, and a decade of record-low interest rates and stock-market volatility [that] pushed investors to seek out profit in property and via riskier strategies."

In this context of risk and volatility, Fortress gave Kushner Partners, the real-estate company owned by the president's son-in-law, a \$57 million loan when Jersey City balked on giving tens of millions in tax abatements and financing bonds to its faltering One Journal Square project. Fortress's CWCapital subsidiary also sold off Manhattan's Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village complex in 2015. Fortress was also an early lender behind both of the proposed series of towers adjacent to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden that critics fear could block the garden's sunlight.

Fortress's parent, SoftBank, isn't the only financial services firm dealing with the Saudis. Blackstone, the world's largest asset manager and the biggest private landlord in the United States, received a \$20 billion commitment from the \$2 trillion Saudi Public Investment Fund for its infrastructure investments.

Pressed about Blackstone's Saudi commitments by *Bloomberg*, president Larry Fink remarked, "The world for business is not black and white."

The Saudis also have close ties to other major U.S. investment houses, including Morgan Stanley, Bank of America and J.P. Morgan.

"A lot of Western investors got very excited about this [the Saudi investments] for two reasons," says Foroohar.

'YOU CAN HARDLY BUY A CUP OF COFFEE WITHOUT LINING THE POCKETS OF ONE OF THESE FIRMS.'

"One, they bought the story that the Saudis were serious about economic and political reform. But they also said, 'Hey, here are large pools of money.' If you're J.P. Morgan or if you're [Blackstone CEO] Steve Schwarzman, it's a great deal."

Medea Benjamin of the anti-war organization Code Pink has been an outspoken critic of the U.S.-backed Saudi bombing campaign in Yemen since it began in 2015. According to the United Nations, the war has put 14 million people at risk of starvation and is currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis. When asked if the Khashoggi killing could shift public perception on the Saudi regime, Benjamin said it depends.

"The Trump administration is anxious to push all of this under the carpet and go on with business as usual and we also know that companies are anxious to see this all blow over," replied Benjamin. "But now there's been a sea change in the attitude of the American people towards Saudi Arabia. Those of us who've been yelling and screaming in the wilderness for years have suddenly found receptive ears among Americans who never paid attention to this."

Benjamin isn't sanguine about attempts by companies like SoftBank or subsidiaries like Fortress to distance themselves from the Saudis.

"They are absolutely responsible," she says. "SoftBank has taken many billions in Saudi money and they were all too happy to do that before Khashoggi's murder. So I think it's great to peel away the layers [with subsidiaries like Fortress] and not let them get away with trying to separate themselves by these false distinctions that they put in the way. Saudi money is dirty money and they need to be exposed."

The situation might be different if the United States had an economy where less power was in the hands of private-equity companies that are always on the lookout for fast cash and cheap debt, and are willing to overlook ethical concerns a repressive regime raises when it kills journalists and wages a protracted war against civilians in Yemen. By the time the Saudi kingdom finally takes its state oil company, Aramco, public in 2021, Western investors will be even more likely to overlook its flagrant human-rights abuses.

"One thing that I think is important to recognize is that the source of a large chunk of the capital being managed by these firms comes from our own pension funds — especially those of public-sector employees like teachers, firefighters, etc., and university endowments," Fields says. "It is entirely possible that a schoolteacher could be renting in a Blackstone-controlled property that her retirement savings have been funneled into. Building more public understanding of these connections, and recognition that community politics and labor politics are one and the same, is a good place to start.

"It is also crucial to support and pursue alternative models of land and housing ownership that explicitly privilege social over financial values," she adds. "Community land trusts, mutual housing associations and limited-equity cooperatives are all strategies that work against speculation. Pursuing these alternatives curbs the influence of players like Blackstone to the extent that they pull land and housing out of the market."

When construction on TSX Broadway starts this winter, the name of Jamal Khashoggi might just be a distant murmur in the news cycle, an unfortunate occurrence from months earlier. Now might be as good a time as any to take a sober look at our economy and ask some tough questions.

"At a deeper level and on more of a kind of existential level, I think we need to ask, 'What is our financial system for?'" Foroohar says. "Because right now, it's about facilitating the issuance of debt so that companies can buy back shares and give dividends to the world's wealthiest people. This does nothing to support Main Street growth. It does not contribute to any kind of increase in productivity, in wages. We have a financial system that is supporting completely the wrong kinds of things. Let's ask the question, 'What do we want the financial system to do for our society?'"

Representatives from Fortress Investment Group, SoftBank and Blackstone did not respond to requests to comment for this story.

MEXICO'S AMLO BUCKS THE RIGHT WING TREND

BUT WILL HE BUCK THE SYSTEM?

BY LAURA CARLSEN

Andrés Manuel López Obrador walked into Mexico City's Azteca stadium at his presidential campaign's closing rally June 27 to a rock-star reception. He shook people's hands on his way up to the stage and posed for selfies, as a crowd of more than 100,000 welcomed him.

The name of the Mexican president-elect's winning coalition, Juntos Haremos Historia — Together We'll Make History — summed up the moment. AMLO, as he's known, defined his coming government as the "Fourth Transformation," placing it alongside Mexico's independence, the Reform War of the 1850s and the Revolution of 1910-20.

"This is one of the most important movements in the world today," he told the crowd. "The three transformations we've experienced had to be done with arms. We're about to carry out a transformation without bloodshed, peaceful, orderly, but profound, and I'd say radical — and no one should be afraid, because the word radical comes from 'roots,' and this transformation will root out the corrupt regime of injustices and privileges."

The crowd roared, and the world looked on with astonishment. In Brazil, the United States, Paraguay, Hungary, the Philippines and many other countries, the extreme right has been reaping the electoral harvest of insecurity, fear and rejection of the status quo. But in Mexico, a president who slams the system where the wealthiest 10 percent of the population controls 64 percent of the nation's wealth and the richest 1 percent controls nearly half, who promotes public programs to redistribute wealth, rails against "the mafia in power," and favors a greater state role in national development and seeks non-military solutions to crime will soon take power — in Latin America's second-largest economy, right next door to the United States.

• • •

ANDRES MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR'S RISE was way off script as far as Mexico's ruling class was concerned. Following 71 years of one-party rule under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) — including an election stolen from a leftist candidate in 1988 — a tacit agreement among elites brought the conservative National Action Party (PAN) to power in 2000. Very little changed. The PAN extended the neoliberal economics that PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari set in the late 1980s. It let the PRI maintain its political machine, while sharing the benefits of crony capitalism a la mexicana. Elites foresaw a bipartisan model similar to the business-as-usual democracy of Mexico's northern neighbor. The U.S. government had no problem with that.

Then López Obrador came on the scene in 2000. A former PRI politician who left the party with other dissidents, he was elected mayor of Mexico City, where he was very popular. He first ran for president in 2006 under the slogan of "For the Good of All, First the Poor," openly denouncing neoliberalism and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Mexico's poor, marginalized by globalization imposed from above, massively and actively supported his candidacy.

AMLO arguably won that election — even the 2006 PRI candidate admitted later that his ballot count gave the victory to his leftist rival. But election officials proclaimed conservative candidate Felipe Calderon victor by half a percentage point, rejecting demands for a full recount. AMLO supporters occupied the nation's capital for months.

In 2012, López Obrador ran again, losing to PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto by a 6 percent margin in a four-way race. The lesson he learned was that to win in a deeply flawed system, you have to build a supermajority.

For his third campaign, he broadened his base by toning down the class rhetoric and focusing on ending corruption and waste. President Peña Nieto made that an easy target. Corruption scandals during his six-year term included his family's occupying a multimillion-dollar mansion bought by a favored contractor, alleged bribes from the Odebrecht construction company, an apparent spy operation against human-rights and anti-corruption activists and an investigation showing that his government funneled \$192 million in public funds into shell companies.

Mexican citizens were fed up with corruption, disillusioned with the economic model that made the rich richer and increased the ranks of the poor, scared of rising crime and violence, and ready for a change. AMLO had the winning formula this time around. He and his team barnstormed the countryside, created a massive social media presence and built alliances that kept the popular base while bringing in prominent business figures.

López Obrador won the July 1 election with a record-breaking 53 percent. Peña Nieto's handpicked successor got just 16 percent of the vote. AMLO's party, the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA) also won control of both houses of Congress and took five of the nine governorships in play, including the Mexico City federal district where López Obrador previously served.

With political power finally in his hands, he has proposed raising the minimum wage (about 59 cents an hour), increasing spending on pensions for the elderly, job creation, expanding access to education, ending the drug war and addressing the root social causes of crime and violence. Now the question is: To transform Mexico, how far will and can he go?

SIGNS FROM THE TRANSITION

Mexico has a five-month lame-duck period between elections and the inauguration of the new president. Incoming presidents usually lie low or meet with the outgoing government behind closed doors to arrange the hand-off of power. But López Obrador began convening his cabinet and announcing programs the day after July 1. The press practically camped out in front of his offices, and long lines of citizens formed to present their concerns to a harried staff and sometimes the president-elect himself.

López Obrador's cabinet has more women than any in Mexico's history, including the Secretaries of the Interior, Social Development, Economy, Public Administration, Labor, Environment, Culture and Energy. They're also 49 percent of the new legislature, making macho Mexico a world leader in gender parity. The cabinet also encompasses a volatile mix of interests. Evangelical Christians and conservative businessmen are strange bedfellows with historic figures from Mexico's left.

The new Congress that took office Sept. 1 has prioritized legislation to cut back government spending on salaries and luxuries, increase social programs, build transparency into budget and legislative activities, create a ministry of Public Safety, enact stronger sanctions against electoral fraud, expand infrastructure, expand access to free public education and restore labor rights public school teachers lost under Peña Nieto.

But the MORENA government has two big external obstacles: Donald Trump and international financial markets. Trump has been surprisingly cordial, but the degree to which López Obrador has gone out of his way to avoid riling the erratic U.S. president indicates a real concern. Their letters to each other since the election read like a bromance. The markets like that, but many AMLO supporters want to see the new government stand up to Trump after Peña Nieto's capitulations. In a recent poll, Mexico had the lowest Trump approval rating of any country in the world—a mere 6 percent expressed confidence in his leadership.

There have already been important test cases. AMLO sent his own negotiator into the NAFTA renegotiation with the Trump administration and approved the final agreement, noting that it

GREAT EXPECTATIONS:

Andrés Manuel López Obrador will be inaugurated Dec. 1 amid soaring hopes that he can transform Mexico's corrupt political and economic system. But will he be able to accomplish his populist, left-wing agenda?



ENEAS DE TROYA

“reduced uncertainty.” After 24 years of NAFTA and export-oriented neoliberalism, Mexico depends on the U.S. for 80 percent of its international trade and most of its investment. The new NAFTA, like the old one, contradicts tenets and programs López Obrador has proposed, but he didn’t want to risk instability.

That’s the second problem. Any indication of tension in Mexico’s relationship with the supreme capitalist power — like every time Trump tweeted that he wanted to pull out of NAFTA — makes markets jittery. The peso falls, Mexico’s investor rating drop and stock markets punish the victim. That’s a lot of power for unaccountable forces to wield over an entire population, and a big reason why López Obrador has taken a don’t-rock-the-boat approach for now.

But it can’t go on forever. The re-named U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, despite improvements in labor and dispute-resolution provisions, continues the same economics he opposes. It failed to lift steel and aluminum tariffs against Mexico and imposed draconian intellectual property monopolies on medicines. Mexican small farmers, an important AMLO constituency, want out. Peña Nieto will presumably sign the revised NAFTA, but it also must be ratified by the MORENA Congress.

That’s not the only confrontation looming on the horizon. The exodus of thousands of Honduran migrants and refugees coming up through Mexico has strained relations. The Peña Nieto government called for them to apply for legal status in Mexico. But most want to keep going to the United States, where many have family. The prospect of spending months waiting for Mexican papers, often in detention-like settings also doesn’t offer much hope.

AMLO, on a victory tour through Chiapas while the caravan was moving through the state, welcomed them and promised work visas and respect for human rights. His message contrasted sharply with Trump’s alarmist conspiracy theories against the Central Americans. But López Obrador is also proposing a joint U.S.-Mexico program to invest in Central America. The two countries have already worked together with this purported

aim since 2014, through the Alliance for Prosperity, a Pentagon-led approach that combines military-police border crackdowns with promotion of transnational investment. The exodus reflects that strategy’s failure. It’s not clear how López Obrador’s proposal will be different, or how he plans to work with the Trump administration to achieve it.

It makes political sense to put off confrontations until taking power, although it’s sending mixed messages. AMLO obviously doesn’t have the same latitude as president-elect as he will as president, so his actions now can’t really presage what he will do in office. He also has a mobilized and vocal base with high expectations that isn’t shy about making demands.

This election signified the empowerment of the Mexican people in the electoral process and a vote for radical change. To carry out deep reforms, López Obrador has to keep them organized enough to exert pressure from below. An October referendum rejecting Peña Nieto’s plans to build a controversial new Mexico City airport in the suburb of Texcoco was a victory for that strategy.

It’s not clear what the right, now sidelined from formal political power, will do to oppose or sabotage López Obrador’s agenda. A part of the left, notably the leadership of the Zapatista movement, has taken a strong stance against the new government. The geopolitics of the region and the Mexico-bashing Trump administration make for a difficult international scenario, where conciliation won’t always be an option.

But one word drove the campaign and will be dominant at AMLO’s December 1 inauguration: hope. In a world where extreme-right violence takes more lives every day and fear often wins out, that’s a pretty big deal.

Laura Carlsen is the director of the Americas Program of the Center for International Policy based in Mexico City.

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She has spent the last two decades with community-led anti-poverty organizations working to build the movement to end poverty.



Rebecca Vilkomerson

Rebecca has been a member of Jewish Voice for Peace since 2001, and has served as Executive Director since 2009.

In 2010 she was named one of the 50 most influential Jewish American leaders by the *Forward*, and in 2017 *The Jerusalem Post* named her one of the 50 most influential Jewish leaders worldwide.



Make the Road New York

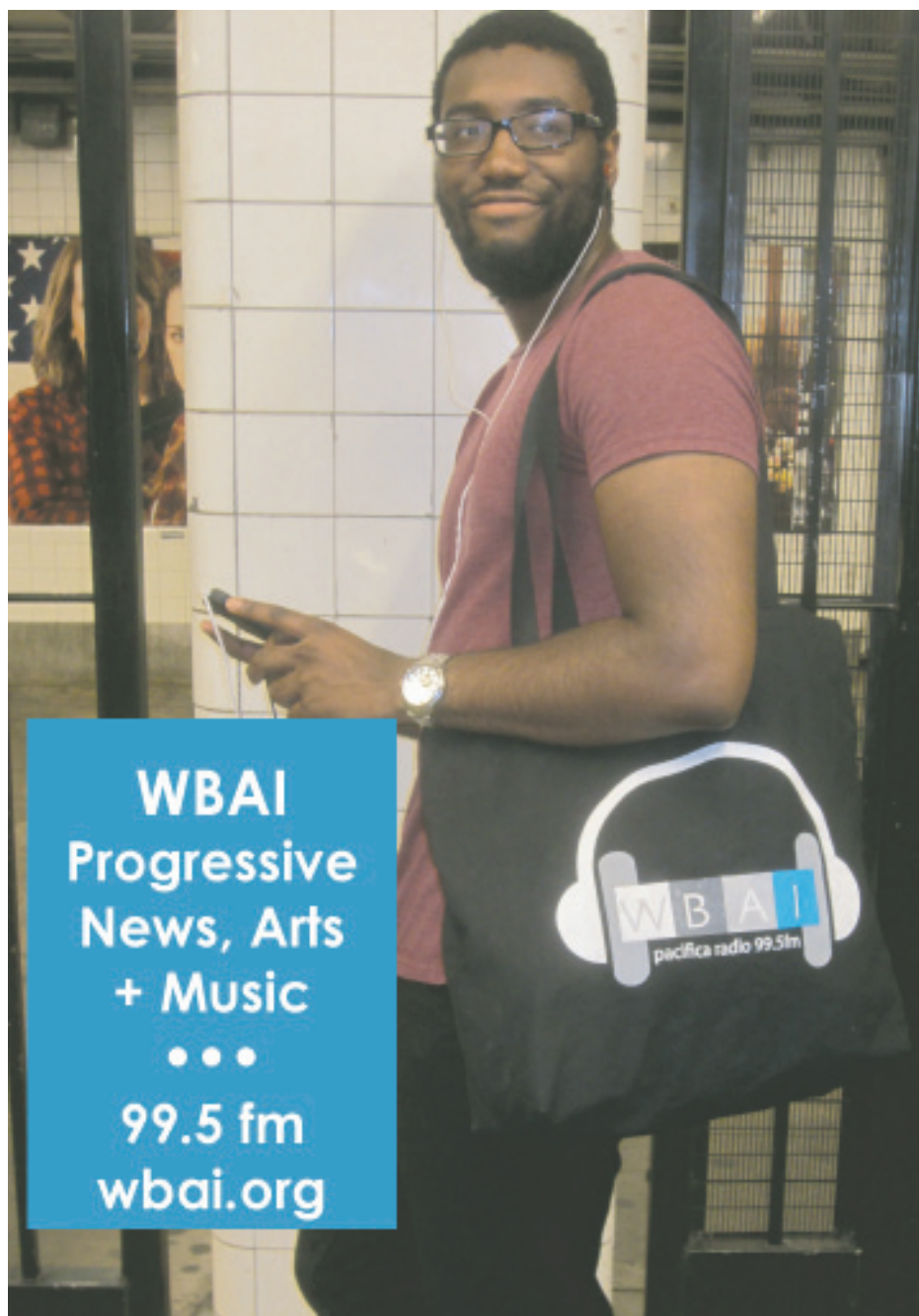
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CAGUAS, PUERTO RICO: SQUATTER CITY

AGAINST A BACKDROP OF GENTRIFICATION, AUSTERITY AND HURRICANE WRECKAGE, ACTIVISTS ARE BUILDING THE WORLD THEY WANT TO LIVE IN NOW.

STORY & PHOTOS BY ERIN SHERIDAN

The main thoroughfare in Caguas, Puerto Rico, a city of nearly 150,000 people, remains desolate for hours at a time. Its buildings, ranging from pale pinks to bright orange and lime green, appear vacant. Many of the storefronts have boarded windows, as if the shopkeepers left in a hurry and haven't looked back.

Hurricane Maria hit Caguas, 19 miles south of San Juan, with the same devastating force that met other municipalities on Puerto Rico's eastern coast. But for locals, it was a common sentiment that life in Caguas was already careening in an unsustainable direction well before last year's hurricanes — Irma, followed by the even more devastating Maria — were even on the radar.

City blocks abound with vacant apartments, a situation caused not only by Maria, but also in large part by landlords who are holding out for a flood of foreign investment. Puerto Ricans have long expected an influx of wealthy mainlanders in what some activists characterize as the island's "third invasion." Post-Maria, Puerto Rico is struggling under a new wave of austerity measures imposed by the Financial Oversight and Management Board — setup by Congress in 2016 to restructure its debt.

The island's government is aiming to privatize its public resources and is incentivizing mainland investment in tech and the island's tourism economy. Business elite from the mainland, ready to take advantage of tax breaks, arrive prepared to buy up entire blocks of land. Caguas' convenient location, just inland from the big city, would be the next logical step in the line of gentrification — cheap property within driving distance of San Juan and world-renowned, pristine coastline.

The future looks bleak in Caguas. Just over 37 percent of the city lives below the poverty line, well above the national average of 14 percent. Homelessness and displacement have reached unprecedented levels in this small city, where the local economy has long struggled to compete with chain stores based on the mainland.

The situation is not dissimilar to that of Manhattan, where 20 percent of retail space remains vacant as property owners hold out for corporate tenants willing to pay rents mom-and-pop shopkeepers can't. But Maritza Hernández, a member of the squatter collective Urbe Apie, compares Caguas to any "small town in America."

"You know what happens," Hernández says, pointing down an avenue of vibrantly colored, empty storefronts. "They put in a mall and they build a Walmart and then nobody comes to the [local] shops anymore." According to Puerto Rico's *Centro De Periodismo Investigativo*, Puerto Rico has a higher percentage of Walmarts per square mile than any U.S. state.

"And then if the [landlords] are not reasonable and they want really high rents, then nobody rents them," Hernández explains. "That's what happened here."

Pinpointing the root of Urbe Apie's mission, she says, "Nothing was more evident post-Maria. We cannot depend on the government, we cannot depend on anybody. If we don't provide for ourselves, nobody is going to help us."

It is difficult to say precisely what Urbe Apie translates to in English. One of the group's founders, Omar Ayala González, characterizes the meaning behind the group's name in poetic terms, as "an invitation to walk, to connect with spaces, to discover and activate them for the benefit of all."

For Caguas residents whose poverty was exacerbated by the storm, community organizations like Urbe Apie played a life-saving role. Hernández estimates that soon after Maria Urbe Apie's small team of

volunteers "were feeding 400 to 500 people every day" out of their mutual aid center — one of dozens of grassroots, de-facto hurricane relief stations that sprang up across the island in the absence of federal relief.

Urbe Apie quickly shook its reputation as a collective full of "la peluz," she laughs. The phrase means hairy people, a common derogatory term for leftists in Puerto Rico.

Relationships were forged over hot meals. Volunteers coordinated trips to check on neighbors. The organization took over various vacant spaces throughout Caguas, utilizing them as distribution centers that formed a solidarity economy still thriving today.

The impact is evident. While it may seem unlikely that a predominantly young, loosely-organized urban squatter organization like Urbe Apie and citizens of this majority working-class city could maintain a productive relationship, that is precisely what happened.

After feeding so many people in such dire circumstances, "They'll never forget you," Hernández says and smiles. She exchanges greetings with everyone she passes in the street. For each of them, she recalls a compelling backstory.

"I watched her teaching students in the orchard," shares Hernández as a middle-aged woman waves from across the avenue. Local students are required to complete "green hours" in order to graduate high school and Urbe Apie offers garden space to surrounding schools. "The way she talks about the herbs, the plants, 'Here, touch this, smell this, isn't it wonderful?' I thought, 'This woman is amazing.'"

Besides its gardens and mutual aid center, Urbe Apie maintains a patchwork of squats that include a clothing exchange, a kitchen, a cafe, a gallery space, a library, a bicycle repair shop, living quarters and even a building where addicts can exchange needles. The organization has also worked to provide condoms for local sex workers.

In every space the organization occupies — on walls, on doors — there is poetry, murals of graffiti. Members regularly organize community art classes at one of the collective's larger buildings. "In a world where you have no control of anything, at least you can paint a wall," says Hernández.

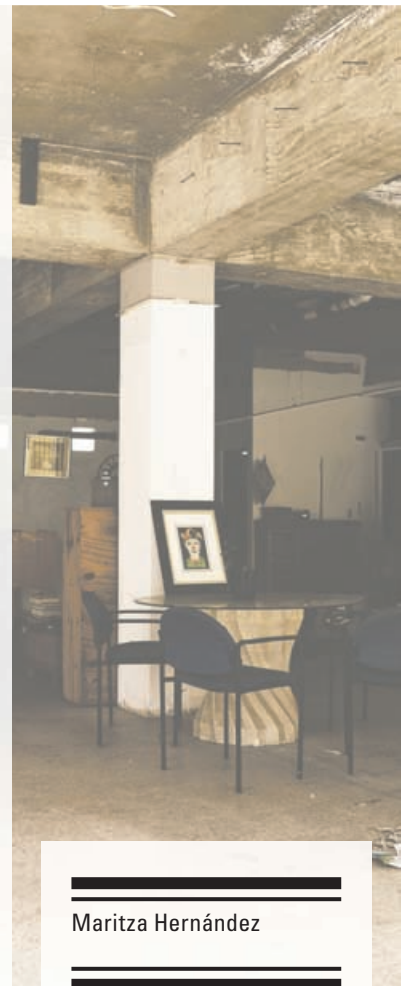
Not all of Urbe Apie's buildings are rented. Hernández — who describes herself in English as an "uncharacteristic" representative of the group because she, unlike many of her younger counterparts, has a background in contract negotiations — has been able to bargain with landlords.

When Urbe Apie does decide to squat at a location, it first carries out a thorough investigation before deciding to occupy the property.

"The Spanish were very good at keeping records," says Hernández. "So everything that happens with the building has to be registered. We ask questions like, 'Who's the owner?' 'What's going on?' 'What's happening [with the property]?' 'Are they interested [in working with us]?' We try to approach the owners sometimes if we know."

Many landlords are simply choosing not to rent out unoccupied buildings, holding out for tenants willing to pay exorbitant prices as the island gentrifies. In Puerto Rico, squatting has long been a solution to the island's housing crisis. Nearly one in five Puerto Rican homes are built illegally on abandoned government land. An estimated half of the island's homes are built without official permission, a process that Hernández and others attribute to close-knit, family-based community networks through which land and property have been shared across generations.

Urbe Apie is charting fairly new territory in taking over effectively abandoned, privately-owned properties. As long as the owners of the properties lay no claim to the unused buildings, or otherwise have no



Maritza Hernández

AN ALEXANDRIA OF THEIR OWN:

Unlike the ancient library, Urbe Apie's lending room has sprung out of wreckage.

AMAZON

Continued from page 5

boost if Amazon arrives, possibly making it one more public benefit for Bezos and his company to milk.

“If you think about what the premise of capitalist urban planning is, it’s that the state creates the conditions for capitalist accumulation, but then takes back something for the public through taxation,” said Stein. “This is just giving away without any kind of public benefit.”

Bailey cautions that even New Yorkers who don’t live in Queens will be buried alive in higher rent and — though Amazon might not be feeding the till — taxes.

“When Amazon announced they were going to building a headquarters,

speculations on property values instantly changed,” he said. “People across New York and the surrounding area are going to have their rents affected, and the taxes on the homes they own are going to go up. It’s not something we can opt out of. It is something that is going to affect all of us whether we like it or not.”

The Queens Anti-Gentrification Network is still formulating a plan to fight back, but right now, “it is super-important for people to get involved,” Bailey added. As he and other housing activists girded themselves for Amazon’s arrival the Wall Street Journal reported Google plans to mop up 1.3 million square feet of office space on lower Manhattan’s west side.

PUERTO RICO

Continued from previous page

intentions of renting them out, the collective says it is well within its rights to utilize the abandoned spaces for the sake of struggling residents.

Once Urbe Apie determines that the squatting is viable, members move in and begin to revitalize the space. At the collective’s largest building — housing living quarters, a bike repair shop, a library, a meeting space and two rooftop terraces — members have faced off with the law.

“The first time [the owners] came over with the lawyers and said, ‘If you don’t leave in five days we’re going to bring the police,’” says Hernández.

She and others knew that the owners would have to bring a court order to kick Urbe Apie out, so the volunteers decided to stay. This particular building, just past the city center, sits abandoned because it is the subject of an inheritance dispute and remains unclaimed by either party.

“Until then,” furthers Hernandez, “we don’t even know if the person coming over has any authority to kick us out because if it’s [in] succession, they need everybody to agree.”

The next eviction tactic the alleged owner took, according to Hernández, was to accuse the occupiers of theft. The police stopped by to let Urbe Apie members know that there were photographs of them “stealing doors.”

“Even the lieutenant of the state police came over,” she recalls. “Why would they mess around with some people taking a door from an abandoned place if there’s nobody claiming the door?”

Hernández describes her love for the building. The volunteers who live inside and maintain the adjacent orchard, she says, are even more attached to the place than her because they’ve created a home inside.

But she has a wider vision for Caguas. Hernández has submitted proposals to open a convenience store and has completed the construction of two community gardens in collaboration with neighbors. The collective will soon open a cabaret-style cafe, *teatro* and event space, El Reflejo, where local artists and musicians will exhibit work.

Hernández is perhaps more of a peluz than she is aware. Though she presents an image akin to a professional working mom, she has, for instance, adopted a pigeon that she found dying and nursed back to health.

It now flies around her house and sits on her shoulder when she goes outside.

She and other Urbe Apie members are nursing Caguas back to health as well. They maintain a positive outlook, embracing uncertainty as part of the uncharted territory of building the city up from the grassroots.

Puerto Rico can’t achieve a real recovery with do-it-yourself organizing. That will ultimately take the state mobilizing and directing the necessary resources. That’s not happening right now in Puerto Rico. For Urbe Apie activists and members of similar collectives that have sprung up amid the mutual crises of gentrification and hurricane devastation, theirs is not merely a struggle over squatting, but is also about holding on to vital living spaces as the island shifts rapidly around them.

Occupation comes out of necessity.

“There is a phrase people use here when they occupy buildings,” Hernández says, staring proudly at a makeshift community garden next to the contested squat. “Aquí vive gente, ‘people live here.’”

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A REVOLUTION REMEMBERED

¡Las Sandinistas!

DIR. JENNY MURRAY

ALPHA DOG PRODUCTIONS, NOV. 21

By Mark Read

Las Sandinistas, a new feature-length documentary film that examines the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1980's, arrives in theaters at a critical political juncture in which crises in Central America are once again center stage. Refugees streaming northward toward the U.S. border flee violence while the president calls them animals and sends army troops to meet them, threatening to shoot unarmed civilians. At such a moment, a film like this can offer a much-needed refresher course on the history and consequences of U.S. intervention in the hemisphere, helping us better understand the root causes that push those refugees to flee in the first place.

The film does this while providing us with the specific and critical perspective of female Sandinistas who are the protagonists of this story. It's a point of view that has largely been excluded from official histories. This film generously provides a corrective, reminding us that women made up the majority of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) and as many as 30 percent of its combatants when the revolution triumphed in 1979. In telling us the story of the female Sandinistas, the filmmakers are in effect able to tackle two very important subjects simultaneously: the revolution itself, and what Dora María Tellez, one of the protagonists, refers to as "the revolution within the revolution."

For anyone that came of age in the 1980s, the story of the Nicaraguan revolution and its ultimate unravelling is an emblematic tale of Cold War U.S. foreign policy and the heavy toll its anti-communist crusades took on Central America. During the 1980s more than 200,000 people were killed in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala in dirty wars backed by the Reagan administration. U.S.-backed client states that routinely used torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions to control their populations were seen as crucial allies. When people simply could not bear it anymore, they took up arms and went into the jungle to train for

a guerilla war. The same basic script played out in countries throughout the hemisphere.

This film puts us on the ground with a group of powerfully committed Nicaraguan women as they live through this history. Director Jenny Murray expertly weaves rare and revealing archival footage with deep interviews that sensitively explore what it felt like to participate in a revolutionary struggle for justice. I left the theater feeling as though I had been given a glimpse into a life that I secretly wish I could live myself — a life of unswerving purpose and profound commitment that these women lived fully and without regret. Just as importantly, these women lift the veil on the stubborn culture of machismo and sexism that pervaded the FSLN, despite its stated aspirations to fight for women's equality. This contradiction arises again and again throughout their revolutionary careers and it extends into the current moment, where they continue to fight for women's equality. They are an amazing group of women, with deep insights into the challenge of combating male supremacy while simultaneously attempting to overthrow a violent capitalist regime. This film is a valuable contribution to our understanding of revolutionary movements and the perils that come with adopting vanguardist — and thereby hierarchical — structures and strategies.

What is less clear, at least to this reviewer, is whether or not this film contributes to a better or worse understanding of what is happening in Nicaragua today. The political situation in Nicaragua is highly complex. With turmoil and violence engulfing that country this spring, there do not appear to be any clear-cut good guys.

Despite being voted out of power in 1991 (a defeat that many historians attribute to popular fatigue with a long-running war against an army of U.S.-backed mercenaries), the FSLN retained a great deal of popularity throughout the country due to the remarkable social progress it had achieved, especially in regards to public health and national literacy rates. In short, while the Sandinistas had been defeated by the United States, the people of Nicaragua still held very favorable views of them. In 2006, longtime FSLN leader Daniel Ortega was voted back into the presidency.

During Ortega's second stint in power,

the Nicaraguan economy has grown more rapidly than that of any of its Central American neighbors and the country experienced relative social peace compared to the unrelenting gang violence in other adjacent countries. Ortega was re-elected in 2012. Since then a growing number of Nicaraguans have chafed under his heavy-handed rule, including several prominent ex-Sandinistas who have denounced him. The women in this film fall squarely into that category. They are among the leading critics of Ortega's rule.

In linking the unfair treatment of the women of the FSLN at the hands of male leaders such as Ortega to the current efforts to oust him from the presidency, the filmmakers come dangerously close to taking the side of U.S.-backed groups that seek to undermine the current government. While the filmmakers may not have intended to take a side in the current conflict, the film can be read as making the case that, while the Sandinista revolution was necessary and noble, the male leadership of that revolution — and Ortega specifically — lacked integrity and honesty and thereby betrayed the revolution, rendering the current government illegitimate. Given the prominent political role of the film's protagonists it is hard not to see it as an opposition film, which made this reviewer somewhat uncomfortable.

All that said, I would strongly recommend this film to anyone interested in Central American history, the revolutionary spirit, or radical feminism. It paints an amazingly detailed and intimate portrait of a revolution, which is a rare thing for a film to even attempt. It is definitely worth your time to go see this film, but I would advise some skepticism towards any conclusions the film might encourage in regards to what is happening in Nicaragua today.



FREEDOM FIGHTERS:

Women made up as many as 30 percent of the combatants at the height of Nicaragua's 1979 Sandinista revolution that overthrew their country's U.S.-backed dictator.

MULTI-TASKING MAMA: A

Sandinista rebel nurses her child.

FILM

COMING OUT ON THE FIELD

Mario
DIR. MARCEL GISLER
FRENETIC FILMS, AVAILABLE ON
iTUNES, VOD AND DVD

By Gordon Glasgow

After premiering to acclaim in Europe, *Mario* — a moving coming-of-age tale of love, homoeroticism and repression within the tight-knit milieu of professional men's soccer — is available for streaming statewide this November.

The story begins in Bern, where we follow protagonist Mario Luthi's progression as he plays for the youth team of one of Switzerland's premier football clubs. It is a near-monastic life, with teammates, coaches, matches and training consuming almost every iota of Mario's energy. He is one of the team's best players and a practical shoe-in to play in the Swiss Super League until a new arrival, Leon, comes in from Hanover. The German immediately stands out among his Swiss home-grown peers. He's easygoing and comfortable with himself.

Mario frets at the prospect of competition from Leon for a slot on the first team (they're both strikers) and begins to worry even more when he finds out that the club has given them an apartment together. Sooner or later — almost inevitably it seems — the two are daydreaming in one another's arms about flying off to Barbados and are trying their best not to hold hands while walking down the street. When rumors of the affair begin to circulate, not only are the players met with hostility, but a meeting with the club's manager and chairman threatens both of their careers.



PRO FUN MEDIA

"Drugs, sex with minors, gay stuff — some things players just can't do!" Mario's manager says to him.

Tears fall, one of the pair quits, the other succeeds and it's safe to say that unless you're a homophobe there is no happy ending to find refuge in with this film.

Speaking over Skype, actor Max Hubacher, a Bern native, tells me that he drew on his own experiences as a youth while researching the role of Mario.

"I played soccer growing up," he said. "I wanted to be a professional athlete and there are constantly homophobic comments being made, by both the players and the trainers. It's so embedded into the culture. 'Wow, that kick was totally gay, work on your left foot more' or 'Don't kick like a faggot,' might be another comment you'd hear."

True to the film, homophobia pervades soccer's upper echelons as well, Hubacher's time spent with professional players while preparing for his part confirmed.

"If you want to have sex with another man, are you really going to feel comfortable telling your teammates or coaches?" he asks. "Will you feel comfortable telling your agent? You spend over half your life with these guys. They control both your personal life and your ability to be bought and sold by bigger clubs."

Mario's director, Marcel Gislser, tells me that, based on his research, some clubs will actively try to cover up a player's homosexuality. "If a player is single for too long, a manager will often make sure that a [public relations] agency finds him a woman to be seen with in public," he said.

Homophobia is not unique

to soccer, which might explain why the film is rumored to have been optioned by a major Hollywood studio, its setting changed to the NFL.

One strange aspect of homosexuality in professional sports is that it obviously exists and, although large portions of Western society have come to reject homophobia, being gay in the male sporting world continues to remain taboo — almost as if stadiums and locker rooms comprise a parallel universe.

I recently spoke with a Bavarian sports psychologist who works closely with Germany's Bundesliga football league. She did not wish to be identified in order to protect patient confidentiality. Sexual repression is one of the primary topics men discuss when they visit her office, she explained.

"Sometimes they will come to me and tell me that they are masturbating a lot, thinking about a male teammate," she said. "Other times, it's about extra-marital affairs, players often feel that their lives were constructed too early on, often by the dreams of their parents, and they subsequently feel trapped in a dynamic they aren't comfortable in."

Gislser hopes his film will breach the near-ubiquitous silence surrounding queerness in sports. *Mario* played in wide theatrical release in Europe and he says that he has heard from many professional soccer players who have gone to see it. Unfortunately, many went in disguise or to theaters in places where they would likely not be recognized.

MORE THAN JUST TEAMMATES:
Aaron Altaras (left) and Max Hubacher in *Mario*.

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RESISTANCE

Max Elbaum

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BOOKS

**WHY THE REDS
WERE BETTER
IN BED**

*Why Women Have Better Sex Under
Socialism*

By KRISTEN R. GHODSEE
RANDOM HOUSE, 2018

By Ann Schneider

What if you had your own guaranteed income, six month's paid maternal leave, free health care and government-subsidized day care? Wouldn't that turn you on? It's no pipe dream; for 70 years, the Soviet Bloc countries provided these benefits and much more to its women. And not solely to ensure a growing population of future workers. The Russian Revolution was sparked by women going factory to factory, demanding the Tsar pull out of World War I. At least at the initial flowering of Bolshevism, women's rights were at the forefront. This history has been obscured, if not deliberately suppressed here in the bastion of free markets. Kristen Ghodsee, an ethnographer known for her research in Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic has brought us a book that shares the same title as her opinion piece in the *New York Times* that went viral last year.

Not all of these benefits survived Stalin's reign, but the mere fact of the Cold War between East and West meant healthy competition to demonstrate a superior quality of life, i.e., one free of racism and sexism. And free love did exist up to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, culminating in "The Great Orgasm War," measured by reported sexual satisfaction of women. While the United States was sending men to the moon, Czech sexologists were uncovering the mysteries of the clitoris.

The '70s and '80s were the golden years for sexual expression of all types in the Eastern Bloc. A 1984 study of comparative sexual satisfaction in East and West Germany found that German Democratic Republic (GDR) youth reported being highly satisfied with their sex lives, both women and men. Eighty-five percent of the young women reported that they achieved orgasm "often" or "almost always." The same questions were posed in 1988 in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) aka West Germany and less than half (46 percent) of the young women reported feeling sexually satisfied after their last sexual encounter. This compared to 84 percent

of their male partners.

Ghodsee writes about the responses to her 2017 Op-Ed and uses some of them to compare the experiences of women who grew up during socialism to those of their daughters. One young Bulgarian woman wrote,

the second thing her mother always asks her (after how are you?) is "Are you having enough sex?"

Sadly, we in the United States are having less and less sex according to annual social surveys. Little of the so-called sexual revolution remains 50 years after the phrase came into currency. This decade, only 66 percent of 18 to 30 year olds reported having sex at least twice per month, compared to 73 percent 20 years ago. Eighteen percent of this age group reported having had no sex at all in 2016, the year before sexual harassment became a national concern. There may be many reasons for this, but "even the best stimulation will not help to achieve pleasure if a woman is stressed or overworked, or worried about her future and financial stability," Ghodsee says.

One consequence is a declining birth rate, which in the United States, is at a 38-year low of 1.77 children per woman. In the first five years after free market reforms were introduced in East Germany, the birth rate dropped by 60 percent.

Neither "lean-in feminism," which tells us to become better at advancing our careers, nor religious exhortations about our "highest calling" offer any viable solution to this problem. Socialism by definition means social provisioning of housing, healthcare, public transportation, education and childcare. Medicare and Social Security remain the most popular government programs of all time. Social insurance for men and women, whether in or out of the workforce was introduced to Russia by Alexandra Kollantai following the 1917 revolution. It survives today and Vladimir Putin is encountering great resistance to raising women's retirement age from age 55 to 63.

As socialism comes back into vogue today, we should be realistic about both the flaws and achievements of past socialist experiments. As Ghodsee's book highlights, a 21st century socialism could give us a lot more than Medicare-for-All, free public college and a Green New Deal. Whoopee!



LYNNE FOSTER



FROM FEARFUL FANTASY TO FINALLY FREE

Brave, Beautiful Outlaws: The Photographs of Donna Gottschalk

LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM
THRU MARCH 17, 2019

By Gena Hymowech

Near the entrance to “Brave, Beautiful Outlaws” is a picture of Donna Gottschalk at the 1970 Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day parade. Snapped by Diana Davies and looking like a young Bob Dylan in the “Subterranean Homesick Blues” video, she holds a sign that says, “I AM YOUR WORST FEAR/I AM YOUR BEST FANTASY.” This one picture has a hell of a lot to say about how queer women were viewed — discriminated against and looked down upon, but also an object of lust. “Love me or hate me/I’m still an obsession,” as lesbian rapper Lady Sovereign once sang.

Unlike the mainstream, which could only see queer women through a funhouse mirror, Gottschalk offers an alternative view, steeped in familiarity.

Raised in the Lower East Side, Gottschalk is an activist who aligned herself with the Gay Liberation Front and trained at Cooper Union until she became demoralized by its heterosexist culture. “Brave, Beautiful Outlaws” is her first public exhibition, and, whether that’s by choice or bad career luck, it’s been a loss for the art world either way. The historical perspective coupled with a raw style that pulsates with sex and love and horror, and above all, humanity, makes this a must-see.

One of Gottschalk’s subjects was Joan E. Biren, a fellow photographer. Gottschalk took a picture of Joan lying in bed topless and half-covered by a sheet, one hand under the cover. The photo instantly turns the sophisticated gallery visitor into a peeping Tom — should we really be watching someone who might be masturbating? But Gottschalk wants us to enjoy it, and the fact that we know the photographer is her lover makes it kind of okay. This is more than just a hot picture, though. Gottschalk reframed queer sexuality as an authentic language that connects women in love. The image reflects a rare “lesbian gaze” that replaces the common male one of the day. In Biren’s nearby photo of Gottschalk, lesbian nudity is reframed as merely practical as we see Gottschalk getting into a tub, which, because this is the pre-genitified Manhattan of the 1970s, is in a kitchen. That shot, like Gottschalk’s image of a lesbian

living out of a packing crate — yes, a packing crate — suggests an uncomfortable relationship between poverty and queerness.

For so long queers were not seen as capable of having families. Gottschalk mowed that idea down too, by photographing a queer couple and their child, as well as writer Sue Katz with the daughter of her girlfriend. She also highlighted the pain of family with pictures of Marlene Elling, who suffered sexual abuse from one or more relatives, left foster care and was in juvenile detention, where, at 14, she was punished for loving another girl. In one photo, the very butch Marlene is naked from the waist up, smiling. The nakedness feels like another reframing of queer sexuality — women who look as masculine as she did were not supposed to be topless.

One activity queer women were engaging in, for sure, was attending conferences. In two such pictures, Gottschalk shot women sleeping at the Revolutionary Women’s Conference in Limerick, Pennsylvania, perhaps indicating that they played — wink, wink — as hard as they worked. We learn politically marginalized groups did not always act with each other’s best interests in mind. “The Revolutionary Women’s Conference was organized immediately after lesbian feminist participants in the Black Panthers’ Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia marched out in protest when their demands were being ignored,” says one plaque. And then there’s Betty Friedan, seeing lesbians as a danger to feminism.

Gottschalk attempted to be inclusive, including Black and trans subjects. There is a special section devoted to her trans sibling Myla. The picture taken of Myla wearing her sister’s dress, allowing herself to embrace her true gender identity, is a highlight. Myla’s eyes are closed, a sense of relaxation — or sadness — flooding her face. Years later, Myla will have to hide her trans identity to keep a job as a night maintenance worker, and Gottschalk will be there to take the photo. Myla seems resigned to her fate in that picture and you just might want to lift her out of it and into 2018, not that it’s that much better on this side of the calendar. Like Marlene, Myla died before her time and both deaths feel like they might have something to do with being queer.

Following Gottschalk’s time in New York, she went to join lesbian-separatist communities in California, a furthering of her activism, but the exhibit does not show that. Once, lesbian separatism was all the rage but that has been replaced by a respect for intersectionality. Radical lesbianism thrives, but it has been

sadly hijacked to apply to lesbians who are trans-exclusionary. On a positive front, queer women are still laser-focused on getting their rights, just like in Gottschalk’s day, and now they have the Internet to make it all the easier. Queer female photographers are certainly more well-known. Zanele Muholi. Annie Leibovitz. Catherine Opie. But what of Gottschalk’s peers? Where are their exhibitions? Where are the queer women of color who were taking pictures in that era? I find it hard to believe they didn’t exist. I, for one, would love to see more exhibitions of women like Gottschalk, women who are or were as brave and as beautiful.

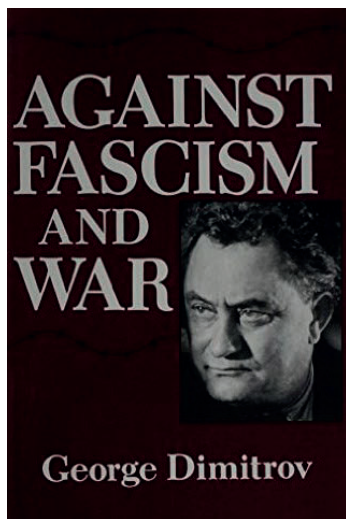


Donna Gottschalk,
*Self-Portrait in
Maine, 1976.*
Collection of the
Leslie Lohman
Museum.

Donna Gottschalk,
*Marlene, New
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JON QUILITY

I have felt nervous speaking before groups of people ever since my school days. I can still hear my classmates laughing at me when I would begin stuttering and lost track of what I was reading. These days, there is a lot to say but I'm unsure I can do it. Do you ever get nervous when you are on stage? You seem to relish being the center of attention.

— MARIA, *Morningside Heights*

MARIA, the “center of attention” no longer exists. People who want to walk into that spotlight — they disappear. Colin Kaepernick is the one person I can think of who is really the center of attention, and he doesn't want attention. He wants simple justice.

Well, Colin is a QB surrounded by TV cameras. You can say that he has a special situation. But Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was tending bar a few months ago. She must be an inspiration to you, yes? She looked around her neighborhood and began to celebrate her Change-a-lujah!

That's it. If you want justice then do your personal radical thing and the old cultural edifices of the corporations, art forms, religions — they will threateningly lean over you.

But those edifices have been eaten from the inside by the psychosis of capitalism. They have left us with zombie police, pixel pollution and millions of people who are eroticized by hatred.

The people who have what's left of the spotlight — let's call them property-owners — they are border-fetishists. Their laws are devices that harvest crimes among the just. They are afraid that beyond the edge of their spotlight is the darkness of the hordes of others, who, in actuality, are billions of moving souls full of light.

Maria. You don't need voice lessons! Don't wait to be pre-affirmed before you break into your freedom. Let's ascend to the Sacred State of Exalted Embarrassment! Disrupt the Earth-haters with raw love. Racism is maintained by isolation. Crash gated communities with some rough forgiveness. Interrupt, disrupt, trespass, shock and educate and love. Maria each of us is already in the center. You are and you always knew it.

LOVE-A-LUJAH!

• • •

Dear Reverend,
I'm sure by now you've heard about the UN's report that essentially gives humanity until 2030 to get its act together in order to curb the worst effects of climate change. Realistically, we're not going to pull this off. How

do we press on with the constant feeling that planet Earth is on borrowed time? I'm feeling more than a little hopeless. Thank you,

— COREY, *Brooklyn*

COREY,
Don't feel “a little hopeless.” Feel really deeply unforgettably what-the-hell-is-happening-am-I-going-to-die hopeless. The Earth's crisis isn't an issue, it's all the issues. It's life and death for all of us.

You ask “How do we press on?” The important thing is to find our radicalism, because the Earth is already in an extreme state and we are sort of wandering with our iPhones into death.

We're shopping. We're trying to get laid. We go to blockbuster films about the end of the world, but as far as the real world is concerned, we're busy.

Put it this way, Jim Crow would still be directing Americans to the colored fountain without 10,000 street actions, thousands of songs and prayers and sermons, and Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King and Joan Baez and James Farmer and Nina Simone and James Baldwin and Rosa Parks and Fred Shuttlesworth and Malcolm X and Medgar Evers and Thurgood Marshall and Emmett Till.

And everyone of these people would say that the movement was deeply moving to everyone. The heroes were mostly unknown. The transformation left each person saying — I will do everything I can do.

The imminent end of civilization don't have nothin' like that. And why not? We haven't forced the story out of the “environmentalism” closet. The millions of premature deaths, whatever climate change and the Sixth Extinction comes to, couldn't even be discussed during the midterms.

Isn't climate change the ultimate pre-existing condition?

Corey, let's not press on, let's be willing to die. The Civil Rights Movement is our gold standard of social change. They risked everything. Whenever there is a new fracked-gas pipeline coming toward New York. We know we have to throw our bodies across it.

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