

THE

= RECLAIMING PRIDE — P4 =

INDYPENDENT

#247: JUNE 2019 • INDYPENDENT.ORG



**A TEMP
WORKER'S LIFE
P8**

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LATEST RUSE
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**WHEN
BROOKLYN WAS
QUEER
P20**

REDEFINING JUSTICE

TIFFANY CABÁN HAS TRANSFORMED THE QUEENS DA RACE.

NOW SHE WANTS TO WIN IT.

BY LIBBY RAINEY, P12

SUE BRISK

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR



COUP D'OREILLE

JUNE

THRU JUNE 15

TUE-FRI, 1PM-6PM • \$5

EXHIBITION: RACE, MYTH,
ART, AND JUSTICE

Twelve photographers engage
with the premise of "race" as a
social construct rooted in myth,
while simultaneously interro-
gating its profound implications
and indignities on our 21st-
century lives.

CARIBBEAN CULTURAL CENTER
(CCCADI)

120 E. 125th St., Mnhtn

THRU JUNE 16

THU-SAT 7PM-9PM, SAT
3PM-5PM • \$25-\$30

THEATER: *THE HAUNTING OF
LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA*

Ishmael Reed's new play brings
to the forefront those charac-
ters who are absent from *Ham-
ilton*, *The Revolution*: slaves,
Native Americans, indentured
servants and Harriet Tubman.

NUYORICAN POETS CAFE

236 E. 3rd St., Mnhtn

THRU SEPT 19

TUE & THU, 6:30PM-7:30PM •
FREE

EXERCISE: YOGA IN THE PARK
Stretch, breathe, and find your
inner peace. Bring a mat.

RANDALL'S ISLAND PARK

20 Randall's Island Park, Mnhtn

JUNE 3-JUNE 9

MON, THU-SUN, times vary •

\$40 & up

PERFORMANCE: *EVERYTHING
THAT HAPPENED AND WOULD
HAPPEN*

Part-performance, part-con-
struction site, this groundbreak-
ing work from German composer
Heiner Goebbels is a poetic re-
enactment of a Europe always

on the verge of
collapse, only to be
rebuilt as if nothing
had happened.

PARK AVENUE
ARMORY

643 Park Ave., Mnhtn

THU JUNE 6

6:30PM-9PM • FREE

MEETING: THE FIGHT FOR
LATER CARE ABORTION

Come learn about this commonly
misunderstood type of abor-
tion care and why it's critical in
the fight for abortion rights and
bodily autonomy.

MAYDAY SPACE

176 St Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

THU JUNE 6

7PM-10PM • \$15

SCREENING: *CREATURE FROM
THE BLACK LAGOON*

All hell breaks loose when
a group of scientists led by
ichthyologist Dr. David Reed
decides to capture a prehis-
toric gill-man for study, only to
find it taking a King Kong-like
fancy to the doctor's girlfriend,
Kay. Author and horror film
director Mallory O'Meara will
be on hand for the screening
with her book *The Lady from the
Black Lagoon*, a copy of which
comes with the ticket.

THE METROGRAPH

7 Ludlow St., Mnhtn

SAT JUNE 8

8PM-12AM • \$15-35

PARTY: PAPI JUICE PRESENTS
BROOKLYN PRIDE

Kick off Brooklyn Pride with
Brooklyn's beloved dance
party centering queer and trans
people of color. Enjoy sets from
resident DJs Oscar Nñ and
Adam R. with special guests
Dee Diggs, Mazurbate, and
Zenobia, plus drinks and curator
tours of the exhibition "Nobody
Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50
Years After Stonewall" happen-

ing all night long.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Pkwy, Bklyn

WED JUNE 12

7:30PM-9:30PM • \$29-\$32

PERFORMANCE: A CELEBRA-
TION OF JAMES BALDWIN

Writer James Baldwin grappled
directly with the most painful
truths of the African-American
experience. This evening will
feature a wide range of material
from Baldwin's works delivered
by actors including Nathan
Hinton (*Madam Secretary*), Joe
Morton (*Scandal*), Carra Pat-
terson (*Straight Outta Comp-
ton*), Anthony Rapp (*Star Trek:
Discovery*), and Charlayne
Woodard (*Pose*).

SYMPHONY SPACE

2537 Broadway, Mnhtn

THU JUNE 13

6:30PM-8PM • \$18

PANEL: I'M YOUR MAN: AU-
THORS' ROUNDTABLE

Learn about Leonard Cohen's
relationship to place, text and
spirituality in this discussion
with authors Sylvie Simmons
(*I'm Your Man: The Life of Leon-
ard Cohen*), Alan Light (*The Holy
or the Broken*), Chantal Ringuet
(*Les Révolutions de Leonard
Cohen*) and music producer
John Lissauer. Presented in
conjunction with the exhibi-
tion "Leonard Cohen: A Crack
in Everything" on view through
Sept. 8.

THE JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., Mnhtn

THU JUNE 13

6:30PM-8PM • FREE

TALK: MAPPING BLOOMSDAY

"If [Dublin] suddenly disap-
peared from the earth, it could
be reconstructed from my
book," wrote James Joyce of
Ulysses. In honor of Blooms-
day, an international com-
memoration of Joyce's novel

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THE INDYPENDENT



BETTY TSANG

on the day it takes place in 1904, experts examine the many ways in which the author's masterful work was inspired by, and functions as, a map.
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Avenue at 42nd St., Mnhtn

THU JUNE 13
7PM-10PM • FREE
PERFORMANCE: NYC DOES DADA
Prepare for an evening of disruptive, challenging and controversial art and writing hosted by Three Rooms Press. The event will feature performances by modern-day Dadaists whose work continues the spirit of the avant-garde art movement sprung from the horror of World War I. Costumes encouraged.
(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St., Mnhtn

SUN JUNE 16
7PM-9:30PM • Donations welcome
READING: CARTA MONIR WON'T STOP SCREAMING
Award-winning cartoonist Carta Monir reads some of her most intimate work, and debuts a new zine. Content warning for childhood abuse, gender dysphoria, and parental death.
BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE, CAFÉ, & ACTIVIST CENTER
172 Allen St., Mnhtn

SUN JUNE 16
8PM • \$75-\$99.50
MUSIC: WU-TANG CLAN: 36 CHAMBERS 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION TOUR
It's on.

FORD AMPHITHEATER AT CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK
3052 W. 21st St., Bklyn

JUNE 20-JULY 8
Dates and times vary • \$12
FILM: PRISON IMAGES: INCARCERATION AND THE CINEMA
Spanning the 1950s to today, this series brings together a broad selection of films, each reflecting different aesthetic and critical relationships to the prison institution: from provocative, activist documentaries to inmate-made films, from commercial exploitation cinema to classic escape dramas, and more.
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., Mnhtn

SAT JUNE 22
1PM • FREE
PARADE: MERMAID PARADE
A one-of-a-kind celebration of ancient mythology and honky-tonk rituals of the seaside. This year's King Neptune and Queen Mermaid: Arlo and Nora Guthrie.
CONEY ISLAND
Surf Ave. & W. 21st., Bklyn

SAT JUNE 22
6:30PM-8PM • \$35
PERFORMANCE: ANDY SUMMERS, A CERTAIN STRANGENESS
Guitarist Andy Summers weaves an audiovisual spell by combining surreal imagery and innovative guitar techniques.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 Fifth Ave., Mnhtn

HIGH TIDE: *There's always a good time to be had at the Mermaid Parade.*

ENTER THE WU: *RZA and the rest of the killer bees swarm Brooklyn this summer.*

MON JUNE 24
8PM-9PM • FREE
PERFORMANCE: SNACK TIME PRESENTS PROM NIGHT
Time to get gussied up and go back to that one magical, lustrous, and unforgettable night at this variety show, featuring drag, burlesque, music, comedy and so much more.
STARR BAR
214 Starr St., Bklyn

THU JUNE 27
6PM-11:30PM • \$18-\$22
PARTY: DISCOVOGUE WITH ESCORT, DJ LINA & MIKEQ
Ahead of the weekend's NYC Pride March, this celebration will feature an extended live set by Escort as well as house and club tracks provided by East Village icon DJ Lina and underground sensation MikeQ and members of the Qween Beat collective.
DAMROSCH PARK
60 Lincoln Center Plaza, Mnhtn

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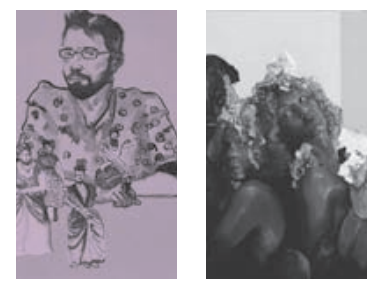
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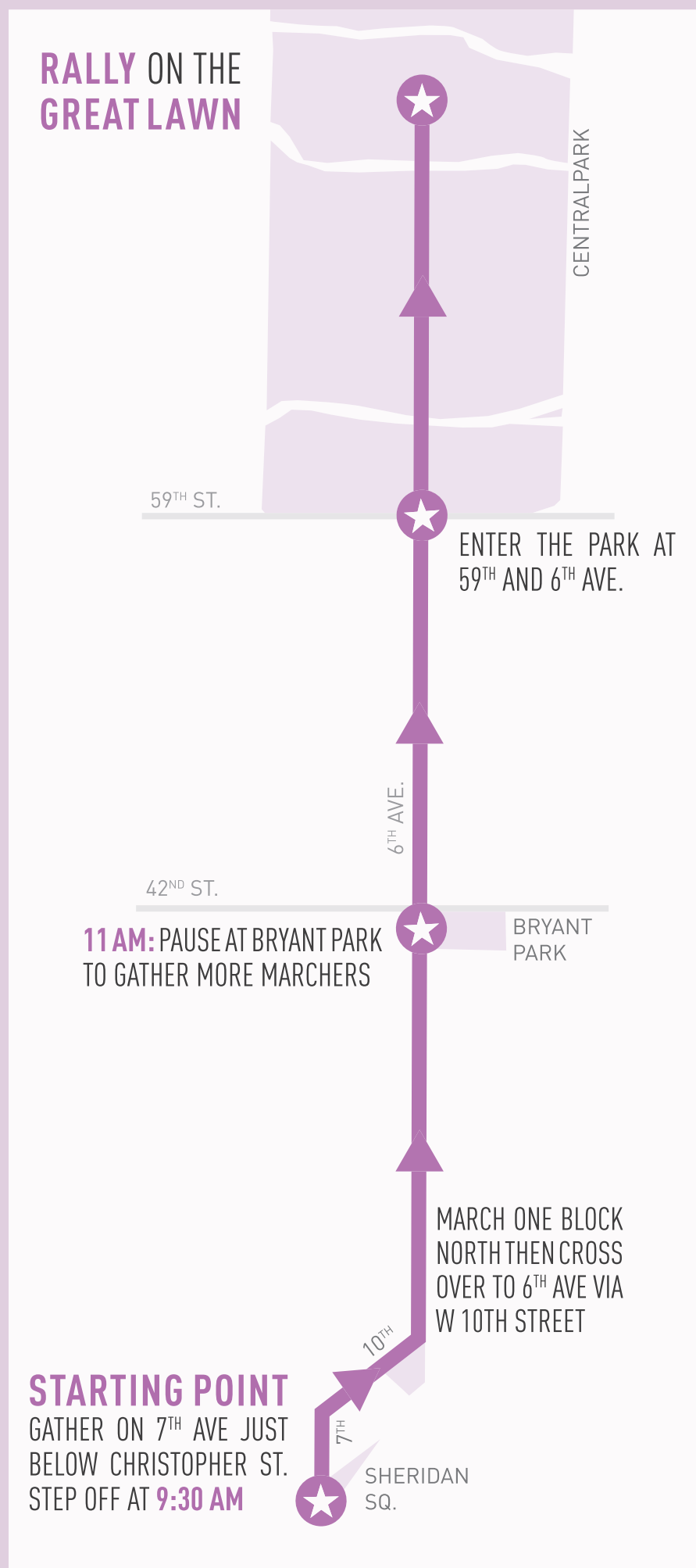


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NO COPS, NO CORPORATE SPONSORS

50 YEARS AFTER STONEWALL, PRIDE GOES BACK TO ITS ROOTS

BY EMMA GAFFNEY

Frustrated that the annual New York City Gay Pride parade has become dominated by corporate floats, a group called the Reclaim Pride Coalition announced in May that it will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots with a separate march. Reclaim Pride's Queer Liberation March will begin 2.5 hours before the official parade on June 30, and will not allow either corporate or police contingents.

"The use of the word 'parade' signals a celebration," said Reclaim Pride member Leslie Cagan, a longtime activist who organized some of the biggest protests in the city's recent history, against the Iraq War and the climate crisis. "We are calling this a march because while we certainly have things to celebrate... there is a lot more fight to be had."

The organization's biggest complaint is that the official parade has become more like a corporate party and less about politics, community solidarity and liberation. Last year's parade had more than 150 corporate floats, and this year's corporate sponsors include T-Mobile, Mastercard, TD Bank, Delta Airlines, Target, HSBC, Skyy vodka and the Omnicom-Group corporate-marketing agency. Last year, Heritage of Pride, the official parade organizers, instituted a policy that limited community contingents to 200 marchers, while corporate sponsors were allowed up to 800.

For corporations, says Reclaim Pride member Robin Scott, a trans Brooklyn-based designer, the event "has stopped being something that is dangerous for them and just something that is a smart marketing move."

Tensions have escalated since the Trump administration came into office. In 2017, a number of community groups organized a Resistance contingent to protest the administration's anti-LGBTQ+ policy changes. But last year, Heritage of Pride tried to ban them from participating in the parade, Cagan says. The Resistance contingent was eventually allowed to march, but at the back of the parade, behind all of the corporate floats, starting five hours after it kicked off and after all of the live broadcasting was over.

"We bring what we think is a more comprehensive view, not only about the queer struggle, but how we are part of it and in relation to oth-

QUEER LIBERATION MARCH

JUNE 30, 2019

THE QUEER LIBERATION MARCH IS A PEOPLE'S POLITICAL MARCH. ANYONE CAN JOIN — EVERYONE WILL HAVE AN EQUAL PLACE.



RECLAIMPRIDENYC.ORG

er struggles,” Cagan says. “The queer movement doesn’t even talk about liberation anymore, let alone positioning itself as part of many communities.” Reclaim Pride met with Heritage of Pride several times earlier this year to encourage it to incorporate some of these concerns in the parade, she adds, “and they said no.”

“The reason the New York City Pride march matters is because Stonewall happened here,” says Reclaim Pride member William Dobbs, a veteran gay-rights activist who worked with Cagan organizing demonstrations in the 2000s and was a member of the Occupy Wall Street press team in 2011. The 1969 Stonewall riots, which began when police raided a gay bar in Greenwich Village and patrons resisted arrest, were not the first time LGBTQ+ people resisted or protested, but catalyzed a larger, sustained movement. “Without the organizing that Stonewall sparked, this event would have been a footnote in history,” Dobbs says.

That, he explains, means that the Pride march should be about supporting justice and human rights, not banks and fast-food chains. “How are you going to get economic justice when you are dancing with Fortune 500 companies?” Dobbs asks.

Another of Reclaim Pride’s concerns is the police presence in the official parade. Last year, Heritage of Pride incorporated a police contingent, which saw a large number of officers acting as official marchers. “Not just out and gay officers, but an official police contingent, with officers in full uniform and with weapons,” Cagan says.

That, Reclaim Pride believes, is incongruent with the parade’s original mission, which, after all, commemorates LGBTQ+ resistance to police brutality. No one knows who at Stonewall threw the first bottle or was the first one to kick back, but many in the bar and the crowd were transgender women, drag queens and more subtly gender-nonconforming “scare queens”

and “flame queens.” Among them were Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, transgender women of color who emerged as leaders as the gay-liberation movement grew. Those issues haven’t gone away: A

2015 survey of more than 27,000 trans people by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that 58 percent of those who reported having an interaction with police in the previous year said they’d been mistreated, from being repeatedly referred to by the wrong gender to being forced to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest.

The parade was never just about pride, says Reclaim’s Robin Scott, but is about political action. The “corporatization of Pride has gotten in the way of that mission.” By holding the Queer Liberation March, she adds, Reclaim Pride is attempting to revive the community spirit of the first Gay Pride parade in 1970 and to put the politics back into the event.

“Most of us would say victories like the right to be in the army, or the right to marriage — those are not the kind of victories we are talking about,” says Cagan. “We would like a more comprehensive and thorough analysis of the institutions that oppress people.”

On June 30 at 9:30 a.m., the Reclaim Pride marchers will attempt to reignite that revolutionary spirit and desire for change, not just inclusion, by taking the same route as the 1970 march, then called the Christopher Street Liberation Day March — beginning on Christopher Street near the Stonewall Inn, and going up Sixth Avenue to Central Park.

“It’s about structural change, instead of just a seat at the table,” says Dobbs. “I hope the march sends a message about justice, about something that’s as big as the sky: liberation.”

READY TO MARCH:

Members of the Reclaim Pride Coalition rally in the West Village across from the Stonewall Inn.

Stonewall at 50

GAY LIBERATION IN THE US & GERMANY

A Conversation with Marc Stein

Jamie & Phyllis Pasker Prof. of History at San Francisco State University

and Patrick Henze

AKA Patsy l’Amour LaLove (Berlin)

Moderated by Ellen Broidy

Co-founder of the First Annual Gay Pride March



Friday, June 21
2019 at 7:00 pm

Audre Lorde Project

147 W 24th St, 3rd Floor, New York

Free Admission



For additional
STONEWALL AT 50
programming, visit
www.rosalux-nyc.org

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Queer History of the Village

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June 8, 22 @12pm

Environmental Justice in Gowanus

10% of ticket sales will be donated to Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE).

June 12, 16, 29 @1pm

Reproductive Freedom in Lower Manhattan

10% of ticket sales will be donated to The New York Abortion Access Fund.

June 15, 29 @11am

Women’s History of the Village

10% of ticket sales will be donated to The New York Abortion Access Fund.

June 15, 29 @3pm

Protests & Riots in the East & West Village

10% of ticket sales will be donated to Unicorn Riot.

June 16 @12pm

Gentrification in Downtown Brooklyn

10% of ticket sales will be donated to Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE).



socialjusticetours.com



BOUNCED FROM THE BODEGAS

YEMENI GROCERS DITCH 'RACIST' NY POST

BY BEN WEISS

In 2007, the *New York Post* ran a photograph of Debbie Almontaser on its front cover, describing her as a “sheik.” At the time, Almontaser was caught up in a controversy that soon blew over, but not before costing her her job as principal at the Khalil Gibran International Academy. Her resignation was in no small part thanks to the tabloid’s reporting, which accused her of running the Brooklyn-based, Arabic-language school as a kind of radical madrasa.

Flash forward to 2019: Almontaser now heads the Yemeni American Merchants Association (YAMA) and she says the *Post* has used its front page to attack the Muslim-American community again — this time, by placing an out-of-context quote from Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a practicing Muslim, over a photograph of the World Trade Center in flames.

“I was just absolutely outraged,” Almontaser tells *The Independent*.

While she and other Muslim Americans didn’t explicitly challenge the *Post* in 2007, they are this go around. Almontaser’s nephew, Mohammed Almontaser, and approximately 900 Yemeni-American bodega owners have banded together in an indefinite boycott of the publication.

Among their demands, as reported by *Bklyner* when the boycott kicked off in April: that the *Post* “change their cheap and sensational tabloids that undermine national unity and [incite] violence and hate for the sole purpose of circulation and sales against minority communities.”

“They’re very racist,” said Mohammed, 29, speaking with *The Indy* at Downtown Gourmet Deli, one of his four bodegas.

An analysis of the *Post*’s archives backs up both aunt and nephew. Sorting through thousands of articles published over the past five years, *The Indy* found that the *Post* was almost twice as likely to use words like “terrorist” or “extremist” when referring to Muslims rather

DONE WITH THEM: You won’t find the *NY Post* at Mohammed Almontaser’s bodegas.

than when referencing Christians. Forty-four percent of the *Post*’s articles with the word ‘Muslim’ also contained a variation on the word ‘terror,’ compared to just 16 percent

with the word ‘Christian.’

Almontaser isn’t taken aback. “The data just presented does not surprise me at all,” she said. “It’s what I and other activists and organizers across the country have been saying all along.”

A spokesperson for the *Post* declined to comment for this article. Nor are they speaking with the bodega owners. “We emailed them requesting a meeting. They never responded,” says Almontaser.

The publication’s lack of engagement has added fuel to the Yemeni-American boycott’s fire. What was planned as a limited 30-day affair has turned into a protest with no end in sight.

Despite the *Post*’s silence, the drop in revenue is probably getting their attention. With 900 stores currently participating in the boycott, Almontaser estimates the newspaper lost about \$270,000 during the boycott’s first two months, based on the estimate that bodegas sell between 10 and 15 papers per day for \$1 each and split the proceeds. The *Post* typically sells about 150,000 copies of its print edition a day.

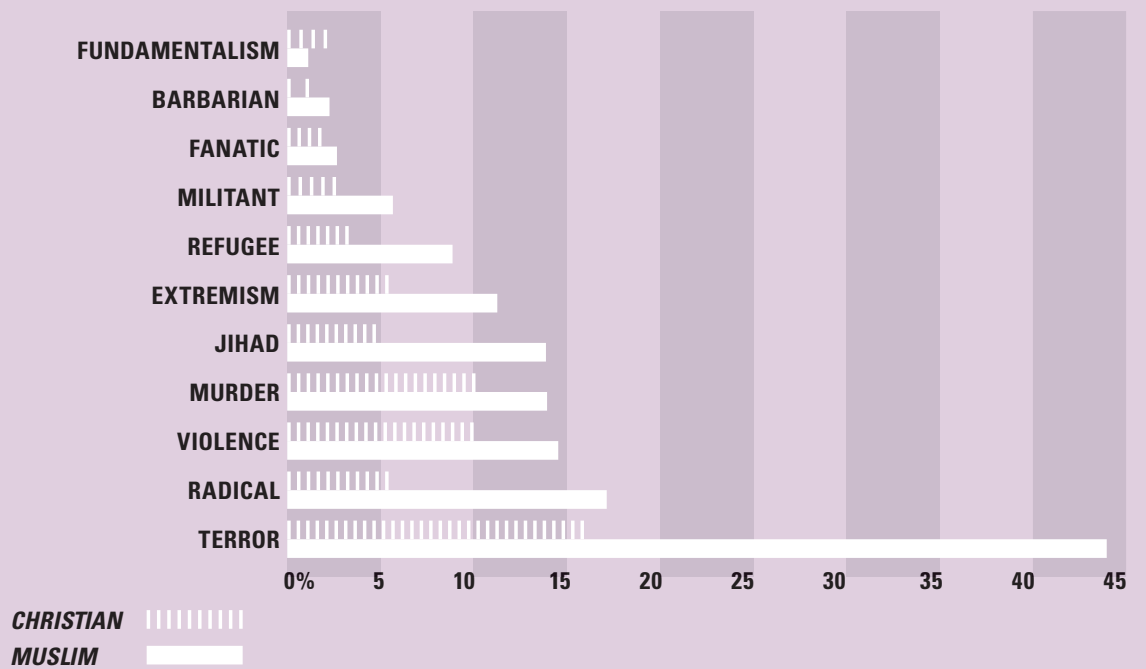
Of the approximately 10,000 bodegas in New York City, 4,000 to 6,000 are Yemeni-American owned, so there’s plenty of room for the boycott to spread, explains Almontaser.

The effort to boycott the *Post* isn’t limited to the Yemeni-American community, either. YAMA has formed a coalition with Black Lives Matter’s New York chapter, Rise and Resist, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and other anti-hate groups. The organization is also reaching out to other ethnic groups in the city who sell newspapers to form a broader boycott, including the Bengali and Dominican bodega operators.

Her nephew, Mohammed, though, needs no more convincing. “I don’t want them in my store. I’m never gonna deal with them again.”

HATE BY THE NUMBERS

Percentage of *NY Post* articles from 2014 to 2019 that allude to Muslims and Christians respectively and also include the following terms:



SOURCE: NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL ARCHIVES



SUE BRISK

BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

STILL NO JUSTICE FOR ERIC GARNER

The NYPD disciplinary hearing for Daniel Pantaleo, the white officer captured on video placing Eric Garner in a fatal chokehold in 2014, continues to drag on. One of the more recent hold-ups in the delay-plagued trial came after the defense asked presiding Judge Rosemarie Maldonado for a recess so that Pantaleo could use one of his vacation days. The judge initially refused but eventually granted a two-day recess when Pantaleo's lawyers couldn't produce the witnesses they called. As *The Indy* went to press, the trial was in the midst of a two-week hiatus, because a Missouri-based medical examiner expected to dispute the cause of Garner's death — homicide — was unavailable. A Staten Island grand jury declined to indict Pantaleo and a federal civil rights investigation into Garner's death petered out, making the disciplinary hearing the only legal setting at which Pantaleo will be held accountable for his actions. If found guilty, he could be fired or, at a minimum, lose vacation time for killing the black father of six.

HOMETOWN ZERO

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced he is making a presidential bid May 16, making him one of 23 Democrats seeking the job. Seventy-six percent of New Yorkers do not believe the mayor should run, an April Quinnipiac University Poll found. Meanwhile, zero percent of Democratic voters in the early primary states of Iowa and New Hampshire say they would vote for him, according to virtually every major polling agency. While the mayor campaigns out of state, school segregation, deteriorating public housing and homelessness are among the pressing issues awaiting him when he decides to return. Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan, an unelected bureaucrat few New Yorkers have heard of, will run the city while the Blaz is away.

NOT FORGOTTEN:

Activists demanding justice for Eric Garner shut down FDR Drive.

DYING FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Youth activists concerned with climate change took part in mass school walkouts on May 24. According to organizers, 1.8 million people participated in the protest, up from an earlier climate strike in March in which 1.5 million people took part. In New York, several hundred children and teens marched from Columbus Circle to Times Square where they staged a die-in. Young activists laid on the pavement for 11 minutes, representing the 11 years scientists say the world has to slash greenhouse gas emissions before the catastrophic effects of global warming are irreversible.

NOT SO REFRESHING

Early results of lead tests conducted at the city's public drinking fountains indicate concentrations of the contaminate exceeding the federal safety threshold at a number watering holes. Lead levels from one fountain at the Bronx's Pelham Bay Park were 50 times the federal standard of 15 parts per billion (ppb). At Cunningham Park in Queens the water was 23 times above the limit. The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is conducting the tests as part of the LeadFreeNYC campaign initiated by the Mayor's office. So far about 500 fountains have been tested with nearly 5 percent containing dangerous amounts of the metal known to cause learning disabilities in children and heart disease in adults. Testing on all park fountains is expected to conclude by June 15. Regular updates are available at nycgovparks.org.

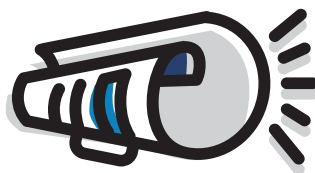
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CHRISTINE LARSON

DISPOSABLE LABOR

MY JOURNEY INSIDE THE \$450 BILLION-PER-YEAR TEMPORARY-HELP INDUSTRY

BY DAVID VAN ARSDALE

In the waiting room of an employment agency in Queens, laborers gather to be dispatched to warehouses and factories in New Jersey and upstate New York. Only their names are recorded before white vans arrive and the workers step in, cramming into seats and crouching on the floor to be transported to the day's job. The job might last a day or two, and the agency acts as the workers' employer. It deducts transportation costs and the fees it charges for the job from their paychecks, which they provide.

Other types of employment agencies record the skills and personal information of workers before attempting to arrange a more permanent position for them. In this situation, the agencies make money through some combination of a charge to the worker or a charge to the business client for supplying labor.

Once called an intelligence office, this type of hiring agency helped launch the at-will employment relationship in feudal Europe and one of the oldest newspapers in the world, *La Gazette*, which began in Paris in 1630 by advertising the skills of servants. During the British Empire, intelligence offices proliferated in London to supply the unemployed and migrants to the colonies as servants, industrial workers and to crew on colonial ships. In colonial New York, intelligence offices mimicked the English prototype and, after independence, grew to supply nearly every type of worker, including slaves.

Immigrants have always depended on this type of hiring agency. In fact, Castle Clinton in Battery Park, which was the depot for immigrants arriving in New York before Ellis Island opened in 1890, housed an intelligence office on site. There were many intelligence offices in lower Manhattan in that era. They awaited the arrival of ships loaded with immigrants in search of work. Much like today, they'd dispatch workers to a job for a fee. More often than today, they'd swindle workers into unsavory employment relationships.

Agencies that act as employers rather than middlemen became more popular after World War II. They promise to provide workers to businesses on-demand and for temporary periods, without the client having to endure the costs of processing payrolls, workers' compensation insurance, retirement benefits and health insurance.

In the 1990s, with the goal of promoting "flexible" employment and production, both President Bill Clinton and Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan backed policies that

allowed these agencies to flourish. Many became publicly traded global corporations, part of a temporary-help industry that today generates \$450 billion in annual revenue, the lion's share of it in the United States.

In 2018, according to the American Staffing Association, temporary-help companies supplied more workers to U.S. businesses than ever before: 3.28 million per week, 16.8 million annually. Meanwhile, the average length of their job assignments ticked down to ten weeks, likely the result of an increasingly flexible economy dependent on a host of new staffing firms, including many who operate through online apps.

The staffing industry's lobbying power has grown too, helping ensure that "flexible" employment policies remain the law of the land. It is thanks to these lax labor regulations that I was able to cram into vans in Queens and land on factory floors upstate and in New Jersey, where I manufactured and packaged goods with hundreds of other temps without one factory manager knowing my name.

Most of my colleagues had migrated earlier in their lives from further south in the Americas. They depend on the jobs and work incredibly hard, often earning their agencies a reputation for providing good workers. There are likely hundreds of such agencies in the New York metropolitan area. Many of them, like the one I worked for, are small, independent operators, whose workers are not always counted among staffing industry statistics.

Over the last few decades, the employee-employer relationship has been hollowed-out — and lobbied out — by the staffing industry and businesses that want to "hire" workers without the regulations and obligations that come with officially employing them. This enables companies to take on workers when demand requires more labor and to dump them after that demand is met — without providing a single employee benefit — and at no cost beyond paying the agency. Companies such as Amazon and the trash-processing giant Browning-Ferris Industries have used this model to insulate themselves from the responsibility of wage and safety laws, and to make it difficult for workers to unionize.

Workers at large pay the price. The greater the ease at which employers can hire flexible workforces with minimal rights, the more they are used, and the greater the pressure on businesses to compete by using this model, thus destabilizing traditional employment and associated rights and privileges on a grand scale.

Donald Trump's Department of Labor has come down strongly on the side of reducing regulations that limit employers' power to set the terms of how they hire workers. The department recently issued an opinion letter siding with an employment agency and another siding with Uber, stating that their respective workers are independent contractors, not employees. Trump's appointees on the National Labor Relations Board are also trying to reverse an Obama-era ruling that Browning-Ferris was legally a "joint employer" of workers who were technically employed by a temp agency.

If Uber and hiring agencies are not responsible as employers, and the business clients of the agencies are not responsible either, workers are left without basic protections and rights, including minimum wage and overtime pay, various health and safety standards, and the right to collectively bargain for better working conditions.

This is not the first time this has occurred in the United States, but there are precedents for reform. Hiring agencies supplied both indentured servants and slaves until the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibited these classes in 1865. In 1910, the Mann Act, also called the White Slave Traffic Act, sought to criminalize the trafficking of women (mostly immigrants) into brothels and prostitution, which some intelligence offices were involved in.

In a 1914 referendum, voters in Washington State outlawed employment agencies, given their mistreatment and abuse of laborers. Around the same time, unions, particularly dockworkers and the building trades, began expanding hiring halls to serve as a fairer way of connecting workers and employers. Various benevolent and worker-run associations have also existed as alternatives. Reviving these solutions would take us much further toward truly helping working families, rather than granting business more power to hire workers on one-sided standards.

David Van Arsdale, author of The Poverty of Work, is a sociologist and labor scholar. He can be reached at the theworkingbeat@gmail.com or followed on Twitter @theworkingbeat.

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LEONARDO MARCH

THE DARK SIDE OF SUNNYSIDE YARD

QUEENS MEGA-PROJECT MET WITH SUSPICION

BY DEREK LUDOVICI

If a New York City Economic Development Corporation proposal goes through, western Queens would become the site of a massive development eight times the size of the recently completed Hudson Yards.

Like Hudson Yards, the project would require building a deck over an active railyard: Sunnyside Yard, a 180-acre site owned mainly by Amtrak and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, now used for train storage, Long Island Railroad tracks, and Amtrak's routes to Westchester County and New England.

The new neighborhood built on top of that deck could hold 14,000 to 24,000 new market-rate units, according to an EDC feasibility study completed in 2017. "The initial phase of market-rate residential development at Sunnyside Yard could reach current price levels observed in the Court Square/Queens Plaza submarkets," the study said. Residential condominium sale prices, it added, are expected to be comparable to those on the Long Island City waterfront, "given the level of amenities and finishes expected."

Another 4,200 to 7,200 apartments would be permanently "affordable," in order to receive tax breaks and gain permission to build taller under the de Blasio administration's Mandatory Inclusionary Housing guidelines. What is "affordable" would be determined by the federal area median income for the metropolitan area, so those apartments could rent for more than what most city or neighborhood residents actually could afford.

The cost of building the deck is estimated at \$16 to \$19 billion, depending on what kind of structures are to be constructed on top of it. It would require reconfiguring the railyard, creating enough space between the tracks to build the deck supports. Larger towers would require additional planning, and it would cost more to

anchor them to the deck or the ground below the platform.

Like the city and state effort to have Amazon build its satellite headquarters in Long Island City, the plan has drawn substantial opposition from area residents. The public meetings to discuss it have been very contentious.

Because building on the site would be so expensive, "the only thing that would support its cost and still be lucrative for developers and investors would be luxury housing and national and international businesses," says Emily Sharpe, a resident of Sunnyside and founder of Stop Sunnyside Yards.

Many don't believe the project will actually deliver affordable housing. "Units promised never materialize, or the federal guidelines for setting the income brackets are much higher than most people can afford here," says Joanne, an elderly resident of Sunnyside who asked that only her first name be used. "We've tried [looking] before when the first buildings went up in Long Island City, and the income rates were ridiculous."

Accessibility and transit will also be major issues. The deck will sit up to three stories above Sunnyside. Most accessibility points will be pedestrian stairways, with fewer ways in and out for vehicles. The EDC study also suggests building a new station for the #7 subway line and the LIRR.

Another concern of residents is the environmental impact. The federal and state Environmental Protection Agency has named Amtrak and the LIRR as "potentially responsible parties" for the nearby Newtown Creek Superfund site.

The EDC feasibility study also projected that the development would have 0.97 acres of public space such as parks per 1,000 residents, less than the city Environmental Quality Review target of 1.25 acres. It says that would be "equal to or above what is provided by other large-scale developments in New York City."

Both the EDC and the lead consultant, Practice for Architecture and Urbanism, discount the feasibility study. "There is no plan for Sunnyside Yard — yet," the project's website says. "We are in the middle of an 18-month process to collectively develop a plan for the site and determine what would be built there over many decades." The actual master plan, it goes on to say, will build "off the technical findings of the Feasibility Study" and take "a fresh look at the site in partnership with local and regional stakeholders to create affordable housing, open space, transportation, schools and more in Western Queens."

Practice for Architecture founder Vishaan Chakrabarti,

who headed the Department of City Planning's Manhattan office during the Bloomberg administration, gave a similar answer to neighborhood residents at a public planning meeting March 26.

Emily Sharpe calls meetings like that, supposedly to get input from neighborhood residents and businesspeople, "a sham." "The EDC or Department of City Planning meet with residents and 'stakeholders' multiple times over the course of a year or so and keep a tally, which they frequently tout, and intimate that that means approval of their plan by the community," she explains.

"Are we going to be a pale imitation of Midtown East?" asks local historian and Astoria resident Mitch Waxman. "The problem we have is Manhattan. Manhattan does not present the solution. Manhattan is how we ended up in the situation we are in right now municipally."

"Part of the way that you get away with doing development projects in areas that you shouldn't in north Brooklyn and western Queens" he adds, "is by creating a very narrow, almost looking-through-a-soda-straw view of the particular lot you want to build on, and you stop looking at things holistically in terms of transit, where the drainage and parts of the deck are going to go."

As with the Amazon plan, local elected officials are also becoming suspicious of the proposed mega-development. "My issue is always the same, if they want to do this, they better explain to us first how the neighborhood is going to handle it," state Sen. Michael Gianaris told residents April 6, in his mobile office at the Woodside Library. "How the trains are going to handle the people. Where the schools are going to be."

"You are doing exactly what you need to be doing," Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez told project opponents at that meeting, "because you are right. What happens is that we'll go out and take that bold stance and as we saw [with Amazon] what happens is people turn around and try to slam you with 'This is wrong. Everybody disagrees with you.' I feel very confident in our position, because we know the community organized against it."

The surrounding communities are gearing up for what could be a long fight. "Even many homeowners feel that the predicted increases in home values will not be worth living in the towers' shadows," says Sharpe.

WE WON'T BE RAILROADED:

Emily Sharpe, a resident of Sunnyside, Queens and founder of Stop Sunnyside Yard.

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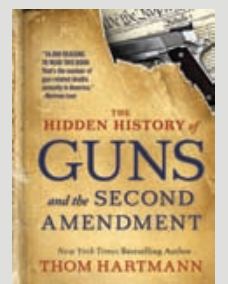


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REVOLT OF THE OUTSIDERS

FIRST IT WAS AOC. NOW TIFFANY CABÁN, A CAREER PUBLIC DEFENDER, IS SURGING IN THE HOTLY CONTESTED QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY RACE.

BY LIBBY RAINEY

Tiffany Cabán stood in front of a crowd in Jackson Heights, megaphone in hand.

It was the first beautiful day of spring, and families were gathered at Travers Park on 34th Avenue to protest a car dealership that was servicing vehicles in a spot where the city had promised car-free park access. And Cabán, a grassroots candidate for Queens district attorney who has risen from long shot to top contender, was there to show her support.

"This epitomizes all of the things we have been fighting for in my campaign," she told the protesters. "We need to start putting our children first, our community first, our people first, over profits, always."

It wasn't the sort of event where one might expect to find a candidate for the borough's top prosecutor. But Cabán, 31, is not running to be a typical district attorney. The queer Latina public defender is promising to end cash bail, fully decriminalize sex work and prosecute violent cops, abusive landlords and immigration agents. In a race where most candidates are calling themselves "progressives," she prefers the label "decarceral." Her goal is to keep as many people as possible out of jail.

"[We must make] sure we're investing all of our resources into creating spaces that are safe for our children to grow, that allow us to not survive, but thrive," Cabán told the crowd.

Children and parents cheered. She had their attention.

• • •

Cabán would have balked at the idea of running for district attorney.

Born in the borough's Richmond Hill neighborhood, she had spent her career as an adversary of prosecutors, a public defender in Manhattan who believed the criminal-justice system was set up to fail the people she represented. She saw her own community reflected in her clients, who faced prosecution for offenses as small as jumping a subway turnstile or possessing marijuana. Cabán would sometimes refer to her job as being "one of the good guys."

Then a wave of progressive prosecutors won election in other cities, such as Rachael Rollins in Boston and Larry Krasner in Philadelphia. And in January, longtime Queens DA Richard Brown, who increasingly stood out as a hardliner compared with the prosecutors in Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx, announced that he wouldn't seek re-election after nearly 28 years in office. Cabán saw an opportunity that had previously seemed unthinkable: radically changing the system she'd spent years fighting from within.

The time was ripe for a candidate like Tiffany Cabán. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's upset win in the 2018 congressional elections had rocked the Queens Democratic machine and activated a politics of hope. A few months later, community organizers celebrated another victory when Amazon announced it would not be opening a new headquarters in Long Island City. And activists across New York City had been steadily building a coalition to draw attention to the power and abusive practices of prosecutors.

So, with the encouragement of a small group of friends and supporters, in late January Cabán launched an outsider bid to become district attorney, promising to stop prosecuting low-level offenses, create a community advisory board and advocate investing in health care, housing and education while seeking shorter sentences for felony convictions.

Endorsements from grassroots organizations and local politicians began to stack up. Her volunteer base grew from dozens to hundreds.

"When I decided to run, I said it would be a win if we are just moving the conversation to center the experiences of my clients and their communities, if we are holding people's feet to the fire," Cabán told *The Independent*. "What surprised me quickly early on is we got to a place where we can and will win this."

Just weeks before the June 25 Democratic primary, Tiffany Cabán has emerged as one of the top candidates in a field of seven contenders, all of whom are promising reform. If she wins, she'll be on the road to becoming one of the most progressive prosecutors in the country, managing around 350 assistant district attorneys and a budget of nearly \$40 million.

In late May, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez endorsed her. "Our criminal justice system needs to change. If Tiffany Cabán wins, things are going to change," Ocasio-Cortez said in a statement. "We deserve a district attorney that understands that to make our community safer we help people prosper. We deserve Tiffany Cabán."

That endorsement is likely to bolster Cabán's campaign with more volunteers, money and visibility. But it's also a warning to the city's political establishment. If Cabán wins, it will be a sign that the grassroots groups that helped elect Ocasio-Cortez are developing lasting political power.

"We're so used to operating in a politics of fear and 'let's not make it worse' that we don't support and back bold, visionary candidates that are really going to disrupt things," said Alyssa Aguilera, executive director of VOCAL-NY Action Fund, a group that has endorsed Cabán. "It's exciting that the progressive community and so many people are lining up behind Tiffany and really going for what we want."

• • •

LIKE OCASIO-CORTEZ BEFORE HER, Cabán is taking on a candidate backed by the powerful Queens Democratic establishment. Her leading rival is Borough President Melinda Katz, who has received more than \$1 million in campaign donations, including a quarter-million from real estate developers and related interests. Cabán, who is not accepting corporate PAC donations, has more individual donors than all the other candidates combined. As of May 24, she had raised around \$215,500 from 2,545 people, an average of \$84 per donation.

Katz, who served six years in the Assembly and eight years on the City Council before being elected borough

president in 2013, has endorsements from several powerful unions, including the United Federation of Teachers, and a slew of local elected officials. Viewed by many as the race's frontrunner, she has moved steadily left as Cabán has gained momentum. Initially, Katz only promised to end cash bail for misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies. Now she's vowing to eliminate cash bail completely. She has also walked back her approval of the city's plan to open new jails in Queens and three other boroughs after closing Rikers Island. Cabán has supported the No New Jails movement since early in her campaign.

"It's really shaping up to be us versus Katz, and the contrast is pretty strong," said Cabán's campaign manager, Luke Hayes. "The machine does have its influence and it's working hard with Katz, but a lot of people have soured on what the machine says and what they actually do."

Cabán is looking to rack up votes in the western Queens neighborhoods — Astoria, Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Corona — that powered Ocasio-Cortez to her upset victory. Katz has greater name recognition throughout the borough and can expect to do especially well in affluent, predominantly white enclaves like her native Forest Hills. The large black vote in southeastern Queens could prove decisive.

Also running are Councilmember Rory Lancman, as well as Greg Lasak, Betty Lugo, Mina Malik and Jose Nieves. All seven candidates — even Lasak, a career prosecutor and judge backed by police unions and the most conservative of the group — have pledged to bring progressive reforms to the borough.

Community members gathered to hear the details of these plans at the Jamaica Performing Arts Center on a Wednesday night in mid-May. The forum was moderated by activist Nicole Paultre Bell, less than a mile from the street where her fiancé, Sean Bell, was shot and killed by police in 2006, on what would have been their wedding day. Three of the officers involved were acquitted, and others never faced charges. Now, Paultre Bell was asking the candidates before her why they were the best choice to reform an office that for decades has sowed distrust in the most diverse borough in the country. Cabán went first.

"I am running to reduce recidivism, I am running to decarcerate," she said. "You're going to hear a lot of similar-sounding ideas tonight, but the differences between me and the others here tonight are massive."

To win, she'll not only have to convince Queens to approve a radically new direction for a district attorney's office known for the tough-on-crime policies of Richard Brown, who died in May. She'll also have to persuade voters she's the best reformer for the job. At the Jamaica forum, all seven candidates pledged to end the school-to-prison pipeline, not prosecute low-level offenses, and implement more alternatives to incarceration. But they offered vastly different models for making these reforms a reality.

"You can vote and have your new DA be a career

politician or a career prosecutor, or it can be a public defender," Cabán said in her closing statement. "Who do you trust?"

• • •

THE STAKES ARE HIGH for communities of color in Queens that have long faced overpolicing and discrimination by law enforcement. ICE arrests and deportations in the borough have increased exponentially since President Donald Trump was elected in 2016. While most of the prosecutors and judges in Queens are white, the majority of those funneled through the courts and jails are people of color. Transgender women of color are disproportionately targeted by the criminalization of sex work.

These disparities were at the forefront of state Senator Jessica Ramos's mind when she went out to campaign for Cabán on a Saturday morning in May. Ramos, who represents the Jackson Heights-Corona area, was one of six candidates who unseated incumbents from the Independent Democratic Conference — eight Democrats whose alliance with the Republicans had enabled the GOP to retain control of the Senate — in last year's primaries.

Cabán credits her political activation in part to that campaign, and Ramos was there to return the favor. While the new state senator stood with a small group of volunteers on Corona Plaza preparing to knock on doors, street vendors nearby sold corn and tamales to passers-by. People occasionally stopped to pick up campaign flyers.

"This is the epicenter of deportation in Queens. We're surrounded by hundreds of undocumented people right now, including street vendors, who are continuously persecuted by the police, and small businesses that need to thrive," Ramos said. "I represent the largest transgender community in the country. Everybody here is just trying to survive. We need to ensure that people can do so in a way that is safe, and ensuring that we have a district attorney who understands that struggle, who understands those lived experiences, is crucial to us."

Born to Puerto Rican parents, Cabán spent her

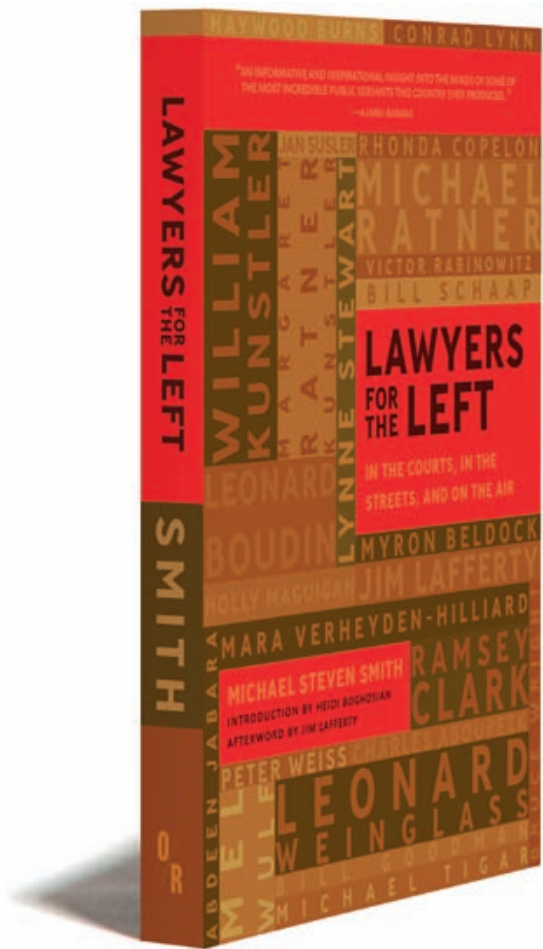
CAMPAIGNING: Tiffany Cabán speaks outside a 7 train station in Corona, Queens.

MOVEMENT CANDIDATE: Tiffany Cabán (center) with sex workers from Make the Road Action. Cabán has garnered support from a number of groups whose members have negatively impacted by the harsh policies of the Queens DA's office.

THE FRONTRUNNER: Queens Borough President Melinda Katz has the backing of the Democratic Party machine in the DA race. But in 2019 is that enough?



Continued on next page



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TIFFANY CABÁN

Continued from previous page

childhood playing at the Woodside Houses where her grandmother, a foster parent, lived. She experienced both the overpolicing of her neighborhood and the transformative power of community-based solutions. When she was a child, her family allowed her grandfather, an alcoholic Korean War veteran who had physically abused her grandmother, to rejoin the family after a prolonged estrangement. He would tell Cabán stories, make her laugh and play guitar for her.

That relationship taught Cabán that people were not simply the sum of their worst actions. As she got older, she wondered what it might have meant for her family if there had been public services to help her grandfather when he returned home from combat traumatized. Instead, the main government presence in her neighborhood was often police.

Cabán left New York to study at Penn State, and then earned her law degree back home at New York Law School. Despite being advised not to, she then became a public defender. She saw her clients trapped by the criminal-justice system. One man faced jail time for jumping a turnstile to get to a meeting with his parole officer, and spent more than a year in court fighting the charge. Another, who was struggling with his mental health, was arrested multiple times at the emergency room after going there seeking medical attention.

Cabán returns to those stories again and again. Her voice tends to speed up as she rattles off examples of how the system has failed people she knows. When she talks about the reforms that she wants to implement, she slows down to make her case.

“This new way of prosecuting is actually the thing public defenders have been fighting for, for decades,” Cabán said. “A lot of these things are common sense.”

• • •

THE RESULT OF THE QUEENS DA RACE will likely depend on turnout. With community organizations behind her, Cabán's campaign is following a model laid out by the insurgents of 2018, such as Ocasio-Cortez and state Senators Ramos and Julia Salazar: focusing on reaching voters that are often ignored by campaigns. This means mobilizing young voters and people who generally haven't voted in primary races, instead of exclusively targeting the small pool of voters who regularly show up to the polls.

This sort of voter mobilization in a borough as vast and diverse as Queens is no small challenge, and a growing grass-roots coalition, including the Democratic Socialists of America, New Queens Democrats and the Working Families Party has teamed up to get out the vote. These groups are centering people who have felt the consequences of tough-on-crime policies directly. Sex workers with the community organization Make the Road Action have been regularly campaigning for Cabán. VOCAL-NY Action Fund — a statewide group that mobilizes low-income people affected by issues like homelessness and mass incarceration — has

been mobilizing formerly incarcerated people to join the campaign. Carl Stubbs, an activist who spent decades in and out of prison and years on Rikers Island, has become one of Cabán's most ardent supporters.

“Tiffany is what we need because she works with the people,” Stubbs said. “I thought DAs were always bad, regardless, but after listening to her, she inspired me.”

Stubbs is a volunteer with Court Watch NYC — a project that formed after the 2017 elections, when Manhattan DA Cyrus Vance Jr. and Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez both won new terms with promises of reform. Court Watch monitors New York City courtrooms to hold DAs accountable to their promises and inform the public about the power prosecutors hold. The group soon joined Queens for DA Accountability, a coalition dedicated to monitoring and changing the district attorney's office through community organizing.

It's efforts like these that have pushed the Queens DA race into the spotlight and mobilized more than 300 volunteers to canvas for Cabán at subway stations, schools, street corners and doorways for months. Some are veteran activists. Others were inspired by Ocasio-Cortez's win.

“Our standard narratives about who wins and who needs to win are no longer gospel,” said Susan Kang, an associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Queens DSA member who has been regularly canvassing. “Cabán has the strongest volunteer base — that's not questionable.”

Some of these volunteers gathered on a sunny Saturday in May in Cabán's Jackson Heights campaign headquarters to prepare for a day of door-knocking. Sasha Weinstein, a Cabán staffer, was there advising volunteers on talking points.

“A lot of people don't know that they can vote for district attorney. There's this whole pre-conversation that you have to get to before talking about why Tiffany is good,” Weinstein says. “When you present the DA as this person (who) chooses which cases go through the system, you see this look on people's faces that are like, ‘Yeah I do have opinions on this.’ We get to entirely redefine the DA in this race.”

Cabán told The Independent that if she wins, she plans to throw out the typical metrics of success for prosecutors, such as percentage of convictions won, and instead judge them by their ability to reduce recidivism, decarcerate, and apply the law fairly regardless of class or race. She promises to create units within the office to release and clear the records of people incarcerated for offenses no longer being prosecuted, and end civil asset-forfeiture practices. She'll also work with communities to distribute the more than \$100 million the Queens DA has received from federal forfeiture seizures to local groups, using a participatory budgeting process.

“This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform our criminal justice system here in Queens and really be a model for the rest of the country,” Cabán said. “This is not a time for meeting in the middle and incremental change. We can have restorative change right now, and we may not get this opportunity in our lifetimes again.”



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FIGHTING MASS INCARCERATION FROM INSIDE THE SYSTEM

PROGRESSIVE DAs LEAD THE WAY

BY RENÉE FELTZ

Tiffany Cabán’s attempt at an upset victory in the Queens District Attorney race comes as voters around the country have already elected other progressive prosecutors with platforms of police accountability and racial justice. Below we look at some of their efforts to dismantle the broken criminal justice system from the inside.

LARRY KRASNER PHILADELPHIA

The push for criminal justice reform reached a turning point after outrage over police violence failed to result in accountability for killer cops in court. One of the earliest confirmations of the potential for change through the ballot box came in 2017, when Philadelphians with seven candidates for District Attorney to choose from elected a career criminal defense and civil rights attorney who had sued the police department more than 75 times on behalf of groups like Black Lives Matter.

Almost immediately after Larry Krasner took office in January 2018, he rolled out a series of policies described as “an effort to end mass incarceration.” He has since replaced dozens of old guard prosecutors with young radical lawyers, eliminated most cash bail, diverted low-level offenses from the justice system and charged crimes at a lower level.

Krasner now appears open to overturning more than one-third of the death sentences for the 45 Philadelphians on death row based on claims that they lacked effective lawyers, or should have been found intellectually disabled and ineligible for capital punishment.

One of his next priorities is to address correctional supervision in Philadelphia, where one in 22 adults were on probation or parole in late 2017 and 40 percent of the city’s jail population was held for related violations. Prosecutors have sought shorter sentences under Krasner and he says parole “should not be longer than the period of incarceration.”

RACHEL ROLLINS BOSTON

In Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which includes Boston, the push for criminal justice reform led last November to the election of Rachael Rollins, a longtime lawyer who campaigned on ending cash bail and said non-violent property crimes were often “crimes of desperation.”

Soon after taking office in January she issued a 65-page memo mandating that low-level offenses such as trespassing should “always be declined, even when attached to another charge,” along with shoplifting, larceny, disorderly conduct, possession of alcohol for minors, possession of non-marijuana drugs, destruction of property, breaking and entering to escape cold or sleep, driving with a suspended license and other charges. In an accompanying statement, Rollins said: “We start with a presumption that, in most cases, these charges don’t need to be prosecuted. Dismissal, diversion, treatment and services are much more often the appropriate outcomes.”

This prompted the National Police Association to file a complaint with the state’s bar association that she had “authorized certain illegal conduct.” But an analysis of Rollins’ first 100 days in office conducted by CourtWatch and co-sponsored by the ACLU found nearly half of the cases it observed in municipal court involved charges from Rollins’ “do not prosecute” list and that assistant district attorneys were still making bail requests.

LARRY KRASNER

RACHEL ROLLINS

WESLEY BELL

CHESA BOUDIN

As Rollins faces a spectrum of critics who accuse her of being both too soft on crime and on police, she has ramped up her opposition to the arrests of immigrants in the state’s courthouses. She filed suit against Immigration and Customs Enforcement over the “chilling effect” these arrests have on immigrants who are victims, witnesses and defendants and now frequently avoid coming in to testify, making it much more difficult to prosecute cases. Rollins has also instructed prosecutors to avoid charges that could hurt the immigration status of a defendant.

WESLEY BELL ST. LOUIS

Perhaps the clearest link between the movement demanding police accountability and the rise of activist district attorneys can be found in last November’s election of Wesley Bell as St. Louis County Attorney. Bell is an African-American son of a police officer, as well as a public defender, municipal court prosecutor and Ferguson city councilmember who loudly criticized the decision not to prosecute officer Darren Wilson for shooting unarmed teenager Michael Brown, calling it an example of why police and prosecutors should remain “separate and independent.”

Before he was sworn in, prosecutors in Bell’s office voted to join the local police union, which had endorsed his opponent. On his second day in office, Bell fired longtime assistant prosecutor Kathi Alizadeh, who was largely responsible for presenting evidence to the grand jury that declined to indict Wilson. He also fired prosecutor Ed McSweeney, who posted on Facebook after the primary that “voters will soon regret what they did” and wrongfully claimed Bell was a “Ferguson councilman with no trial experience.”

Bell previously worked with the Department of Justice to implement recommendations from its report that found Ferguson profited from demanding large fines from low-income residents of color for petty misdemeanors like traffic violations. After his election he issued instructions to stop prosecuting the possession of less than 100 grams of marijuana and failure to pay child support. He also told prosecutors not to overcharge defendants to pressure them into pleas or threaten witnesses to force them to participate in prosecutions. In April he tweeted that during his first 100 days in office, “we’ve reduced the jail population by 12% which is the lowest since 2002.”

WHO ELSE IS NEXT?

In addition to Tiffany Cabán in Queens, Chesa Boudin in San Francisco appears to have a chance of being elected District Attorney on a progressive platform in the county’s first open race for the position in more than 100 years. The job was a springboard for Democratic senator and presidential hopeful, Kamala Harris.

As a deputy public defender, Boudin led a major challenge to money bail and pretrial detention, but perhaps most interesting is his personal story: he is the Yale Law School-educated son of Weather Underground radicals David Gilbert and Kathy Boudin, who are in prison and on parole, respectively, for their role in a botched 1981 robbery that left two policemen dead.

Boudin has vowed to make “public safety” encompass the rights of both victims and defendants, amid a campaign dominated by candidates who are tough-on-crime. He counts Larry Krasner among his supporters.



COURTESY



COURTESY



COURTESY



DAVID HOLLENBACH

YOU'VE BEEN ZUCKED

FACEBOOK SAYS IT IS CHANGING. IT IS. IT'S GETTING EVEN SCARIER.

BY PETER RUGH

Facebook is like a bar that used to be a fun place to hang out with friends until the owner put cameras in the bathroom and replaced the tchotchkes with genocidal slogans and anti-vaccine propaganda. You look around and all of a sudden all the patrons have hair coming out their ears, velcro shoes and are sipping prune juice to ward off constipation. The McGuire sisters are on the jukebox.

Young people are leaving Facebook in droves. They're going over to that hip new joint down the block, WhatsApp, and showing off their faux-vintage photos on Instagram. But everything old is new again. It turns out these new spots are owned by the same guy, a milquetoast twerp to whom the forces of capitalism and deregulation have contrived to grant dominion over the communications of a third of Earth's population.

With the 2020 presidential elections just around the bend, we should be so lucky if Facebook were just a watering hole. Instead it's a vast multimedia company, harvesting data on its 2.6 or so billion users and lending a megaphone to Russian bots, Brazilian proto-fascists and the worst excesses of the Myanmar military. If only it would have remained a place where grandma could post photos of her little munchkins, while her grandkids share pics of their Smorgasburg pizza cupcakes through an Amaro filter on Insta. Facebook's founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, may still have the placid face of a China doll, but Facebook itself lost its innocence, if it ever existed, long ago.

The company's business model is based on the endless expansion of its sweeping data harvesting cartel that turns the consumer into a commodity. We all know this, but many of us keep using Facebook and the other apps in the Zuckerverse because, as Margaret Thatcher might put it, "There is no alternative." They've monopolized a vast chunk of the once wide open world wide web.

And so it is with suspicion that critics have greeted Zuckerberg's plans to redesign his scandal-plagued company's name-

sake and related platforms toward more personal interactions.

"Facebook has proven itself a bad actor and I don't take anything they say or do at face value," Douglas Rushkoff, a professor of digital economics at City University of New York and host of the *Team Human* technology podcast, tells *The Independent*.

According to a March blog post from the Zuck himself, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp chat services will be integrated. All messages will be handled with end-to-

end encryption, meaning their contents will be visible solely to the sender and receiver — a privacy tool already baked into WhatsApp. Taking another page from WhatsApp, users on Facebook's other networks will have the option of allowing their communications to disappear after brief intervals. Meanwhile, Facebook itself will shift the emphasis it places on its news feed, the bottomless scroll of friend and advertiser distraction, to group and person-to-person networking.

"I do think there's some sense in them returning to the idea of being a social network, rather than a propaganda publisher," says Rushkoff. "But the only way I will believe they are serious is if they liberate themselves from the need to achieve continued exponential growth. If they need to keep growing, then they will need to find new ways of violating our privacy and eroding our social integrity."

Zuckerberg seems to have anticipated the scepticism he's been met with and attempted to get ahead of it, acknowledging that "frankly we don't currently have a strong reputation for building privacy protective services, and we've historically focused on tools for more open sharing."

When it comes to open sharing, the Zucker has lost his appetite for it. His March post directly contradicts another, published four months earlier, in which he pledged Facebook would be more vigilant in rooting out disinformation. Now he's pushing it into the shadows instead. How can Zuckerberg's sites root out disinformation if the messages they carry are private and temporal? The answer, so far, is they can't.

Evidence of this comes to us from Brazil, where the Trump of the Tropics, Jair Bolsonaro, landed in the presidential palace on Jan. 1 in what observers have termed the WhatsApp election.

Broadband happens to be costly in the country, where the average household income per capita comes to just \$400 a month. But mobile carriers offer plans through which customers can access the internet on the cheap through select apps — WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. Thus, 120 million Brazilians, or nearly 60 percent of its population, use WhatsApp to connect to the web. The limited internet access that has led to WhatsApp's popularity — not just in Brazil but

across large portions of the developing world — is also what makes it such an effective propaganda tool.

A coalition of wealthy business interests backing Bolsonaro spent millions of dollars on WhatsApp disinformation campaigns ahead of voting. Drawing on data — some of it collected through Facebook — marketers established asorturf WhatsApp groups and flooded cell phones with doctored photos and fake news that the average Brazilian had limited means of validating.

"Propaganda is very effective when you do not have the possibility to either fact check or to receive different kinds of information," notes Luca Belli, a professor of internet governance at Fundação Getúlio Vargas' School of Law in Rio de Janeiro.

In response to a report in São Paulo's *Folha* newspaper, Facebook said it deleted thousands of fake accounts, but the damage was already done.

Exactly how much of a role WhatsApp played in the presidential vote is difficult for researchers to gauge, says Belli, given that the messaging service is encrypted end-to-end and the plethora of pathways the false information could have traveled, but he's worried for other democracies in the Global South — and for the United States — where similar conditions exist: weak data protections and a monopolized internet landscape void of net-neutrality laws that prevent the walling off of the web.

Yet despite the potential for spawning political rumor mills, end-to-end encryption means that at least the Zuckerberg and his cronies won't be tracking our conversations, right? Sort of. Sending encrypted messages won't prevent the Zucker from gathering your metadata, i.e. the who, when and where behind your supposedly private communications.

"Without transparency about how Facebook will monetize its end-to-end encrypted services," writes Gennie Gebhart of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, "users and advocates cannot scrutinize the various pressure points that business model might place on privacy and security."

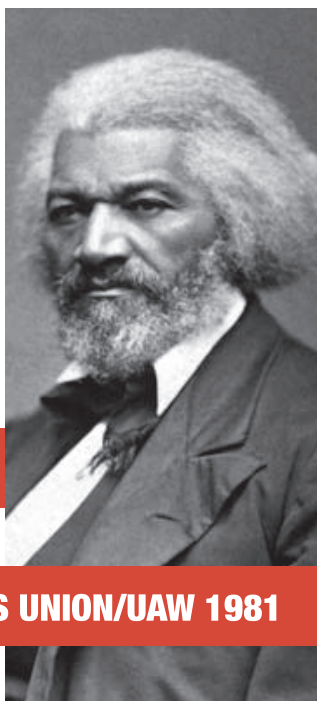
The integration of Facebook's platforms appears to have less to do with generating more meaningful connections than it does with the Zuck's desire to build a super app, à la China's WeChat — one all encompassing, self-contained intraweb within the internet through which all manner of communication and commerce take place.

"That at this moment is the dream of Facebook," says Belli. "Facebook is the only social network that has the critical mass of users that could turn out to be a super app."

We'll have to bide our time to see what kinds of social media chicanery lie in store for us as the 2020 presidential election heats up, but at least one of the candidates, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, has pledged to break up the Facebook monopoly. In the meantime, look out folks. It's Zuckerberg's world. We're just living in it.

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SUE BRISK

DIAPER CHANGE, CLIMATE CHANGE

A PARENT'S LOVE & A PLANET IN CRISIS

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Just as I took off his diaper, my son shit again. It happens. But he focused and pumped out of his tiny anus a mudslide so deep it was Biblical. I gave up on changing him. “When global warming destroys the soil,” I said, “let’s grow potatoes in your shit, like Matt Damon did in *The Martian*.”

Raising a child in the Anthropocene and the possible end of an inhabitable Earth at human hands requires a grim sense of humor. I like to think of it as acceptance, the last stage of grief. I’m not sure if it is but I do know, I’ve gone through the other four stages — denial, anger, bargaining and depression. Laughter was closure. I had let go of hope.

Then my son forced me to reach beyond grief. We were in the park and he let go of my hand. Legs wobbly, he looked at me. We were both scared as he unsteadily walked. Pride burst in me like fireworks. I wiped away tears and cheered. Each new footstep took him into a future I won’t be alive to see. In that instant, I felt love, giant, immense, immeasurable love for him that forced me to go beyond acceptance to action.

DENIAL & ANGER

“He’s kicking,” she said, and pressed my hand to her belly. He was. He was pushing out to the world. I leaned close and told him how much we loved him. In those months, I was delirious with joy.

I was so full of fatherhood, I thought I was big and strong enough to protect him. I had a job. I had good health. I could take care of my son. I would do a hell of a lot better than my no-show father ever did. Denial insulated me.

Months into the pregnancy, Hurricane Maria ripped up

Puerto Rico and relatives vanished. No phone. No e-mail. Nothing. I went to the island, drove around until I found them. Along the way, I saw mothers alone with children in hilltop homes with no gas or food. I saw fathers waiting in lines for ice and water for their families.

I came back shaken and angry. The world was filled with forces so much stronger than any of us. Just one superstorm, one war or financial collapse and we’d be begging for food. I hated how America betrays the poor and vulnerable.

By the time my son was born, I was humbled. The doctors passed

him to me, I held him like a breathing pearl, beautiful and fragile. I just wanted him to be safe.

BARGAINING

“What about Canada,” I asked. “Isn’t the ice going to melt? Let’s move. Let’s grab land.” She nursed our son and made the calculations. We saw the writing on the wall. Fires in the west. Superstorms wrecking the coasts. White people elected Trump. How long before America collapsed?

She shrugged. “Then what? Live behind a barbed wire, steel fence gate?” A dark vision crossed her face. “People will get hungry and eating the rich won’t be a metaphor.”

I was bargaining. What if we fled? What if we moved inland? What if we stockpiled guns? They were dreams of privatized escape, 1990s militia survivor stuff. Needle those dreams with a logical question and they popped. None of us, not even the rich, can escape the climate crisis. Some can hide for a while, but no safe zone, no walls, no borders can keep out millions of refugees desperate to live. We’re all in this together.

DEPRESSION & ACCEPTANCE

“I, I, I...” my throat knotted. Around the table friends looked at each other, then me. We were talking about the climate crisis and I was in professor mode until I mentioned my son. Sorrow choked me.

When I got home, I hugged my son as if to apologize for the hell he was going to inherit. He slept on my chest and I kissed him over and over. We were trapped in systems that left us little room to maneuver. Every plane in the sky, every car in the street, all meat in stores — all the ways in which capitalism polluted the planet were sold to us as the good life. Disaster was coming.

He didn’t ask for any of it. He didn’t ask to be born. It was our selfish decision and we both would be gone as he faced nightmare Earth.

A PLACE ON THIS EARTH: *What kind of world will this little fellow inherit?*

I began to celebrate the smallest things. When he held up his head, I danced like a clown. When he babbled “ma ma” and “da da,” I wrote it on the calendar. If the future was going to be painful, I clipped the moments of joy and held them to my chest. Today was what mattered. And when grief spilled into my thoughts like drops of ink, I joked it off.

“Just remember,” I told him as he gobbled an egg, “in the future when you buy Soy lent Green, it’s made from people.”

ACTION

He grew so fast. He was a tree sapling rising in fast motion. Our faces moved like two suns across his sky. His hands reached for us.

Tired from exploring, he climbed on my chest and slept there for hours. I kissed the top of his head and smelled his new baby smell. One day, after being bathed and fed, after we played peek-a-boo for forever, he put both hands on my face, pulled me in and gave me a wet gummy kiss on the nose.

We changed each other. A deep magnetic force pulled us together. Whenever he crawled away, he came back. Whenever I went to work, I felt his absence as if my heart was stretched miles from my chest. It was love. And I saw it everywhere, in every degree. It is the magnetic force that makes friends hug on the street and a cashier smile at a favorite customer and drives adults to wheelchair their aging parents into the park to feel sunlight. Love binds the human universe.

Walking him in the park, I watched him touch trees in wonder and realized being afraid of the climate crisis won’t stop it, but loving the Earth can inspire us to heal it. My barely one-year-old son taught me that I don’t need to “accept” the end times.

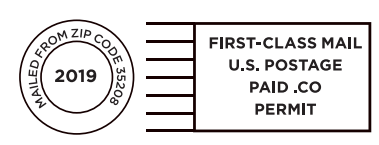
Today, we went to an art store and got billboards, markers and paint. It will be a summer of action. My son and I will join the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion. Together, we’ll protest at Wall Street and Trump Tower. We’ll look like trees, growing in fast motion, new ideas blossoming on our signs like wild flowers.

"I THINK CLIMATE CHANGE IS BASICALLY LIKE A NATIONAL DISASTER, AND IT'S ██████████ GOING TO AFFECT EVERYBODY" USA, LE ██████████ (AGE: 10) "THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY IS AFF ██████████ FECTING EVERYONE ON THIS PLANET IN A ██████████ DEADLY WAY." USA, DAVID JEROME FOST ██████████ 22) "THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ARE ALREADY ██████████ DYING DUE TO AIR POLLUTION AND RES ██████████ SOURCE SCARCITY, AND SO MANY THINGS RELATE ██████████ ED TO CLIMATE CHANGE." USA, ARIELLE MARTIN ██████████ (AGE: 17) "WE ARE ALL IN IMMINENT DANGER" ██████████ OORZ (AGE: 17) "PUT THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF ██████████ OUR CLIMATE AND OUR PLANET AHEAD OF ██████████ SHORT-TERM PROFIT." AUSTRALIA, DOHA KI ██████████ 7) "SKIPPING CLIMATE CHANGE IS WORSE TH ██████████ AN SKIPPING SCHOOL." BELGIUM, ANUNA DE ██████████ E: 17) "TO US, IT IS SO SELF-EVIDENT THAT WE ██████████ CAN'T KEEP ON GOINNG IN THIS DIRECTION." ██████████ XELLE KIAMBI (AGE: 17)

< C U T O U T >

TEENAGE VOICE 2019
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SIGNATURE.



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BOOKS

YE OLDE QUEER BROOKLYN

When Brooklyn Was Queer: A History

BY HUGH RYAN

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2019

By Jessica Max Stein

Hugh Ryan got the idea to write *When Brooklyn Was Queer* when he held pop-up queer history exhibit parties in his Brooklyn apartment; when one such event drew 300 people, and another was shut down by the police, he knew he was on to something. Contemporary queer Brooklyn was hungry for its history.

Ryan has cooked up a delicious first taste of Brooklyn's pre-Stonewall LGBTQ+ community history, a fun read of narrative nonfiction. Ryan shows clear respect and affection for his colorful cast of characters, honoring their identities (such as their presumably preferred pronouns) as well as their idiosyncrasies. He generously uses "queer" as a catchall term to discuss both sexuality and gender identity, which enables him to observe how the two have historically interacted, as well as to expand who he can include in his motley crew. The geographic narrative is also a thoughtful, flexible framing, allowing Ryan to discuss how physical and social changes in the city landscape affected where queer people lived, worked and played.

Ryan's spry, chatty narration makes you feel like he is walking you through one of his exhibits. As he tells it, the urbanization of Brooklyn in the late 1800s enables queers to discover each other, as people increasingly participate in the public sphere — particularly around the waterfront, where many queers work as sailors, artists, sex workers, entertainers or factory workers at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. But having found each other, queers are in turn discovered — by straight people. The narrative arc rises as increasing visibility triggers a backlash from doctors, the judicial system and zealous "moral" reformers. Ryan populates the pages with colorful characters, from the poet Walt Whitman to the black lesbian dancer Mabel Hampton, with a keen eye for how each person exemplifies their times. Hart Crane, who wrote the earnest ode "To Brooklyn Bridge," exemplified the 1920s: the passionate poet burns bright and then burns out. For things are never quite the same once the Great Depression hits, particularly for queers already on the economic margins. Yet havens remain, such as February House, a queer house in Brooklyn Heights inhabited by a "literary menagerie" from Carson McCullers to W.H. Auden to Gypsy Rose Lee (who later inspired the play *Gypsy*). Queer sailors and female factory workers, in particular, find respite during World War II — but see it snatched away again when the war ends.

Ryan puts it best: "After 1945, the physical and mental suburbanization of America would rip right through the heart of queer Brooklyn (sometimes literally)." The Lavender Scare (it wasn't just a Red Scare) forces queers out of government and entertainment. The American Psychiatric Association includes ho-

mosexuality in their first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), thus classifying it as a mental illness. The police crack down on cruising, using entrapment to arrest men for "disorderly conduct — degeneracy." Dispersed by these social forces, queer milieus can't survive the borough's physical changes. Ryan lays much of the blame at

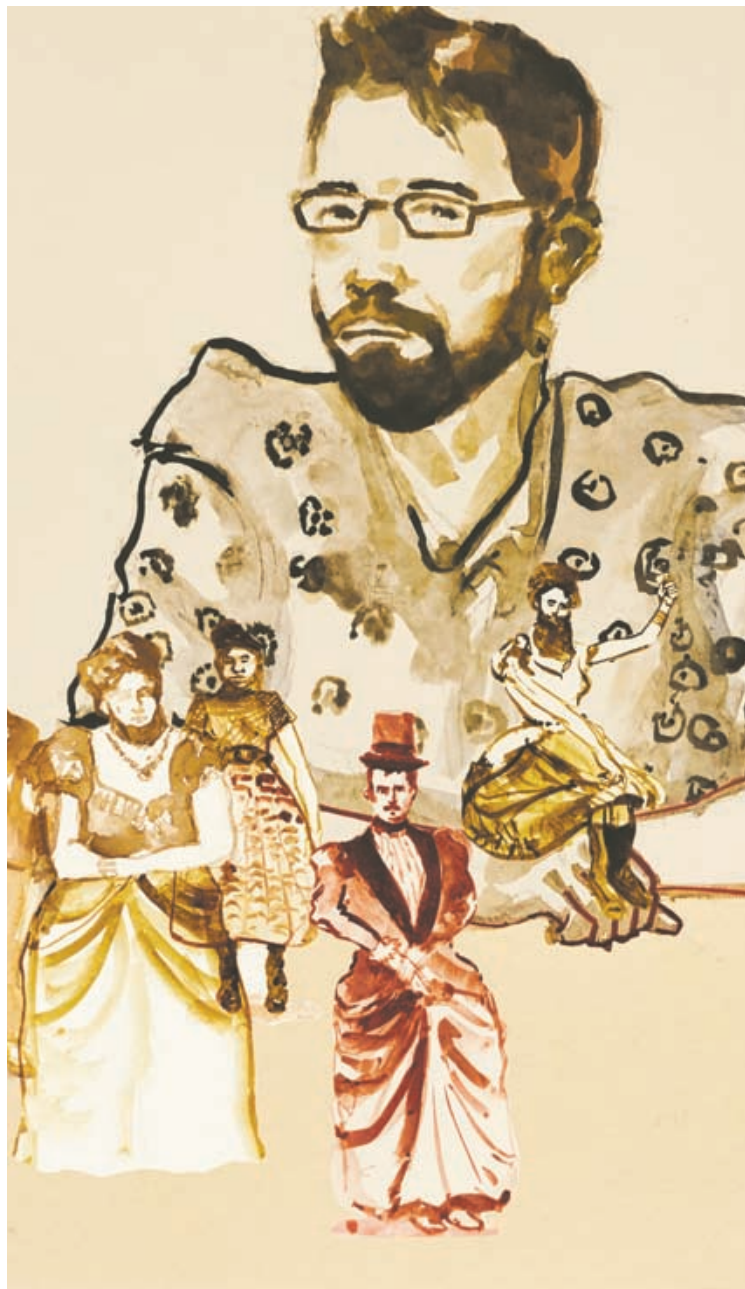
Robert Moses' feet. The arrogant city planner sees Brooklyn as a mere obstacle for Long Islanders commuting to Manhattan, ringing the waterfront with roads. The on-ramp to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway wipes out great swaths of queer Brooklyn history "in one vicious swoop," knocking down February House as well as Hart Crane's former home. By the time of Manhattan's Stonewall uprising, the queer people and places of Brooklyn aren't just gone, they are forgotten.

Ryan has his work cut out for him excavating such a well-buried

history. Biographer Stacy Schiff describes this daunting task as "writing around the holes." At times I wanted the book to be less anecdotal and more comprehensive — which might frankly be impossible given the lack of material available. Once you accept the holes, however, Ryan is exemplary at deftly guiding you over and around them. He cherry-picks illustrative details to spin into vivid scenes, such as his cinematic description of a bustling Fulton Ferry Landing, back when the ferry was how you got to Brooklyn. He also engagingly guides you around the possible holes in your own historical context, offering efficient off-the-cuff explanations and modern-day parallels: one mid-19th century Manhattan queer bar is likened to "a candlelit version of CBGB — the hottest hangout for the city's most outré artists". Occasionally Ryan stretches his definitions in order to include material. While this flexibility is refreshing when he discusses 19th century Boston marriages between women, which many historians don't read as queer because they were ostensibly sexless, it doesn't quite work for Marianne Moore, who neither lived nor identified as queer, at least according to her biography.

But Ryan is not trying to be the be-all end-all,

just the beginning. He understands the book's place in an ongoing dialogue, a shared stewardship of community history. The book is an open thank you to those who preceded him in this work, such as George Chauncey and Allan Berubé, as well as those who might want to take up the torch. "I look forward to the book that comes after this, and the one that comes after that, and the one that maybe you're going to write," Ryan affectionately dares the reader. Let the conversation begin.



ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

CHILDREN OF STONEWALL

Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall
THRU DEC. 8 AT BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 EASTERN PKWY, BROOKLYN, NY

By Jessica Max Stein

“**N**obody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall,” now showing at the Brooklyn Museum, seems like a direct response to Hugh Ryan’s affectionate challenge to rediscover our queer history and to create our queer future. The 28 LGBTQ+ artists, all born after 1969 and currently working in Brooklyn, use everything from oil paints to photographs to light boxes to the artist’s own used, indented foam mattress topper to weigh in not just on what is queer and what is contemporary, but the very question of what is art.

The first room honors the artists’ activist ancestors, playing with themes of “Stonewall Uprising,” “Heritage” and “Revolt.” Some pieces directly correct the myth of Stonewall, the three-day police-raided-turned-revolt that is widely considered the beginning of the American queer movement — and widely whitewashed in the retelling. I particularly appreciated Tuesday Smillie’s *The Hudson River Jordan*, a banner in homage to Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), whose members included Stonewall leaders Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. The multipurpose textile piece is made of blue tarp, silver fabric, a pretty hint of pink, and bedecked with a bouquet of fake flowers. “The banner alludes to the lived experiences of STAR and its members — marked by both precarious material conditions and glamour,” explains the museum. You can appreciate it on the wall as art — but you could also wrap it around your shoulders or sleep on/under it. Similarly, LJ Roberts’ light box installation *Stormé at Stonewall* literally illuminates the whitewashing of Stonewall history — inspired by a suggestion from Hugh Ryan (small world). The flashing on-screen cut-and-paste collages *New York Times* articles about black butch lesbian and Stonewall veteran Stormé Delarverie, those that feature her as well as those that erase her, thus questioning how the story gets told.

The exhibition can’t quite decide whether it’s an art show, an activist vehicle or a random archive. This works, most of the time. The best pieces are those that maximize both the medium and the message. I was particularly captivated by David Antonio Cruz’s gorgeous oil paintings of STAR’s modern-day counterparts: Black trans women who were murdered in 2017 and 2018. They stare directly at the viewer with a gaze that is part seduction, part implication. Similarly, I appreciated the detailed small drawings of haimisch queers with expressive faces in Smillie’s collage

trptych, *We Cannot Live Without Our Lives*, *STAR 2012* and *Police Van, Trans Day of Action*. The joyful, delightful depictions of queers continue in the work clustered under the theme of “Care Networks,” with Mohammed Fayeze’s lively, colorful cartoon *Armory* next to flyers for Papi Juice parties, both featuring queer POC Brooklyn parties in full glory. The show even nods to the



ANTHONY ALVAREZ



David Antonio Cruz (American, born 1974). *runlitttlewhitegirl*, portrait of the girls, 2016/2017. Oil and enamel on birch panel, 30 × 40 in. (76.2 × 101.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © David Antonio Cruz.

Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski (French, born 1985). *Instructions for a Freedom*, 2015. Gouache, watercolor, tea, and marker on paper, 41½ × 96 in. (105.4 × 243.8 cm). Private collection. © Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski

Tuesday Smillie (American, born 1981). *The Hudson River Jordan*, 2018. Textile, tarp, beads, fake flowers, spray paint, sequins, grommets, plastic, safety pins, 72 1/2 × 111 3/4 in. (184.2 × 283.9cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Tuesday Smillie

art form of zines with the inclusion of Camille Godoy’s *Amigx*.

The centerpiece of the exhibit — or certainly of the Care Networks room — is LJ Roberts’ gargantuan textile piece, *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn in the Three Towns of Breukelen, Boswuyck and Midwout during the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era*, previously shown at the Smithsonian. Picture a fabric recreation of Brooklyn, a three-dimensional quilt made largely of knitted bundles. Applied across it, thick and readable, are the names of Brooklyn’s old neighborhoods and the names of 24 contemporary queer houses. It looks like a three-dimensional quilt, a relic from the 19th century, particularly intriguing from the same artist who did the light box installation, comfortable both in textiles and high-tech. The queer house theme is used slightly less effectively in the wall display devoted to Lavender Hill, a 1970s queer house in Ithaca, New York. While I enjoyed the photos and flyers and chore calendar and other fun ephemera, it feels more like artifact than art. Similarly, in the last room, a catch-all with the wide theme “Desire,” Mark Aguilar’s *I’d Rather Be Beautiful Than Male* is little more than glitter script on a white background, even if the lettering does evolve perfectly from blue to pink as the viewer reads left to right. But most creative use of materials goes to Constantina Zavitsanos for *I think we’re alone now (Host)*. Inside the frame is the artist’s own foam mattress topper, indented like a curving human form — creating a surprisingly resonant and sexy visual.

In keeping with being both an art show and a history project, the exhibit also has an “Our House” room with books and iPods, to learn more — and, of course, to meet your fellow queers.

JAILHOUSE POETS

Hummingbird in Underworld: Teaching in a Men's Prison

BY DEBORAH TOBOLA

SHE WRITES PRESS

JULY 2019

By Eleanor Bader

From 1992 to 2008, award-winning poet and playwright Deborah Tobola taught writing to inmates at several men's prisons in California. Her memoir about this experience, *Hummingbird in Underworld*, not only indicts the inhumane U.S. criminal justice system, but offers a deeply moving reflection on the frustrations and joys inherent in this work.

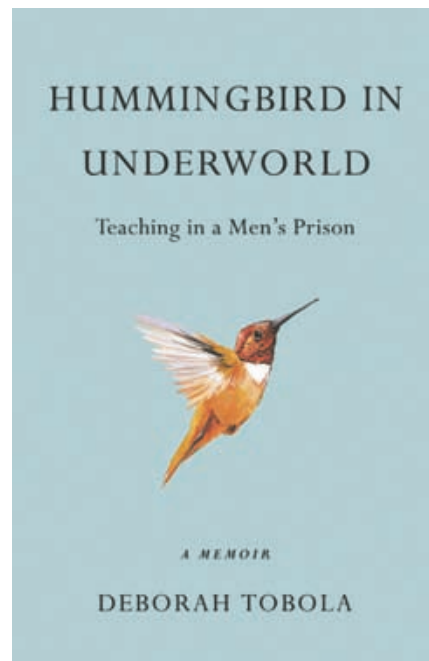
Her own story, as the oldest daughter of an unconventional band of hard-working, hard-drinking, working-class immigrants, is interwoven with tales of the incarcerated men who spent hours under her tutelage. The juxtapositional mash-up is sometimes jarring, but it's also inspiring.

In fact, Tobola notes that her father had worked as a guard at the Men's Colony, a post he held while attending college. "He liked the inmates better than the guards," she writes, a lesson that was not lost on Tobola as she began the job.

But this is not to say that the prisoners were easy to deal with. Tobola admits to fear. "Urkel," she writes, "is smarmy." Smiley, she continues, has been found

guilty of "L&L — lewd and lascivious acts with a minor. He's a child molester." This detail gives Tobola pause as she contemplates hiring him to assist her in running the Arts in Education Program, a plum assignment that pays between \$42.50 and \$52.50 a month. As she considers his application, she has to confront her biases and assess feelings both rational and not.

This, she reports, happened frequently. To wit: one man she interviews had been convicted of rape. As she peruses his file, she learns that he was not what she calls "a he said/she said rapist, but the kind who climbs



into your bedroom in the middle of the night and puts his hand over your mouth so no one can hear you scream. Do I want to be locked up with this guy ten hours a day? No."

Thankfully for Tobola, most of the men in her classes — as well as the men she hired — had been incarcerated on drug charges. "Substance abuse underlies their criminal activity," she writes, and it is clear that the help they need is nowhere to be found within the prison walls.

Unless, of course, redemption can be found through word play.

Tobola starts her classes with a poetry unit and uti-

lizes a poem by Seamus Heaney: "Once in a lifetime/The longed-for tidal wave/Of justice can rise up/And hope and history rhyme."

Is this true? Tobola asks. Although the Department of Corrections bureaucracy ul-

timately stifles this and other discussions — and constantly threatens to halt the program for fiscal and ideological reasons — Tobola persists, eventually provoking the inmates to write and revise not only poems but original theater pieces. Everyone, she says, is enriched by the experience. Indeed, Tobola ultimately left the prison system to found the Poetic Justice Project, the country's first theater company for the formerly incarcerated.

Throughout, her goal has been the consistent. Using the hummingbird as an example, she describes the tiny creature as "a quick-hearted warrior who beats back the darkness with iridescent wings/Hummingbird sucks the evil out of men/Leaves them with a thirst for beauty and the trick of flying while appearing to stay perfectly still."

While I wish that the memoir had provided more insight into how racial dynamics impacted her classroom, *Hummingbird in Underworld* nonetheless depicts teaching as a calling, and Tobola's account is beautifully wrought. Her belief that a different future for the men in her classes is possible, and that they might live free from violence, drug use, alcoholism and economic instability will likely strike many readers as unrealistic. Not Tobola. "In one legend," she writes, "the god of music and poetry became a hummingbird and flew to the underworld where he learned the secret of transformation."

And if a bird can do it, why not men?



JON OUILTY

TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

Hi Bill, I was pleased to learn that the Williams Pipeline won't be pumping fracked gas through New York Harbor anytime soon. But I worry we keep fighting these small battles while a larger war is underway for our planet. How do we know what to prioritize? Is there a better way?

Earthalujah!

— HEATHER, Red Hook

DEAR HEATHER,

Every small victory builds toward the Earth Revolution. But we are out-matched by the fossil fuel industry, their bankers and the police.

The average person in the United States has lost their sense of courage. Our strongest form of courage starts from the gentlest source, our love for children, neighbors, from the Earth around us. This ain't no hall-mark card. The revolutionary coming from a theory or a paycheck is never as fierce as the one who arrives from love.

Our loving isn't igniting our warrior-ness right. The capitalism matrix sees this intimate place as a profit center and pours in super heroes with no politics, luxury condos and 10,000 ads a day. Product-life!

Our urge to survive and to protect our loved ones is embedded in our common sense, our quiet sense of self, what we naturally have within us. I remember a rally against the Williams Pipeline at City Hall just two days before the postponement of the metal snake. Ladonna Brave Bull Allard spoke to us. She is the mother of the Standing Rock Movement, making a proclamation alone that summer of 2016 that became a gathering of hundreds of Earth peoples standing in the way of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Before sending us off marching over the Brooklyn Bridge she told us to "stand up with the Earth!"

"You are the Earth!," she said. "You have the power!"

— EARTHALUJAH!

• • •

Dear Billy, I look forward to Pride every year. The energy of the parade is incredible but it has gotten so corporate. How do we

celebrate the strides our movement's make without being co-opted?

— Dexter, Paramus

DEAR DEXTER,

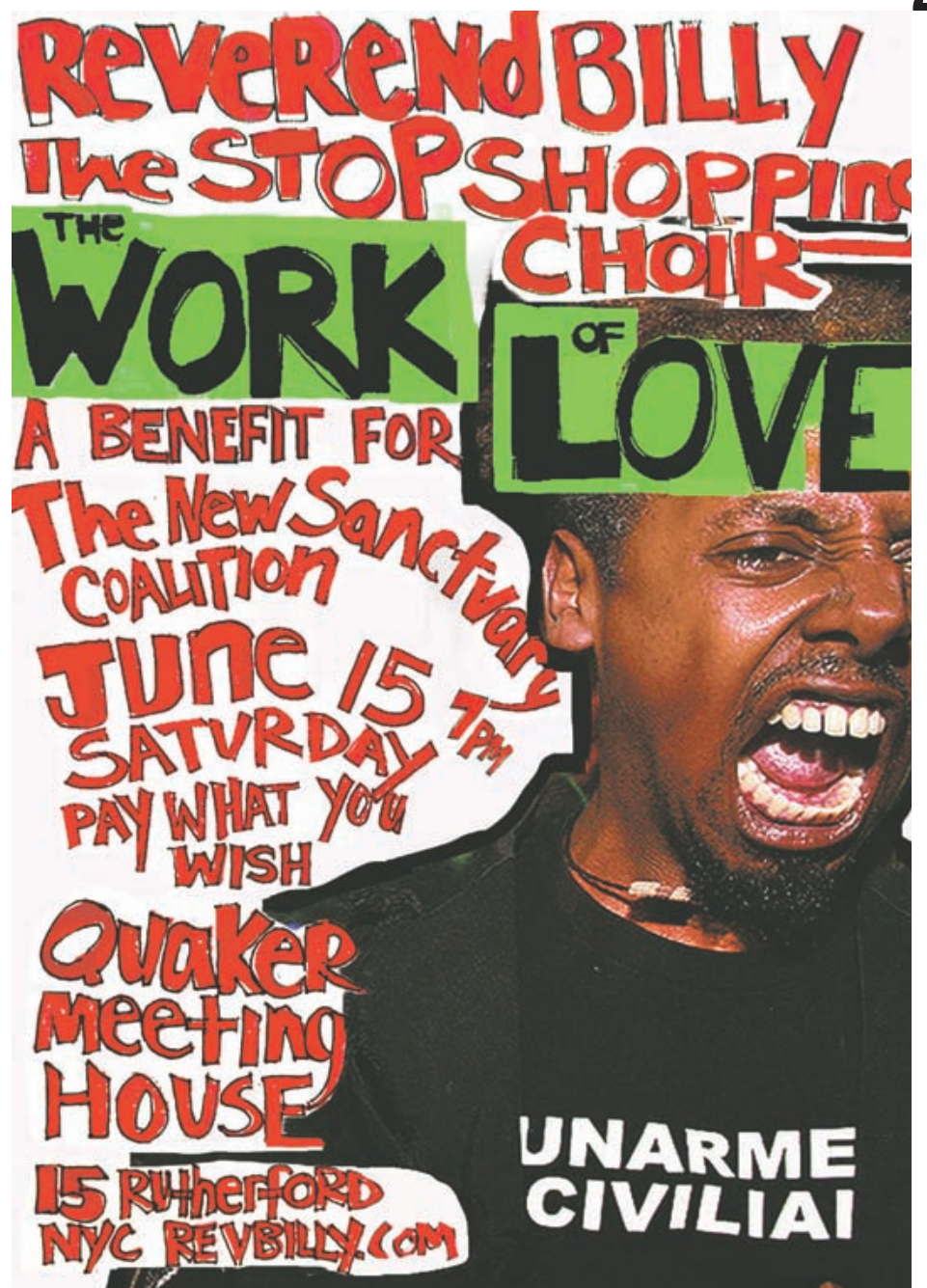
Let's cut the shit. You say Pride is "so corporate." What do you mean? Let's ask: What corporations are sponsoring the Pride parade in 2019? Let's go to the website. There, clear as day, is the sky-blue hexagon logo of JPMorgan Chase, the number one funder of fossil fuel in the world.

Let this number sink in: 250,000. That's the most-quoted estimate of dead in 2018 from climate-caused floods, wildfires, drought and superstorms. People are burned alive because of Chase. They drown. Roofs cave in and babies are crushed in basements. Chase puts millions of tons of carbon dioxide in the air. They make profits for their speculator stockholders by moving money into oil wells, open pit mines, pipelines and cluster bombs. (War is the human event that hurts the climate the most.) Chase is a city-state of ghouls in suits. CEO Jamie Dimon makes \$31 million a year.

Can we stop pretending for a minute? The reason Jamie Dimon isn't in prison is because the laws are not being enforced and most of us know this. It's people like the organizers of Pride who accord respect to Dimon, this Al Capone crossed with Idi Amin, by taking his money. By playing along we keep his performance going. We keep his act real. So yeah, Pride is so corporate and we all are.

Try the Reclaim Pride march, Dexter. Same day, different route, and very different feel.

REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. HAVE A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REV.BILLY@INDEPENDENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.



LEADING WHILE MUSLIM

CHALLENGES AMERICAN MUSLIMS FACE FROM THE SCHOOLHOUSE TO THE WHITE HOUSE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26 7-9PM

Join us for a fireside chat with **DR. DEBBIE ALMONTASER**

Dr. Almontaser will discuss how global events, political discourse, and the media coverage of Islam and Muslims post 9/11 have affected American Muslim school principals. She will explore the adversities American Muslim school principals have experienced post-9/11 and how to address them.

Copies of her book *Leading While Muslim: The Experiences of American Muslim Principals After 9/11* will be available for sale. Half of the proceeds will be donated to 'mercy bakery' to assist people in Yemen.

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Left

Forum

2019

June 28th - 30th Brooklyn

What is **left** to be done?

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