

THE INDYPENDENT

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**BROOKLYN'S
UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD
P4**

**HEALING
MIGRANT
YOUTH
P12**

**TINY PRICKS
P17**

**LES residents
April Merlin
(left) and Yvette
Mercedes are
helping to lead
the charge to
save the East
River Park.**

FIGHTING FOR THEIR PARK

**LOWER EAST SIDE RESIDENTS CHALLENGE CITY'S
CONTROVERSIAL CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN**

BY JOHN TARLETON, P10

SUE BRISK

**THE INDYPENDENT, INC.**

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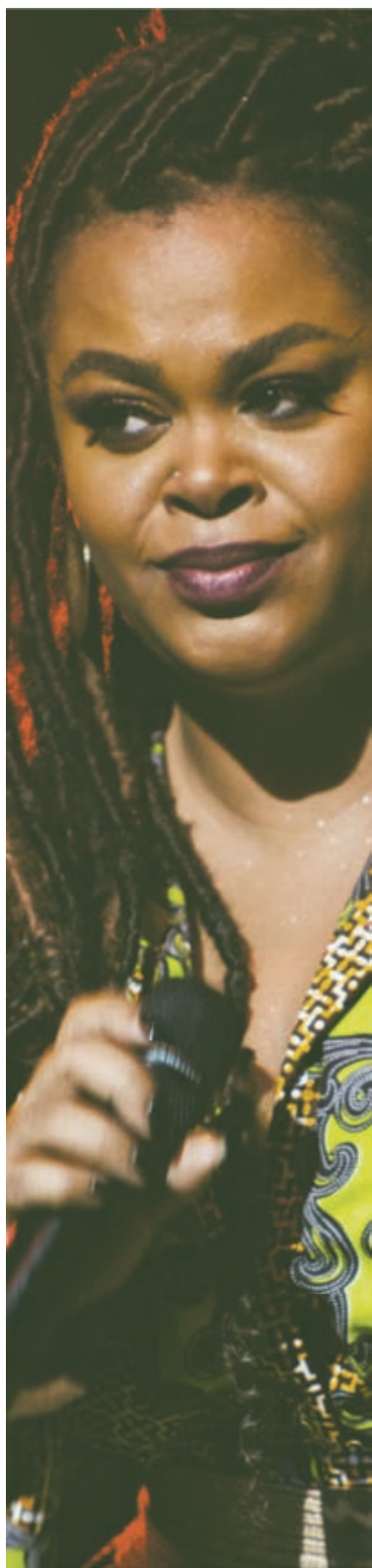
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JUSTIN DE NOOJER

AUGUST

FRI AUG 9

6PM • \$25
HISTORY: BUSHWICK BEER HIS-
TORY RUN

A running history tour focused on
Bushwick's cultural and industrial
history, having once been the
beer-brewing center of the city
and country. Open to runners and
non-runners alike and ending at a
nearby brewery. Funds go to Mil
Mundos, a bilingual bookshop and
community space.

KCBC BREWERY
381 Troutman St., Bklyn

AUG 10–AUG 11

SAT & SUN, 10AM–5AM • FREE

FOOD: BLACK VEGFEST
Vendors galore. Dead Prez
performs.
WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER
158 Buffalo Ave., Bklyn

SUN AUG 11

2PM–6PM • \$5
MARKET: THE LIVING DEAD
MARKET

The Jersey City Oddities Market
heads to the cemetery. Come for
a dozen vendors and special live
entertainment.

**THE HISTORIC JERSEY CITY & HAR-
SIMUS CEMETERY**
435 Newark Ave., Jersey City

MON AUG 12

7PM–11PM • \$30
MUSIC: BLACK FLAG
People calling themselves "Black
Flag" are still making music,
including guitarist, songwriter
and sole continuous member Greg
Ginn, who helped form the legendar-
y punk band in 1976 Hermosa
Beach, California.

BROOKLYN BAZAAR

150 Greenpoint Ave., Bklyn

TUE AUG 13

7PM–9PM • FREE
LIT: POETS AT THE END OF THE
WORLD: A READING AT CAVE
CANEM

Poets at the End of the World
(PEW) is a collective comprised
of acclaimed poets, Ama Codjoe,
Donika Kelly, Nicole Sealey, Evie
Shockley and Lyrae Van Clief-Ste-
fanon, who dedicate themselves to
social justice.

CAVE CANEM
20 Jay St., Ste 310-A, Bklyn

FRI AUG 16

5PM–10PM • FREE
MUSIC: ACCORDION FESTIVAL
Experience the wide range of this
often-overlooked and little-known
instrument at this special event,
featuring Aces of Rhythm (tango
from Argentina), Fedor Chistya-
kov (Russian rock-and-roll), Los
Texmantiacs (Texas-Mexican
conjunto) and Alberto Jamaica
(Vallenato from Colombia).

BRYANT PARK
Btw 40th & 42nd Sts. and Fifth &
Sixth Aves., Mnhtn

SAT AUG 17

12PM–4PM • FREE
ART: THE 29TH ANNUAL SAND
SCULPTING COMPETITION
Grab a shovel, pails and head to
the beach.

CONY ISLAND
Coney Island Beach, Bklyn

SAT AUG 17

2PM–6PM • FREE
PARTY: LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSE-

UM BLOCK PARTY
Enjoy live music,
art-making activities,
food and perfor-
mances. Something
for all ages.

**LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM OF GAY
& LESBIAN ART**
26 Wooster St., Mnhtn

SAT AUG 17

5PM–7PM • \$10 suggested donation
LIT: WRITE FOR DEMOCRACY
An evening of readings, music, beer
and pie to raise funds for Common
Cause North Carolina. Performanc-
es and readings by Jane LeCroy,
Joshua Mehigan, Oliver West and
The Indy's Peter Rugh.

PELS PIE CO.
446 Rogers Ave., Bklyn

SAT AUG 17

6PM–10PM • FREE
FILM: IF BEALE STREET COULD
TALK
This adaptation of the James
Baldwin novel stars Academy
Award-winner Regina King, Cole-
man Domingo, Michael Beach,
Teyonah Parris, Aunjanue Ellis and
newcomer Kiki Layne.

ST. NICHOLAS PARK
Corner of St. Nicholas Ave. & St.
Nicholas Terrace, Mnhtn

SUN AUG 18

12PM–6PM • FREE
PARTY: SPLIT'N LANES DODGIN'
GUTTERS' MOTORCYCLE SHOW!
Brooklyn Bowl will be jam-
packed with cool and unusual
vintage motorcycles, two full
bars, food by Blue Ribbon, a
live DJ and 16 lanes of bowling.
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reserved for motorcycle parking.

BROOKLYN BOWL
61 Wythe Ave., Bklyn

SUN AUG 18

1PM–3PM • FREE

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THE INDYPENDENT



A. JARRETT

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A developer wants to tear down a Brooklyn building where abolitionists fought the power in the 19th century.

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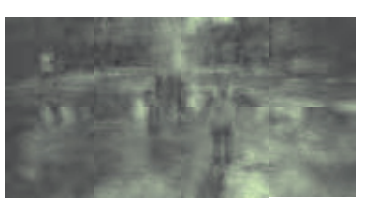
A new needlework exhibit memorializes the prez's snottiest tweets.

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Two new works of fiction tackle the tribulations of caregivers.

TAKE IT TO THE STREETS, P19

Theater for the New City's newest work of absurdity challenges Trump... and all of us.



SOCIAL: SECURITEA TIME: FEMINIST CYBER SELF-DEFENSE
This social event from the CyPurr Collective hopes to build a system of offline communal support by creating a comfortable space to discuss issues, share experiences, ask questions and build digital agency. All while enjoying delicious tea and snacks, of course.

BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE, CAFÉ & ACTIVIST CENTER
172 Allen St., Mnhtn

SUN AUG 18
6PM-9PM • FREE
MUSIC: THE WAILERS' JULIAN JUNIOR MARVIN

Guitarist Junior Marvin's first recording with Bob Marley & the Wailers, 1974's *Exodus*, is widely considered one of the greatest albums of all time — in any genre. Marvin plays and sings the Bob Marley & The Wailers hits the way he believes Marley intended them to be heard.

MARCUS GARVEY MEMORIAL PARK
6316 Mt. Morris Park W., Mnhtn

MON AUG 19
7PM-9PM • FREE
PARTY: PRESENTATION PARTY

A monthly event dedicated to celebrating our shared knowl-

edge. Anyone is free to come on stage and give a presentation on something they're interested in or passionate about.

STARR BAR
214 Starr St., Bklyn

FRI AUG 23
7PM-10PM • \$99

PARTY: BUNGALOW LUAU
Eat drink and be merry. Feast on suckling pig, Hawaiian sides and delicious drinks. Hawaiian fire dancers will perform and dance through the night.

BUNGALOW BAR
377 Beach 92nd St., Queens

AUG 24-AUG 25
SAT & SUN, 12PM-10PM • \$60 & up
MUSIC: AFROPUNK

This year's line-up features Jill Scott, FKA twigs, Leon Bridges, Gary Clark Jr., Kamasi Washington, Santigold, Lianne La Havas and many more.

COMMODORE BARRY PARK
Flushing Ave. and N. Elliott Pl., Bklyn

SAT AUG 24
6PM-4:30AM • \$45
MUSIC: HEROES NYC: VICTOR CALDERONE, DANNY TENAGLIA & OSCAR G

CASTLES BUILT ON SAND: Admire the temporal masterpieces at Coney Island's annual sculpture competition, or craft your own.

PUNKY FUNK: Always poetic, soulful and fresh, Jill Scott is among the headliners of this year's Afropunk fest.

A party spotlighting DJs who have been instrumental in shaping New York's nightlife culture.

FRI AUG 30
8PM-4AM • \$25, 21+

MUSIC: PARADISE GARAGE REUNION
The mother of all underground dance music parties. Started as a private weekly party in SoHo in 1976, under the watchful eye of the iconic DJ Larry Levan, it has since morphed into an annual event successfully running for more than 25 years since the Garage closed in 1987.

ELSEWHERE
599 Johnson Ave., Bklyn



7-24-19 TED RALL



SUE BRISK



GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

SAVING BROOKLYN'S RADICAL PAST

227 DUFFIELD ST, ONCE A HUB OF 19TH CENTURY ABOLITIONIST ORGANIZING, IS IN DANGER OF BEING TORN DOWN

BY GARRET REICH & PETER RUGH

Life has always been precarious in this city if your skin is a certain color, but it has suddenly become all the more dangerous. Armed men roam the streets of New York, on the prowl for human beings. But where there is oppression there is resistance. A covert network comprised of conscientious and morally outraged Americans has sprung up, offering sanctuary to those whose freedom is at peril.

No, this is not Donald Trump's America and we are not talking about the movement that has arisen to thwart his mass deportation agenda.

It is 1850 and we are on Duffield Street not far from the bustling docks of Brooklyn where Southern cotton and tobacco, as well as sugar, refined in nearby warehouses, are hoisted daily into the hulls of ships bound for Europe. Though wealthy shipping merchants still profit handsomely from its fruits, slavery has gradually been abolished here. President Millard Fillmore, however, has just signed the Fugitive Slave Act.

Nicknamed the "Bloodhound Law," the measure is intended to cool tensions between Northern and Southern states by mandating that escaped slaves residing above the Mason-Dixon Line be returned to their masters. On this cobblestone street, a patchwork of subterranean passageways connect the townhouses, where former slaves take refuge should their bounty hunters come knocking.

Today, Duffield Street is padded with cement and lined with highrises. Only one, three-story reminder of the 19th century remains on this stretch of downtown Brooklyn. On July 26, New Yorkers gathered in front of its broken windows to keep it from being demolished. They want instead for 227 Duffield Street, which once served as a sanctuary for Southern blacks fleeing slavery, to be preserved as a landmark.

"There has been a long battle to retain this space and turn it into a museum," said Imani Henry of Equality for Flatbush. "The city has not been respectful of the activists, the family that has been wanting to make sure that this becomes a landmark, that children walking up and down this block can go inside and know that this was a stop on the Underground Railroad, that this was a place of black abolitionist activism."

Built in the 1840s, 227 Duffield was purchased by prominent abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Truesdell, who moved to the city from New England in 1850, shortly after the Fugitive Slave Act became law. Maps and property records from

HISTORY LESSON: Protesters demand that the former stop on the Underground Railroad be saved at a July 26 rally.

HIREG GUNS: Bounty Hunters try to abduct a formerly enslaved person who fled to the North. This practice became legal under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

HOME: The building was owned by prominent abolitionists Harriet and Thomas Truesdell.

around this time indicate that tunnels were built linking the buildings on Duffield Street.

Joy Chatel, a cosmologist and amateur historian who owned and resided at 227 Duffield until her death five years ago, even speculated that there might have been a cavernous link between the home and the former African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church, Brooklyn's first black house of worship nearby.

In 2007, the city attempted to claim eminent domain over the former Underground Railroad stop in order to construct an underground parking garage. Chatel sued and the city backed off, going as far as renaming Duffield Street "Abolitionist Place." However, the building's current owner, small developer Samuel Hanasab, filed an application with the Department of Buildings in June to demolish the property.

Laura Barbieri, an attorney with Advocates for Justice, told *The Independent* in July that she is seeking a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction against Hanasab, while the city's Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) reviews an application to grant 227 Duffield landmark status. She is also seeking to prevent the Buildings Department from granting the permit necessary to carry out the demolition.

"We would ask that there would be time for the LPC to consider the application," Barbieri said, "to hold a hearing and to consider all of the evidence to determine if landmark status should be awarded to the building."

Aleah Bacquire Vaughn, executive director of Circle for Justice Innovation (CJI), said she and other protesters want to protect a piece of Brooklyn's past.

The Truesdells "used their home as a place to save other people, to preserve history and freedom," Vaughn told *The Indy*. "I believe that should be remembered."

Equality for Flatbush has a petition on Change.org directed at the LPC, calling for the building to be spared. It has garnered nearly 3,000 signatures as of the time of this article's publication.

Before her death in 2014, Joy Chatel told the *New York Times*: "There's no black museum in Brooklyn to celebrate the Underground Railroad. This is the house to do it in. It's important that the children and all of the people can see what people had to go through to be free."



SUE BRISK



SUE BRISK

THE LANDLORD FROM HELL

BARBERRY ROSE MANAGEMENT HAS A SCAM FOR EVERY TENANT

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

New York State passed laws in June that dramatically strengthened its rent regulations, but tenants in Inwood are still fighting a landlord they say is trying to push them out and jack up rents.

Residents of 252 Sherman Ave. filed a lawsuit on July 19 against Barberrry Rose Management, demanding repairs and alleging that even after their rent was raised for “major capital improvements” (MCIs) to the building’s boiler and roof, they still have inadequate heat and hot water and the roof leaks.

“We were paying for something that was supposedly new,” tenant Emmanuel Antigua told *The Independent* at a rally in front of the building on July 16. He said the two MCI increases last year raised rents by about \$100 a month on average.

Others say Barberrry Rose, which has spent more than \$140 million in the past five years to acquire more than 30 buildings in Inwood and Washington Heights, is following the classic predatory-landlord pattern of buying up buildings in gentrifying neighborhoods and then trying to drive out the rent-stabilized tenants.

The nine demands listed on a flyer that members of the Barberrry Rose Tenant Union passed out at the July 16 rally included consistent heat and hot water, no more MCIs, correct rent bills and “that our neighbors not be taken to court for frivolous cases, including non-primary residence cases and nonpayment cases for back rent tenants do not owe.”

“We’ve seen a great increase in the number of civil complaints filed against tenants,” says Ronald Porcelli, a staff attorney at Manhattan Legal Services’ Tenant Rights Coalition who is representing the 252 Sherman Ave. tenants. He says such eviction cases show “a very clear pattern of harassment.”

The suit also alleges that the MCI increases are a “strategic mechanism” by which the landlord has been able to raise rents on rent-stabilized tenants, “securing greater profits while harassing tenants and encouraging them to be displaced.”

“Although we cannot specifically comment on pending litigation, Barberrry Rose Management has a long history of maintaining affordable housing and improving conditions for all of our renters in Northern Manhattan,” Barberrry Rose owner Lewis M. Barbanell responded in an emailed statement. “We look forward to addressing false and inaccurate statements about our record.”

Barberrry Rose, based in the Five Towns area of Long Island, began buying up buildings in Inwood and Washington Heights in 2014. Its biggest single deal came in December 2016, when it acquired 13 buildings for \$63.6 million, according to the *Real Deal*.

“Why is a landlord paying that much for buildings that are almost all rent-stabilized?” asks Johanna Monge, an organizer with the Metropolitan Council on Housing who has helped form tenant associations in seven buildings. “It’s a red flag.”

Many of the residents are elderly and Spanish-speaking, she adds. Rents are typically \$1,000 to \$1,500 a month for longtime

BUILDING POWER: Sarah McDaniel Dyer, head of the 252 Sherman Ave Tenants Association, at her home in Inwood.

tenants, about \$2,000 for newer tenants, and as much as \$4,000 for deregulated apartments.

The MCI increases and lack of heat and hot water were “what led to a lot of the organizing,” Monge says. “Folks were enraged that they were paying additional rent for something that didn’t work.”

At 252 Sherman Ave., says tenant association head Sarah McDaniel Dyer, Barberrry Rose put room-temperature sensors that would trigger the building’s boiler in “the hottest room” of her top-floor apartment — where “it won’t tell the boiler to turn on, and everyone below is freezing.” Monge says that’s common in the other buildings she’s been in.

The 20-unit building had 42 open violations as of Aug. 1, according to records posted online by the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development. They include a leaky roof, roach infestations in two apartments and no cooking gas since January in one first-floor apartment. That apartment is home to an elderly rent-controlled tenant whose \$500 rent is the lowest in the building, says McDaniel Dyer.

“They told him they were going to replace his stove, and they never came to fix it,” she adds.

Tenants at 125 Sherman Ave. are also contesting Barberrry Rose’s application for MCI increases, says Milianeth Smith, an elementary-school parent coordinator who’s lived there for 12 years. The increases, for work done on the outside of the building, new floors in the halls and a new security system, will raise her \$1,200 rent by \$58. While the building doesn’t have the problems with heat and dubious eviction attempts that others have complained about, she adds, “they’re charging us for new renovations that don’t really benefit us, they just make the building look prettier.”

Another issue is the eviction lawsuits. At 252 Sherman Ave., says McDaniel Dyer, Barberrry Rose claimed one tenant actually lived in Queens, where he has a brother with a similar name. In 2017, according to the *Manhattan Times* neighborhood newspaper, Barberrry Rose filed a suit accusing 66-year-old Juan A. Minaya of living in Fort Lee, New Jersey — home of 77-year-old Juan B. Minaya.

Defending these cases is not as simple as showing up in court with a Con Ed bill with your name and address, says Porcelli. They can take as much as a year. “A lot of evidence is required,” he explains, and landlords often “allege alternative facts.”

The rent-law changes enacted in June are supposed to eliminate the economic incentive for landlords to push tenants out. They restrict rent increases for renovations, repeal the 20 percent increase allowed on vacant apartments and prohibit deregulating them if the rent is high enough.

Are they having an effect? “It’s too early to tell,” says Porcelli.

Johanna Monge finds it encouraging that 10 days after the new laws were passed, Barberrry Rose dropped its application for a construction permit in four of the five buildings it owns that are in the city’s Certification of No Harassment program, which requires landlords to prove they have not harassed tenants before they can get a permit for major construction work. That saved tenants from “a lot of really expensive work,” she says.

“People want to fight back for their tenant rights,” says Porcelli. “They’re only asking that their landlord follow the law.”

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FRI AUG 30 • 7–9:30PM
PANEL: The Chinese Feminist Collective hosts a discussion on China’s #MeToo movement and beyond.

NG THE COLOR

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SUE BRISK

BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

DANIEL PANTALEO FIRING

More than five years after he was videotaped choking Eric Garner to death in Staten Island, Officer Daniel Pantaleo was suspended from the NYPD on August 2. As *The Indy* went to press, it fell to Police Commissioner James O'Neill to announce whether he would follow an administrative judge's recommendation of dismissal, alter the ruling or allow Pantaleo to keep his job and pension. For his part, Mayor Bill de Blasio has expressed sympathy with the Garner family while defending Pantaleo's right to due process — and doing his best to remain at arms length from the decision his chief of police must now declare. Few doubt, however, who holds ultimate power to determine Pantaleo's future with "New York's finest." If the judge's ruling is "allowed to stand, it will paralyze the NYPD for years to come," said Patrick Lynch, head of the Police Benevolent Association, directing his comments at the mayor. Garner's daughter Emerald, meanwhile, promised that if Pantaleo remains on the force, "you will see the biggest march that you have ever seen in New York City."

BILL & GIL'S PREZ CAMPAIGNS STUMBLING

While distancing himself from the Garner case, de Blasio wants America to embrace him. Yet his campaign and that of Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, the other New York pol in the crowded Democratic presidential race, appears to be doomed. During July's Democratic debates, Gillibrand (along with chanting protesters) criticized de Blasio for allowing Pantaleo to keep his job for the last five years, but neither candidate seems to be cutting the mustard before a national audience. To participate in the next round of debates this September, they each have to come up with 130,000 individual donors and reach 2 percent in four party-certified national and/or early-state polls by Aug. 28. Both are struggling to reach their benchmarks and are desperately panhandling people's Facebook feeds for \$1 donations. At the end of June, Gillibrand had 77,000 donors, de Blasio 7,000. Bernie Sanders leads all candidates with 746,000 donors and has the most donors

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE: *Eric Garner's mother Gwen Carr takes a knee and raises a fist during a civil disobedience outside Barclays Center in July.*

of any candidate in all but a handful of states.

JUDGE RULES AGAINST TWO BRIDGES PROJECT

A state Supreme Court judge issued a scathing rebuke this month of plans to erect four luxury towers that would have cast the Lower East Side neighborhood of Two Bridges in their shadow. The developers behind the plan — CIM Group, L+M Development Partners and Starrett Development — had argued that the highrises were a "minor modification" to an earlier plan approved by the city in 1972 and therefore did not have to undergo the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), which allows for community input. The City Council and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer sued. The planned development, which includes one tower that would stretch more than 1,000 feet tall, can still go forward along the waterfront between the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges, only now the council, Brewer and Community Board 3 will get to have their say — albeit the latter two in an advisory capacity.

HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ALL COMES TO THE BRONX

This August, the city announced the rollout of NYC Care, de Blasio's plan to provide free or low-cost health care coverage to all New Yorkers regardless of income or citizenship status. At a cost of approximately \$100 million, the program will eventually cover an estimated 600,000 uninsured Gothamites. Currently, it's only available to those who can prove they have lived in the Bronx for at least 6 months, but the program will be citywide by 2021. Bronx residents seeking to enroll can call 646-NYC-CARE for assistance.

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ESTEBAN GUERRA

SET UP BY THE DA

THE SAUL ROBLES CASE SHOWS HOW FAR BROOKLYN PROSECUTORS WILL GO TO CONVICT

BY THEODORE HAMM

In August 2010, a brutally violent street fight took place on the usually placid streets of Park Slope. Just after midnight on Sunday, August 1, roughly 20 people clashed with crowbars and knives at the corner of 5th Avenue and 12th Street. Alex Santiago, a 22-year-old from Sunset Park, was stabbed to death and another man was knifed repeatedly but survived.

After an initial media splash, the case remained quiet until 2013, when Brandon Santana, a suspect in the case, escaped custody at the 78th Precinct station house. Santana had reportedly been living in Iowa since the deadly incident.

Last month the 2nd Appellate Division unanimously overturned the 2014 conviction of Saul Robles, whom Santana identified as Santiago's killer. In ordering a new trial for Robles, the AD court strongly rebuked both Brooklyn judge Danny Chun and the prosecutor who handled the case.

The court's ruling uniquely illustrates the extent to which prosecutors will pursue a faulty case simply to secure a conviction. And it shows how judges are not exactly neutral players in the process.

In building the case against Robles, Brooklyn prosecutor Kori Medow decided that Santana's testimony alone would not be enough to win a conviction. As the appellate court ruling states, during the trial Santana's "veracity and credibility were questioned because he had lied to detectives and an assistant district attorney, absconded from a police station, and received an extremely favorable cooperation agreement in exchange for his testimony."

In order to help erase any doubts the jury may have had regarding Santana, Medow brought in a second witness. The problem is that this person had not identified Robles in two police lineups.

At one of the lineups, an NYPD officer asked that witness which person she would "lean toward." On the stand, Medow asked the witness "what made you lean towards" Robles, and the reply was merely "the jaw."

As the appellate ruling states, Judge Chun should not have allowed that witness to testify. The fact that Chun did so is the basis for the court's decision to order a new trial.

Chun has sparked controversy over the last few years because of his handling of the

Peter Liang and John Giuca cases. According to several former Brooklyn prosecutors, Chun is viewed within the office as a member of the DA's "team."

But in the Robles ruling, the appellate judges reserved their harshest words for Medow, arguing that she "engaged in multiple instances of inappropriate and unacceptable advocacy throughout her summation." Since the prosecutor's summation is last, it's an advantageous time to smear the defendant.

Medow thus assured jurors that Robles was motivated by "machismo" and kept using phrases like "because he's guilty" and "[b]ecause he committed the crimes." She further declared that "it would require a lot of mental gymnastics to believe the defendant did not commit this crime." The gratuitous comments caused the four appellate judges to "express strong disapproval of such conduct."

Meanwhile, there was one other conviction in the 2010 street fight: Brandon Santana. In 2016, he received a favorable sentence of six to seven years for first-degree gang assault and escaping custody. Santana was paroled earlier this year.

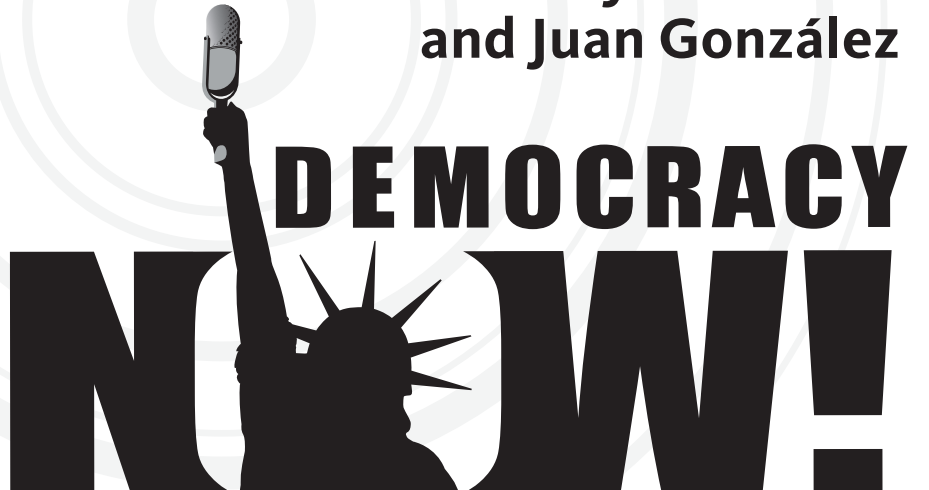
Robles' next court date is August 20, when the DA's office will announce its decision either to retry (which seems unlikely) or not retry him. Other options include an appeal of the Appellate Division's ruling.

Since the 2015 trial, Medow has been promoted to her current position as deputy bureau chief of the Brooklyn DA office's Orange Zone, which runs from Brownsville to Park Slope.

Along with Cy Vance and the rest of his city counterparts, Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez supported the District Attorneys Association of New York's (DAASNY) fight against the creation of a statewide prosecutorial misconduct commission last year. Although Gov. Cuomo signed the legislation, it's currently stalled because of a DAASNY lawsuit.

How DA offices like Brooklyn will handle instances of misconduct is anyone's guess. Regarding the appellate court's criticisms of Medow's conduct in the Robles decision, all that a Gonzalez spokesperson would offer is that "We are reviewing the decision."

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



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8/10 • 2pm • Manhattan
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8/11 • 2pm • Manhattan
Central Park Bandshell | 72nd Street Crosswalk

8/16 • 6:30pm • Brooklyn
Coney Island Boardwalk | W. 10th St.

8/17 • 2pm • Brooklyn
Maria Hernandez Park | Knickerbocker Ave. & Starr St.

8/18 • 2pm • Manhattan
Jackie Robinson Park | W. 147th St. & Bradhurst Ave.

8/24 • 2pm • Brooklyn
Sunset Park | 6th Ave. & 44th St.

8/25 • 2pm • Queens
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9/7 • 2pm • Manhattan
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WHEEL TROUBLE

A SPIKE IN BICYCLE TRAFFIC DEATHS HAS CRITICS WONDERING IF NYC DRIVERS HAVE A LICENSE TO KILL

BY EMMA GAFFNEY

When 30-year-old Em Samolewicz was killed on Brooklyn's Third Avenue on July 29, after she was hit by a truck when she swerved after being "doored" — her path blocked by a suddenly opened car door — she became the 18th bicyclist to die in a crash in New York City this year. That number is almost twice the 10 bicyclists killed in accidents in all of last year, which was the fewest the city recorded in the last 100 years.

On July 25, two days after two other bicyclists were killed in separate accidents in Greenpoint and Staten Island, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the "Green Wave" plan, which will see \$58.4 million poured into keeping cyclists safe on city roads over the next five years.

"You will see continued and increased presence by the NYPD. You will see more public education [...] to change the behavior of motorists," the mayor said, speaking at a high school in Bay Ridge. "I want everyone driving a truck in this city to know that the NYPD will be watching, and they will take action if any trucker... endangers a bicyclist."

Nine of the 18 cyclist fatalities this year involved a truck, according to the mayor's office.

The Green Wave plan, Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg explained, intends to expand the Vision Zero traffic-safety plan's goal of building 10 miles of protected bike lanes each year. It would add 30 miles a year of new bike lanes separated from traffic by barriers, with 25 miles to be completed this year and 80 miles by the end of 2021. Those projects are "in various stages of planning and design," the mayor's office said.

The plan also includes hiring 80 new transportation staff dedicated to improving bike-friendly infrastructure and redesigning city streets over the next five years. According to

the city's map of the proposed renovations, much of the redesign will be focused on Brooklyn, where 13 of the 18 deaths have occurred. Trottenberg estimated that "thousands" of parking spaces would be lost.

The Vision Zero plan was announced by de Blasio in 2014, with the goal of eliminating all traffic deaths in the city by 2024. The name "Vision Zero" comes from a Swedish program that theorizes that pedestrian deaths are not accidents but failures of street design.

In 2018, according to city Department of Transportation data, 203 people were killed in crashes involving motor vehicles — 115 pedestrians, 78 vehicle occupants and 10 bicyclists — and more than 60,000 were injured, including about 10,800 pedestrians and 4,300 cyclists. Bicycle-pedestrian crashes injured 55 riders and 270 walkers, and 329 riders were hurt in bicycle-only crashes.

The revamped safety plan comes after mounting pressure from community organizers and cyclist advocates. On July 9, more than 1,000 people attended a mass "die-in" in Washington Square Park, silently lying on the ground beside their bicycles. Participants decried government's failure to prosecute drivers involved in the deaths and the police history of responding to bike tragedies by going on a ticket-writing blitz against other cyclists in the area of the crash. "We don't think this is a problem that can be policed away," bicycle messenger Mike Pach, 28, told *AM-NewYork*.

On July 26, hundreds more gathered at Union Square Park to participate in a Critical Mass ride organized by Time's Up to demand better infrastructure for cyclists. At the July 25 press conference, de Blasio said that one in four adults in the city own a bicycle, and the number of people biking to work is growing twice as fast as in any other major U.S. city. "That's good for our earth, our city and our quality of life," he said. "Our responsibility is to ensure that this good option is safe."

The mayor, however, did not address how the city might reduce the number of cars on the roads. "We must break car culture to protect cyclists in NYC," City Councilmember Antonio Reynoso (D-Brooklyn) posted on Twitter on July 25. He said the "new bike plan — largely an expansion & acceleration of Vision Zero — falls short. Reckless drivers will continue to terrorize our streets until there's a

culture shift to prioritize pedestrians & cyclists."

The number of cars on city streets has risen over the last four years, largely driven by e-hail apps such as Uber and Lyft. According to city Taxi and Limousine Commission figures, the average number of "high-volume for-hire vehicles" on the streets increased from 7,300 a day in January 2015 to 59,900 in May 2019.

The Green Wave plan, Transportation Alternatives communications director Joe Cutrufo said, "is taking several good steps forward, but given the urgency of the problem, we'd like to see action even faster."

About "800,000 people ride a bike regularly in New York City, but there is this huge population of people who are curious and interested but are afraid because the streets don't adequately protect them," Cutrufo said. "We've seen the number of cyclists grow over the last decade or so, right along with the growth in safe cycling infrastructure. When you look at the expansion of protected bike lane miles, you can see the number of regular cyclists go up in tandem. If you build it, they will come."

Two of the 18 fatalities this year, including Em Samolewicz, occurred on Third Avenue in Sunset Park, an eight-lane road under the elevated Gowanus Expressway that's a major truck route and has no bike lanes. Cutrufo says roads like this "deserve a rapid response," and that any time a cyclist is killed, the Department of Transportation should immediately investigate why it occurred and how to prevent these tragedies from happening in the area again.

Mayor de Blasio said on July 25 that the "100 most dangerous locations" would "receive additional NYPD enforcement, with a special focus on trucks."

"Third Avenue needs a protected bike lane," says Andrada Popa, a Sunset Park resident who suffered multiple foot and ankle fractures after a truck drove into her in April while she was riding her bike there. "I don't feel safe riding in the open bike lanes. It's a wide-open road, so it should be possible to have a protected lane there." Popa, who is still recovering from her injuries, told *The Independent* she believes the 30 miles of protected bike lanes the Green Wave vows to create over each year are not enough.

WALKERS KILLED BY BICYCLISTS 0

0 BICYCLISTS KILLED BY BICYCLISTS

WALKERS INJURED BY BICYCLISTS 270

329 BICYCLISTS INJURED BY BICYCLISTS

10 BICYCLISTS KILLED BY CARS

WALKERS KILLED BY CARS 115

4300 BICYCLISTS INJURED BY CARS

WALKERS INJURED BY CARS 10,800



FROM FOSSIL FUEL TO WIND

IT WAS SLATED TO BE A NATURAL GAS IMPORT TERMINAL, THEN ENVIRONMENTALISTS RAISED THEIR VOICES

BY PETER RUGH

Everything appeared to have been worked out. A \$25,000 donation had been made to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's re-election campaign by Liberty Natural Gas, a mysterious company owned by a Toronto-based investment group with a bank account in the Cayman Islands. The governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie at the time, was skeptical but said he would "keep an open mind" when it came to Liberty's blueprints. The Army Corps of Engineers had already signed off. The plans seemed simple enough. Tank ships would pull up about 20 miles off the shore of Long Island, millions of cubic feet worth of liquified natural gas in their hull. The cargo would be heated aboard the tankers upon arrival and returned to a gaseous state, pumped into a pair of pipelines. Four hundred million cubic feet of decompressed natural gas a day were slated to pour into Long Beach, near the mouth of Lower New York Bay. That didn't happen. Instead those same waters will soon be home to the largest offshore wind farm in the United States. How does something like this occur? How did we go from a liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal to wind turbines? Hard freaking work, says Kim Fraczek, head of the environmental group Sane Energy Project.

Citing concerns over climate change and the risk another su-

perstorm like Sandy would pose to the terminal, Sane and a coalition of other environmental groups "organized pretty much all New York City and Long Island communities to push their elected officials to tell Gov. Cuomo why this is dangerous for our region," Fraczek said.

Sane and its partners started a "Wind Not LNG" campaign.

"Because we had a positive, alternative vision, that helped gather more support," said Fraczek. "It gave people

a Point B to work toward.

What began with a ragtag cluster of environmentalists and local community groups rallying in defense of Long Island's coast concluded on July 19, when Gov. Cuomo sat down at a desk in Albany and signed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

Passed by the Democrat-controlled state legislature in June, the bill sets stringent targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing New York's use of green energy. To help meet the goals set in the measure, Cuomo announced that the state had signed contracts for the construction of two wind farms that will eventually provide enough electricity to power more than a million homes.

"It's one thing to say, 'We're going to support these emissions reduction targets,' but if you don't have a path to get there it's useless," said Shay O'Reilly of the Sierra Club. "In this case, they actually set into law that the state is going to support 9,000 megawatts of offshore wind development by 2035. That is a legal target in the bill that has now become law."

The 1,696-megawatt wind farms, one plugging into the city, the other into Long Island, "get us a significant chunk of the way there," Shay said.

Continued on page 17

The poster features a black and white photograph of a person in a hoodie with their right fist raised. In the background, there is a large orange sign with the text "ATTICA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY". The background is a green field with vertical black stripes.

CELEBRATING BLACK AUGUST

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August 2019 THE INDEPENDENT

RESISTING THE WRECKING BALL

RISE OCEANS ARE INEVITABLE. BUT DOES THE CITY HAVE TO DEMOLISH THE EAST RIVER PARK TO SAVE IT?

BY JOHN TARLETON

It was a bright Sunday afternoon in early August when Yvette Mercedes looked out over East River Park from the entrance at East Houston Street and FDR Drive.

Children scampered around a baseball diamond as a Little League game unfolded. On the far side of the field, cyclists and joggers moved up and down the esplanade that runs along the East River for most of the park's length, from East 12th Street to just north of the Manhattan Bridge. Young couples lay on patches of grass, their limbs tangled together, while older couples sat on benches quietly watching the river's churning waters. To the north, some of Mercedes' working-class Lower East Side neighbors held sprawling family gatherings centered around the park's barbecue pits.

"This is all we have," Mercedes said. She has lived in the nearby Baruch Houses public-housing development for more than 30 years. "We don't have the Hamptons. We don't have summer homes. When we want to get away, we come here."

That could soon change.

Seven years after Hurricane Sandy lifted up the ocean and inundated whole swaths of the city, including the Lower East Side, the de Blasio administration is racing to win approval for the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project, a \$1.45 billion flood-mitigation plan that has sparked an outcry from some neighborhood residents.

The plan calls for closing the 58-acre park for three and a half years, burying it beneath eight to 10 feet of landfill, and building a new park on top of it. The entire barrier would run 2.2 miles, from Montgomery Street to East 25th Street.

The battle over that plan is more than a fight over the future of a little-known gem of a park. It raises questions about how other major coastal cities will respond to an escalating global climate crisis and to whose benefit; the legacy of housing segregation; the conflicting priorities of top-down city planning and neighborhood-based concerns; the values we assign private automobiles and mass transit; and the hollowed-out state of democracy in a New York where "the tale of two cities" persists.

as Third Avenue. The surging waters also knocked out a Con Edison substation at East 15th Street and FDR Drive, throwing almost all of Manhattan below 40th Street into a gloomy darkness.

No group in the Lower East Side suffered more than the approximately 28,000 residents of the New York City Housing Authority developments that line the west side of FDR Drive. The residents — including many seniors with no means to flee elsewhere — lost water and electricity for more than a week, and had to climb up and down pitch-black stairwells if they wanted to venture outside.

"I saw that water come in," Mercedes recalled. "I didn't have light for over seven days."

Sandy may have seemed like a once-in-a-century storm. But with carbon emissions and global temperatures both rising, it's expected that New York will see more supercharged hurricanes, along with higher sea levels as the polar ice caps continue to melt. To that end, the city and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development invited Lower East Side residents to help envision a flood-mitigation plan for the neighborhood. After four years of meetings, broad support emerged for building a landscaped eight-foot berm along the back of the park that would abut FDR Drive, with the hope of someday decking over the highway to expand the park. This plan would have provided much-needed protection for the neighborhood, while preserving access to the esplanade and some of the park's trees. It would have also required closing one of the FDR's six lanes every night for five years.

Then last September the city Department of Design and Construction (DDC) abruptly announced it was scrapping the community's plan in favor of the plan to close and rebuild the park. That plan would not close any lanes on the highway.

"It's really about saving the cars," said Howard Brandstein, executive director of the Sixth Street Community Center, which hosts environmentally themed programs for neighborhood youth. "It's Robert Moses' wet dream — the eternal, uninterrupted flow of traffic."

"They're asking us to sacrifice something that's essential for our well-being and for a generation of children," said Mercedes' friend April Merlin, a mother of two who has lived in the neighborhood for 30 years and comes to the park regularly to jog and ride her bike. "If they close down a lane or two of the FDR, people will find another way to get to work."

OPponents of demolishing the park cite a litany of negative consequences. They include:

- Loss of space for family gatherings.



- Loss of ball fields and other play spaces for local youth and possible criminalization of kids who might spend more time hanging out on the streets.

- Undermining the sports programs of neighborhood schools, whose students would have to travel as far away as Randall's Island to find other sports fields.

- Loss of the bike path along the river, which is popular with cyclists who don't want to risk riding in street traffic.

- The cutting down of 981 mature trees that provide shade and clean the air of toxins spewed by cars that race by on the FDR Drive. The saplings that replace them would require 20-30 years to grow to a full canopy.

- Loss of biodiversity: 82 bird species, 96 insect species and more than 200 plant species would be displaced, perhaps never to return, according to City College of New York biology professor Amy Berkov.

- Dust from the immense quantities of dirt that would be dug up in the park or delivered by barge. Neighborhood residents already have high levels of asthma.

- No storm protection until after the 2023 hurricane season — assuming the city finishes the project on time.

"That's laughable as a timeline," says Christine Datz-Romero, executive director of the Lower East Side Ecology Center, which is based in the Fire Boat House toward the south end of the park. She noted that it recently took the city 18 months and \$3.5 million to repave the park's jogging track, and that repairs to the esplanade began in 2001, languished for many years, and were finally completed in 2011. She worries that this project could easily keep the park closed for a decade.

"What guarantees do we have that it will be better this time?" she asked. The city has not given her any assurances that the Ecology Center will have a home in the rebuilt park.

• • •

YVETTE MERCEDES WAS UNAWARE of the Robert Moses-sized wrecking ball aimed at the park when she saw a flyer taped to a traffic crossing signal at East Houston and Columbia streets one evening in late April. It was an announcement for a meeting of opponents of the park's demolition.

"I listened and felt like 'oh wow, this is horrible,'" Mercedes recalled. "I committed that I was going to educate my community, because everyone was totally oblivious."

Mercedes and Merlin met at that meeting and immediately became a team. They went from floor to floor in the Baruch Houses, leaving informational leaflets under the residents' doors. They also canvassed people in the park and informed them about what was happening. Mercedes estimates that she has so far spoken with 2,000 people, and that less than 100 were aware of the city's plans.

"Everybody's against the demolition of the park or didn't know about it," says Merlin. "We're letting people in on what's happening behind closed doors."

While opposition to the park's demolition has been slow to gather, the de Blasio administration

has been pushing its plan through the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), which allows local community boards and borough presidents to hold public hearings and weigh in, but only on an advisory basis.

Arguing that it would be its plan or nothing, the city won the conditional support of Community Board 6 (Stuyvesant Town/Gramercy) and Community Board 3 (Lower East Side), the latter of which added a list of 28 changes it would like to see made to the plan.

Like much of the United States, the Lower East Side lives with the legacy of segregated housing. For much of the late 20th century, the neighborhood was largely Latino, but now it has been gentrified by increasingly affluent whites, while public housing is occupied predominantly by Black and Latino renters.

Naomi Schiller, a professor of anthropology at Brooklyn College who lives in the East River Co-op — a union-built housing complex located at Grand Street and FDR Drive that switched from limited-equity to market-rate some 20 years ago — says neighbors have been pitted against each other. Non-NYCHA residents who oppose the city's plan have been portrayed as tree-huggers who care more about the park than flood protection, when almost everyone in the neighborhood agrees they need some kind of seawall.

"The city has presented their plan as the only option to get flood protection along the river," Schiller said. "That's unfair and has been incredibly divisive."

She was among the 150 or so people who attended a July 16 ULURP hearing hosted by Manhattan Borough President Gail Brewer. Defenders of the park turned out in force. Brewer didn't reject the city's plan, but to much applause insisted that something so hastily thrown together should be subject to an independent third-party review. Mayor Bill de Blasio agreed to a similar outside review earlier this year for a controversial plan to repair part of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

"We've only got one chance to get this right," Brewer emphasized.

A contingent of about 30 opponents of the city's plan turned out a week later for a City Planning Commission hearing to make their arguments to the commissioners. A number of speakers urged that, at the very least, the DDC should carry out construction in phases so part of the park would remain open throughout the project. DDC Deputy Commissioner Jaime Springer-Torres suggested that parts of the park could be reopened as construction goes forward, but did not make any commitments.

Two of the few speakers to advocate for the city's plan were Nancy Ortiz, longtime president of the Vladeck Houses Tenants Association, and Camille Napoleon, vice president of the Baruch Houses Tenants Association, the younger half of the father-daughter dynasty that has held its reins for decades.

"Life over trees," Ortiz said. "I believe in protecting life."

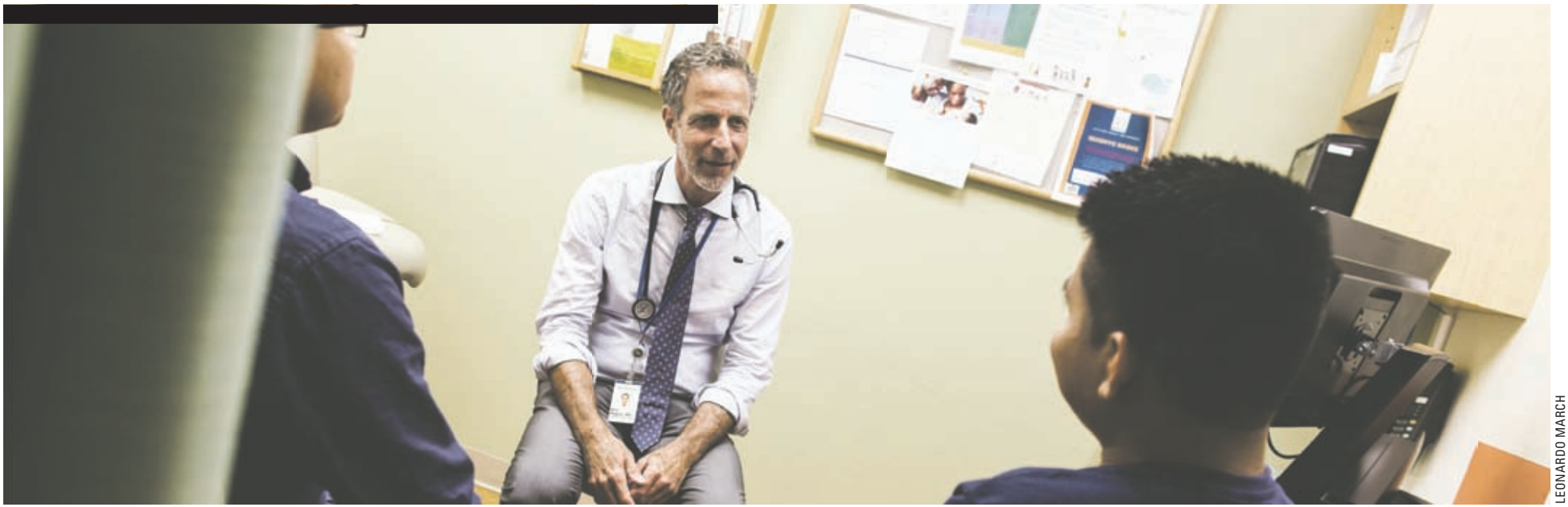
"If we have to choose between a tree and a life, we

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH: Neighborhood kids enjoy splashing around on a hot summer day.

MEAT ON THE GRILL: The barbecue pits on the north end of the park are the site of many a family gathering.

A TIME TO RELAX: A couple enjoys a pleasant Sunday afternoon.

PLAY BALL!: East River Park plays hosts to numerous little league teams.



LEONARDO MARCH

AFTER THE CAGES

BRONX GROUP AIDS MIGRANT YOUTH

BY RENÉE FELTZ

Unaccompanied children who come alone from Central America to seek asylum in the United States have complex legal, medical and mental health needs. After their release from harsh conditions in U.S. border camps and detention centers run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, some are released to New York City. In the Bronx, Terra Firma helps hundreds of kids pursue healthy lives when they are reunited with their parents or sent to live with a sponsor. The Independent spoke with co-founder Dr. Alan Shapiro.

What experience motivated you to work with migrant children?

I have dedicated my career to working with marginalized and vulnerable children. What led to Terra Firma was actually a Guatemalan boy that came to our mobile medical unit serving homeless youth in Harlem that we've operated since 1987. He had lost his psychiatric medications, and needed to get new ones. Sadly, this boy was very severely mentally ill and unable to tell us anything about his history, except he had a business card from his lawyer, with Catholic Charities, and that was Brett Stark, who is now our Legal Director. We called Brett and he explained they were seeing an uptick in the number of "unaccompanied" children seeking legal services and they were also looking for medical and mental health services to send children to. When we learned that being an "unaccompanied" immigrant child granted them the ability to seek legal status in the United States, we set up a program to meet their needs in 2013. Then, when a large number of children came into the city in the spring of 2014, we were ready to accept many of them.

What kind of trauma have these children endured when you encounter them?

You have to remember children are in the stage of developing their identity, the sense of who they are, and that will be carried through to adulthood. These children often have sustained compounded trauma. They have been traumatized first by events in their home country. Then they leave their home countries, which in itself is extremely traumatic, and have to leave behind family, friends, school, culture, everything. They then travel often more than 2,000 miles to the U.S. border, and many are victimized, suffer from hunger, exposure to the elements, and travel in dangerous ways — on top of trains and in the back of trucks. By the time they get to your border, they are in a pretty fragile state. Then they either go to a port of entry, or cross the border through the desert or the Rio Grande. That in itself can be a frightening experience.

You would think the system should provide the most comforting, safe, healthy environment for children so they can recover from the trip and start feeling a sense of safety. Unfortunately, it puts kids at more risk of traumatization. We know from visiting Customs and Border processing centers, and from the government's own reports, that they are freezing, have non-nutritious food such as bologna sandwiches, and children often have to sleep on cement floors with a

mylar blanket. Children don't understand what the next steps are, and why they're there in the first place. Some are held up to a month, against regulations. To add to all that: the medical services in the Customs and Border processing centers are very cursory.

When these children are released to the Bronx to live with their court-appointed sponsor, or be reunited with their families, how does Terra Firma address their needs?

Terra Firma's principal role is to care for the complex needs of migrant children once they are released from ORR detention and are living in New York City with their sponsors. We provide comprehensive pediatric care in a medical home model, integrated with on-site mental health services and pro bono immigration services. We also have a robust Youth Enrichment program that includes English, workshops, educational support and field trips throughout the year. It includes a summer program with English as a second language courses for children for two hours, followed by two hours of soccer, in collaboration with South Bronx United, a youth development program; a photography course in collaboration with the International Center for Photography and field trips to museums to other places around New York.

You describe the program as a medical legal partnership?

In this partnership, healthcare professionals work side by side with immigration attorneys and may uncover invaluable information that can be used to support the children's legal cases. When children come to us they're more likely to have been victims of community and/or domestic violence (e.g. physical and sexual abuse) but might not feel comfortable telling their lawyers about what happened. However, the medical providers and mental health providers are adept at identifying those problems and helping children retell these histories and process those traumas.

What's so important about that is that many of these traumas are critical for children to win their legal cases to be allowed to remain in this country. The healthcare providers will write mental health and/or medical affidavits that explain the physical and psychological trauma that child has endured and how these findings corroborate the child's own story. We had an adolescent boy who was run over by a car of gang members because he refused to join their gang. When he came to us, we referred him to an orthopedic specialty clinic where x-rays revealed past injuries and the metal plates in his leg. He originally lost his asylum hearing. The medical evidence in this case corroborated his history and that proved critical in winning his asylum case.

How does your program help the kids adjust to their new lives?

Terra Firma has a critical role in helping children acculturate into a new environment. Children who must now adjust to a new family, a new language and a new culture. We see children who come perhaps from rural Guatemala, and now they're living in the South Bronx. You can imagine how incredibly disorienting that might be. We provide mental health services to help them process all of the trauma I spoke about and the incredible change of now living with a new family that many of them have never seen in their life or not for 10 or 15 years, even if it's a parent. So there is this enormous amount of readjustment and a lot of emotional complexity, in the reunification process with family, both enormous joy but also feelings of guilt and anger.

All of this makes it important for us to be there for children, and for their sponsors, their new families, to help them, as we say, to land on solid ground, which is what Terra Firma means. We also run support groups for adolescents, preteens and the children's sponsors. Our groups are based on a trauma-informed model of care. For unaccompanied children, the group meets weekly for 14 weeks and follows a curriculum that deals with the various phases of migration and living now in the United States. When we start the groups off, we always invite veterans of the group who are kids who have already gone through this to talk to the new cohort of children.

What kind of outcomes have you seen?

In general the children we see are among the most resilient children I have ever cared for. Many of the kids that we first started to take care of back in 2013 are now in college, and thriving. Just this year, one of our girls won a Beat the Odds \$10,000 college scholarship from the Children's Defense Fund. Another one just won a scholarship to CUNY's Hunter College. What really upsets me so much is the negative rhetoric one hears about who these new immigrant children are from politicians who have never seen or worked with these kids and who don't see their humanity or the incredible successes that we see. Many of these kids also want to give back to the community because they felt so thankful for the services they received.

Have others been able to replicate your model?

We are in the process of writing a replication manual right now! We've given dozens and dozens of presentations and have received many requests to help replicate. So we're looking for funding so that we can grow our own program and then help others develop the terra firma model as well.

How can people who read this support Terra Firma?

We're asking folks to donate at terrafirma.nyc. If people are interested in volunteering, they can make a request through our website as well.

Renée Feltz is an investigative journalist who has covered immigration since 2006.



SUE BRISK

THE DOMINO EFFECT

HOW TRUMP USES FEAR OF IMMIGRANTS TO STOKE CIVIL WAR

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

In Minnesota, officers smashed a car window and dragged the undocumented worker out. The ICE raids to deport some 2,000 migrants had begun. Armed agents with dogs searched migrant neighborhoods. But activists gave out Know Your Rights leaflets hand to hand and on social media and people knew to keep doors closed.

They live in terror. It is easy to vanish in America. If you don't have "papers." If you have an accent. If you work off the books. Any day at your job, ICE can show up. Any morning, the door can be banged on by officers. Half asleep, you can be seized and in a quick dizzy blur, shoved across the border.

Terror is a political tool. The Trump Administration creates a domino effect by attacking undocumented migrants to send messages to other groups. The raids ease conservative white anxiety about losing their place in America by "purging" the nation. They also teach moderate citizens to obey their fear and look away. And Trump uses deportation rhetoric against Democrats of color to delegitimize elections. After the dominos fall, the Right can pick them up to build an impenetrable Fortress America.

THE RACE WHISPERER

The Right's terror began when Obama won. As we danced in the streets, Republicans bought guns. Some were afraid of new laws. Some were afraid black criminals would run wild like in Bush Sr.'s Willie Horton ad. Some thought the Democrats would let U.N. soldiers patrol America.

A wall — not a physical but a cultural one — had crashed down. Conservatives looked around and realized how diverse the United States was and shuddered. Political scientists have published a mountain of books and reports on white racial grievance. Take your pick from Cornell Belcher's *Black Man in the White House*, American Car-

nage by Tim Alberta, *Identity Crisis* by John Sides, Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck or *Strangers in Their Own Land* by Arlie Russell Hochschild. They traced the rising toxic brew of rage and fear that was suppressed during the Obama years by liberal triumphalism. No one gave it voice until that special man came along and put his brand on it.

"He says what I'm thinking," said Susan Delemus, a fanatic Trump supporter, on CNN. He was her race whisperer. Saturday Night Live alum and talk show host, Seth

Meyers said Trump isn't telepathic but his need for approval gives him a hunting dog's power to sniff out red meat for Red America. During rehearsal for a 2004 skit called "Trump's House of Wings," he called it dumb but the audience liked it so Trump danced and grinned. Meyers said, "When 'Build the wall' or 'Lock her up' became catchphrases, I realized, 'Oh, that's the same brain that was convinced that 'Trump's House of Wings' was a winner [...] the only thing is that the audience likes it.'"

Trump is a bottom feeder of mass psychology. He effectively transferred Red State America's terror of obsolescence into a revenge fantasy against Blue State America, even if it was the wealthy who they worship that betrayed them. So Trump says he'll build a wall. His audiences love it. America's breach would be sealed. Now Trump promises more walls to trap migrants and voters and Democrats in a state of terror. The dominos fall.

DISTRACT & CONQUER

A hand slowly peels the curtain back and scans the street. No agents. No dogs. No ICE trucks. The migrant worker opens the door and quickly, quietly goes to work.

The nationwide, large-scale ICE raids that Trump threatened in mid-July did not hit. Supposedly, plans were scaled back as Trump's televised bragging tipped off his many undocumented targets. It was a smaller, slower roll-out over the week and at the discretion of ICE field offices. The 2,000 immigrants targeted were spared for now but live in the shadow of ICE officers, who await their orders.

The walls close in with each new threat of mass deportation. It is not just migrants living in fear. Friends are afraid. Bosses and co-workers are afraid. Lovers and spouses are afraid. Children are afraid. Deportation sends terror through the web of relationships that hold neighborhoods together.

Was terror the goal in the first place? The lackluster follow-through calls into question the very reason for

ICE raids. Presidential candidate Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said on ABC, "If you wanted to go after security risks [...] why alert them and say you're doing this on a Sunday and do it two weekends in a row? Why, because you want to make news, right? It's not about having people who are security risks deported, it's about scaring everyone in the country."

Every ICE raid, threatened or real, goes beyond targeted migrants to make a surveillance state in our everyday lives seem normal. Border agents have set up checkpoints with in 100 miles of the border. And not just on the U.S.-Mexican border. ICE set up checkpoints in Maine and New Hampshire. ICE boarded Greyhound buses to search for migrants. ICE can search vehicles without a warrant. We see occasional cell videos of resistance but most travelers are intimidated and hand over their identification or just want to get on with their day.

Every time a citizen doesn't question authority and gives their ID, they learn to fear the state. They are scared of getting detained and if black, of being shot. They learn not to ask questions. They may even get angry at migrants, believing that if they had followed the rules none of this inconvenience would exist.

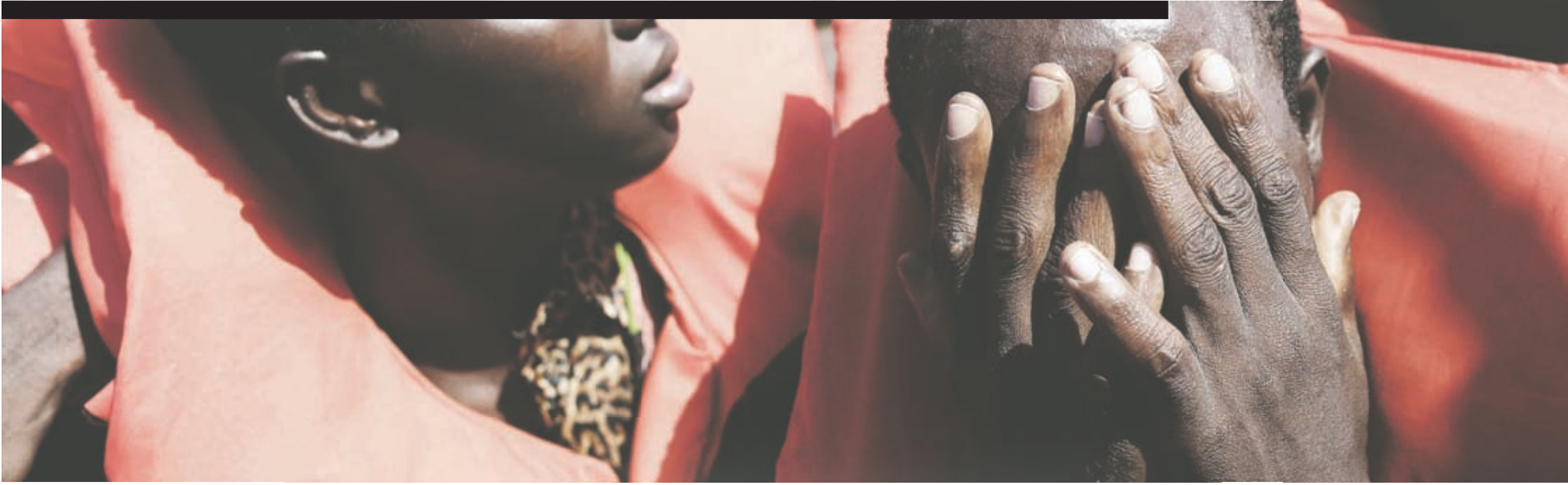
LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT

Every step of the way, people resist. In Nashville, Tenn., ICE surrounded an immigrant man and his son as they pulled into park. Panicked, he messaged activists and neighbors who came, circled his van, gave him food, water and gas so he could stay inside as ICE officers loomed. The stand-off lasted for hours. ICE left without an arrest.

With every domino that falls, activists and everyday people rush into the streets or go to the homes where migrants are threatened by Trump's purge. They video. They interlock arms in a chain. They text and call and chant. They represent the majority of America that looks at the newcomer, the stranger, and sees themselves.

One of their neighbors, Felishadae Young came to help and later said, "It put a lot of fear in me, because it could be me, it could be my family. It could be anybody. It could be your neighbors, just like it was my neighbor today," adding, "It changed a lot about how I feel about this country."

POWER IN NUMBERS: In response to the threat of mass raids, immigrants and their supporters held a vigil outside of federal immigration court in Manhattan on July 12.



JACLYNN ASHLY

TRAPPED IN MALTA

MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND IS PUTTING REFUGEES BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

BY JACLYNN ASHLY

“Everyone was so scared on the boat,” says Bokretzion Gebrekidan, a 39-year-old Eritrean asylum seeker, recounting his journey from Libya to the shores of Malta six years ago.

“The heat was unbearable,” he continues. “When you looked up it was only the sky, and when you looked down you could only see the sea. It was terrifying. People were crying and praying. No one slept for the whole three days we were at sea.”

The wooden fishing boat that held Gebrekidan and about 300 other migrants and asylum seekers from North and Central Africa broke down. Its engine stopped working. They were attempting to reach Italy, but were rescued by the Maltese coast guard and taken instead to a detention center in the small island nation about 50 miles off the coast of Sicily.

Gebrekidan was one of the lucky ones. The trip across the Mediterranean is a life-threatening journey for most of those who depart from Libya. An estimated 2,275 migrants and refugees perished at sea in 2018, an average of six deaths per day, according to the UN Refugee Agency. So far this year, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has recorded at least 840 deaths in the Mediterranean.

Those who survive are not given a warm welcome in Malta. Greek, Roman, Arab and French cultures have left their mark on the former British colony, which exists as a crossroad between Africa and Europe. But despite its multicultural history, the island nation is giving its latest arrivals a chilly reception. The country is at the front gate of a Europe that has cooled to an influx of refugees who are fleeing war, famine and privation by the thousand, and where, as in America, a far-right preaching iron-clad borders in response to a humanitarian crisis has gained political traction.

A STATE OF LIMBO

Gebrekidan, like most asylum seekers in Malta, was granted “subsidiary protection,” a status of sub-citizenship he must renew each year. At least 485 asylum seekers were granted subsidiary protection in 2018 and are living in a state of legal limbo. Although most would face serious harm if returned to their countries of origin, they are not recognized as refugees and therefore have no path to citizenship.

This also means that they are not afforded the right of family reunification, leaving them separated from their loved ones indefinitely. Unless they are resettled to another EU or non-EU member state, their subsidiary protection status can be revoked should their native land be deemed safe.

Like Gebrekidan, 35-year-old Major Sium, fled Eritrea, often referred to as the “North Korea of Africa,” after finding himself a target of President Isaias Afwerki’s regime. Both say their residency status means occupying a state of constant uncertainty.

“We are basically invisible,” Sium told *The Independent*. “We are always worried. We see people who have been here for 10 years and are still separated from their families.”

Despite living, working and paying taxes in Malta for at least six years — and most likely continuing to do so for the foreseeable fu-

ture — Sium has no route to permanent residency or citizenship and receives no pension benefits.

Between 2014 and 2017, the United States was the only country resettling refugees from Malta and in the decade prior to Donald Trump’s election took in more than 3,000 people. Upon taking office, President Trump froze the resettlement program.

Sium’s hopes were crushed.

“Now what?” he said. “We just wait in Malta until they decide to deport us back to our country? We can’t live a normal life here. Most of us can’t get married because we don’t know what will happen to us in the future. I have no idea what will happen to me.”

FAMILIES DIVIDED

Akram Jrerah, a 57-year-old asylum seeker from the city of As-Suwayda in Syria — one of the countries listed in Trump’s 2017 Muslim travel ban — arrived in Malta on a visa in 2011, a few months after the Syrian revolution broke out, fearing himself a target of forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad. Two years later, his wife and daughters, ages 11 and 12, traveled to Libya and attempted to make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean to reunite with him. Soon after setting off their boat was forced to return to Libyan shores, unable to withstand the waves. Deeming the journey too dangerous, his wife and daughters returned to Syria.

His wife has since divorced him.

“It was impossible to get them here, so she wanted to move on with her life,” Jrerah said — his story a typical one among asylum seekers here.

Mazelo Gebrezgabhier, a 30-year-old Eritrean who arrived in Malta by boat in 2016, says that his wife back home filed for divorce following Trump’s freezing of the U.S. refugee program.

“She’s been waiting for almost four years and we have no idea if it will be another four years or maybe ten years before we can be reunited,” he said. “That’s not a life.”

NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

Migrant boat arrivals were on the decline here, with just 23 migrants disembarking on Maltese territory in 2017, according to the U.N. Refugee Agency. But since Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini took office in June 2018 making closing off Italian ports and immigration centers the cornerstone of his far-right policies, Malta has seen a sharp uptick. There were nearly 1,500 arrivals during the second half of last year and so far in 2019 1,583 migrants have landed on Maltese shores.

Meanwhile, the Libyan Coast Guard, which receives training and funds from the EU to intercept migrant boats leaving its shores, returned 85 percent of migrants rescued to Libya in 2018. Many refugees are placed in closed detention where they face limited access to food and are vulnerable to disease.

Last month, the Tajoura detention center on the outskirts of Tripoli was hit in two airstrikes, killing at least 44 detained migrants and severely injuring at least 130. Following the attack, the U.N. demanded the closure of the detention centers and the release of the refugees. Despite these demands, the survivors of a migrant shipwreck last month — considered to be “the worst Mediterranean tragedy this year” with up to 150 migrants believed dead at sea — were transferred to Tajoura, in a move Doctors Without Borders called “unimaginable.”

The EU’s decision in March to pullback naval patrols in the Medi-



JACLYNN ASHLY



YARA NARDI / ITALIAN RED CROSS

terranean, which have rescued tens of thousands of people since they began in 2015, coupled with Italy's criminalization of NGO-led search-and-rescue missions, have added to the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean.

AUTOMATICALLY DETAINED

Malta officially ended its practice of automatic detention for migrants in 2015 following an outcry by advocacy groups and an EU court ruling that deemed it a violation of human rights. The country's current policies mandate that arrivals be transferred to "Initial Reception Centers" (IRCs) where they undergo health screenings and age assessments before being released into what are called "open centers," where migrants can come and go as they please, but outsiders are restricted from entering. Conditions in both types of facilities have been widely condemned as deplorable by rights groups.

Dominik Kalweit, deputy executive director of the Malta-based NGO Kopin, notes that Malta's Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), has failed to increase its capacity or provide adequate human resources and staff training. The open centers, some of which are mere mobile metal containers, are in "dire need of refurbishment and upgrading," he said.

AWAS did not reply to *The Indy's* request for comment.

Meanwhile, automatic detentions have continued under a different guise. Migrants and asylum seekers are only supposed to be kept in the closed IRC facilities for a maximum of 14 days. However, in reality, many migrants have reported being held for several months. According to Marc Tilley, an NGO advisor based in Malta, young, North African men, mainly from Morocco and Algeria, are particular targets.

"What we know is that certain ethnic groups are being profiled and being put into detention." If you're a young North African man "you'll be taken straight to Safi and put straight into detention," Tilley said, using the name for a local prison housing migrants at risk of deportation.

Tilley accuses Malta of practicing "collective asylum rejections" based on a migrants' nationalities, a practice which is illegal. Last year, Malta deported almost 600 migrants, the majority of them hailing from North African nations.

Shazali al-Nour, a 25-year-old asylum seeker from eastern Darfur in Sudan, fled violence in his village after his two uncles

TURBULENT WATERS: *Migrants rescued by the Italian Red Cross in the Mediterranean Sea in 2016 prior to a crack down on such missions.*

LOCK & KEY: *Graffiti demanding the opening up of the closed-off "Initial Reception Centers" in Marsa, Malta.*

SEEKING FREEDOM: *Sudanese asylum-seeker Shazali al-Nour was held for weeks in a Libyan prison before escaping to Malta.*

and two brothers were killed. "I couldn't live there anymore," he said "I felt like any day I could lose my life."

He left Sudan for Libya but never thought of attempting the perilous journey to European shores until he got into an argument with his Libyan boss who refused to pay him for months of work. His employer called the police, who threw al-Nour in jail. Two-and-a-half months later, he was able to escape by squeezing through a small opening in a bathroom. He boarded a Europe-bound vessel with about 100 other migrants from Sudan and Bangladesh.

"I was scared to get on the boat," al-Nour said. "But my situation in Libya was so difficult. Both options were horrible, so I had to choose one of them."

Upon his arrival to Malta in October last year, al-Nour was placed in an IRC for a month. "It was like being in a prison," he recalls. "You can't leave. You just eat and sleep — nothing else. I had no idea how long I would be there. No one provided us any information."

A recent report by the Asylum Information Database lists the NGO's concerns over Malta's reception centers: "low hygiene levels, severe overcrowding, [a] lack of physical security, [the] location of most centers in a remote area of Malta, poor material structures and occasional infestation of rats and cockroaches."

Al-Nour was eventually transferred to the Hal Far Open Centre, where he stayed for two months before finding independent housing and a job at a bakery. He is waiting to find out if he will be granted subsidiary protection by the state, whereby he will be trapped within in the same legal limbo that governs the lives of so many refugees on the island.

Calmer seas during the summer months mean an increase in new arrivals like al-Nour. The numbers of those seeking asylum will likely surpass those of the previous year. Fleeing destitution and violence, they just keep coming.

Thursday, September 5, 7.00pm
The Brooklyn Commons, 388 Atlantic Avenue



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CLIMATE CHANGE SPURS A GREAT MIGRATION

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIFFANY PAI

Climate change will have a profound impact on where people live and work in the 21st century. In fact, it already is. Researchers have identified climate change-induced drought as an underlying cause of the Syrian Civil War, which has displaced millions. The Maldives Islands are sinking due to climbing sea levels. Then there's the descendants of the Biloxi, Chitimacha and Choctaw American Indians on the Isle de Jean Charles off the coast of Louisiana. Battered by increasingly severe storms and with rising waters eroding their soil, they are being forced to flee land their ancestors, escaping reservation life, settled in the 1830s.

But humans aren't the only Earthlings on the move. By paw, wing and fin, a great migration is underway. Even plants and trees are getting in on the act. As emissions of greenhouse gases continue to heat up the planet, a whole host of species are hitting the road in search of more hospitable environs. Their changes of address will have a profound impact on the ecosystems they leave behind, the new homes they adopt and life for us homosapiens.

Inside Climate News has put together a manifest of the critters and fauna hitting the highway so you can keep track of their comings and goings. It is available at insideclimatenews.org/species/archive. Here are some highlights.



ARCTIC SHREW

Solitary and parasite-riddled, the shrew is often overshadowed by flashier arctic creatures like the caribou and the polar bear. But the shrew has insight to offer the shrewd observer. Modeling diets and parasite colonies from decades-old shrew specimens and comparing them to their present-day descendants, scientists have found a climate bellwether in the pint-sized rodent. As the climate warms, their habitats are shifting.

Examining two subspecies of shrew, researchers have found that as the planet heats the masked shrew's habitat is expanding from the south and its parasites are intermingling with those of its more northern cousin, the barren ground Shrew. Scientists warn disease will spread as the two relatives increasingly greet one another, potentially reaching other animals as well.



BLACKLEGGED TICK

You don't want one of these vampires landing in your hidden places. Latching on to scalps, armpits and crotches during the summer months, blacklegs, also known as deer ticks, spread Lyme disease, which causes fever and fatigue and turns deadly if left untreated. All it takes is a day and a half or two for transmission to be complete. Warming temperatures and longer summers have allowed blacklegs to flourish. Once rare, Lyme disease is now the fifth most common illness in America. Blacklegs are expanding their territory too, which now stretches into Canada, where there were 2,025 reported cases of Lyme disease in 2017, up from 144 in 2009.



LOBSTER

Succulent when boiled alive and doused in butter, our delicious friend has all but left these New York shores in search of colder waters. Perhaps it's an instinctive paranoia that sets off the crustacean's stress levels, a suspicion that the water it is wading in might be a chef's pot, but once temperatures rise above 68 degrees, it's bye-bye lobster. Between 1996 and 2014, the amount of lobster netted in New York fell by 97.7 percent.

Meanwhile, Maine's lobster population is booming. The late David Foster Wallace, a man greatly concerned with the ethics of slaughtering the claw-limbed delicacy, described the state's annual Lobster Fest as "something like a Roman circus or medieval torture-fest." Yet Maine's days of living high on the lobster are numbered. Temperatures in the Gulf of Maine are expected to rise by 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100. Northward they must go, but Canadian bon vivants shouldn't rejoice yet. Lobsters are adapting to ocean acidification with thicker shells. Their meat might be much harder to get at by the next century.



BALD EAGLE

Though they're America's national symbol, bald eagles prefer to summer in Canada. They're fond of carrion and fish, and revel in swiping captured prey away from other birds. Benjamin Franklin, who was partial to the wild turkey, accused them of not making their living honestly.

Hunting and pesticides greatly reduced the eagle population in the 20th century, but with the 1972 ban of DDT, along with conservation efforts, the raptor made a comeback and was removed from the endangered species list in 2007. Shrinking ice cover, however, means the birds are heading north to nest sooner. Earlier foraging times mean increased exposure to contaminants. Man-made toxins could once again be the bird's undoing, and leave the United States without a fine-feathered thief for its insignia.



DOUGLAS FIR

Doug's favorite holiday is Christmas. That's when his green branches are decked with lights and presents for children surround his trunk. Yet, despite his fondness for Jesus' birthday, Doug's a tree of all seasons. An ever-green, he makes his home in the Pacific Northwest, but as Western North America heats up and dries, and his habitat shrinks, he is spreading his seed inland.

SEWING DISSENT

Tiny Pricks

BY DIANA WEYMAR

ON VIEW THRU SEPT. 3 AT LINGUA FRANCA (382 BLEECKER ST.)

By Celestina Billington

The words, stitched in black, glare out from the center of a handkerchief, decorated with a motif of pink roses: “Oh, my God. This is terrible. This is the end of my Presidency. I’m fucked.”

The stark contrast of the language and the visual aesthetic encourage the sort of cognitive dissonance that is now commonplace in American political consciousness. Looking at the kerchief, one could imagine blowing one’s nose comfortably into the cotton cloth, covering the embedded “presidency” in snot.

This hand-sewn phrase, and thousands of others like it, line the walls of *Lingua Franca*, a compact shop in Manhattan’s West Village dedicated to embroidery that has been temporarily converted into an optical echo chamber of Donald Trump quotes, his words fashioned to textiles of varying styles. It’s all part of “*Tiny Pricks*,” a public art project created and curated by artist Diana Weymar.

“I feel that Trump’s words are like pricks. I mean, I feel poked and pricked,” Weymar tells *The Independent*. “This project is trying to reverse that.”

Weymar’s own creations make up only a small portion of the display, with the majority of the works being submissions from people all across the United States. Through Instagram (@tinypricksproject), a series of workshops and now via this traveling exhibition, thousands of people have joined the project.

Participants pick a quote from the president, sew it and mail their work to Weymar, who finds a space for each amidst the growing assemblage.

For Weymar, it’s a way of creating a space for reflection, the act of stitching calms her. “I find that my mind slows down, that my language slows down,” she says. “I think if we had to stitch everything that we said we’d all be much nicer people.”

With over 33,000 followers on Instagram and daily posts that consistently receive over a thousand likes, Weymar’s concept is resonating. There’s a collective thread

tying all these people together: a shared desire to process the presidency and, more specifically, to process the language deployed by the prick in the White House.

This need for reflection is understandable. According to the *Washington Post*’s calculations, the president has so far made over 10,000

false or misleading statements. Beyond the falsehoods, there’s also the unparalleled absurdity of so much of what Trump has put out there. There’s his infamous “grab them by the pussy” quip, in addition to many other inflamma-

ter and in the media, she began producing more often and enlisting others, hosting workshops for her friends and with the public.

Now she hopes to have 2,020 submissions logged by 2020, when the next presidential election will start to heat up, and to display the needle works in swing states.

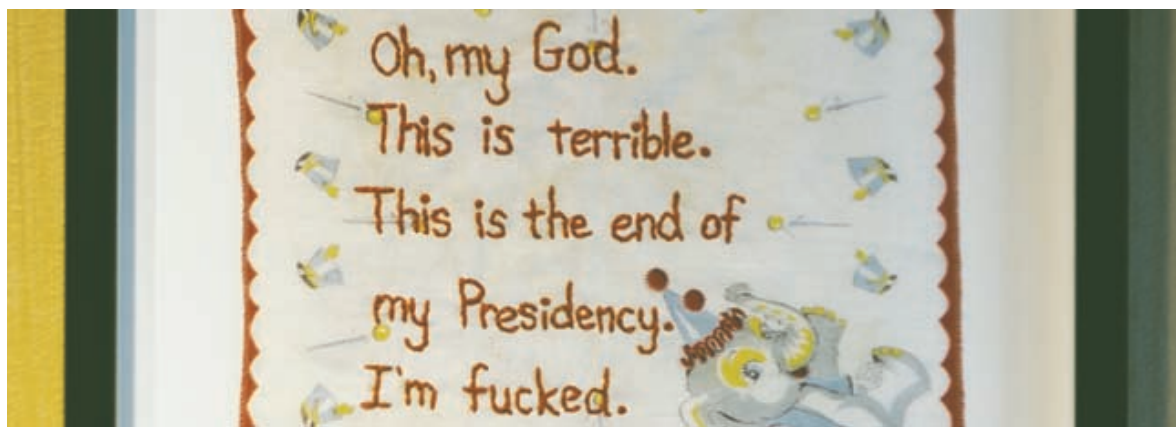
“This project has been a call and response,” Weymar

CRY ME A RIVER:

Trump’s rude and stupid remarks appear even more so when threaded through dainty cloth.

STITCHED

TOGETHER: Artist Diana Weymar with her growing needlework assemblage.



ESTON BAUMER

ESTON BAUMER

says. “The next step is to move it into a more political realm, to really use it as a tool to draw attention and awareness to the language that has come out of this presidency.”

Weymar recently revisited the “stable genius” quote that started the ongoing textile protest, posting her updated version to her Instagram on July 19, the date marking 18 months since the original went viral. The updated take on the quote is sewn on burlap and decorated with colorful mushrooms. The choice to depict fungi, hinting at psychedelia, suggests the statement is hallucinatory, rather than that of a stable person.

This revisit feels more explicit than the original, the needlework more steady. Weymar accompanied the post containing it with the hashtag #DelusionsOfGenius. It’s an indication that “*Tiny Pricks*” foray into more blatant political messaging will be bold, while maintaining a sense

for the kitsch and the cute. Weymar’s growing army of seamstresses are wielding their needles like so many tiny swords — and pricking back.

‘IF WE HAD TO STITCH EVERYTHING THAT WE SAID, WE’D ALL BE MUCH NICER PEOPLE.’

tory remarks, but there are also downright bizarre phrases, such as “The kidney has a very special place in the heart” and “I am a very stable genius.”

The “stable genius” comment was the first Weymar documented. Using her grandmother’s needlework kit from the 1960s, she sewed the letters with yellow thread over a print of red and purple florals. The finished product and the multitude of responses it received on Instagram served as the catalyst for “*Tiny Pricks*.” Weymar set out to create one piece a week, though with the ongoing onslaught of Trump’s ridiculous comments on Twit-

WIND FARM

Continued from page 9

The deal — reached with the Nordic firms Ørsted and Equinor, respectively — is the largest procurement of renewable energy in U.S. history. The twin projects, which push New York toward the CLCPA’s ultimate goal of eliminating its greenhouse gas emissions entirely by 2050 — the strongest target yet set by any state — are expected to create 1,600 jobs and to generate \$3.2 billion in economic activity and come with a \$23 million state investment in workforce development and education.

Equinor is currently considering opening

a turbine manufacturing plant at the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal in Sunset Park, an area the environmental justice group UP-ROSE has long fought to transform into a hub for green industry against a tide of gentrification. A company spokesperson told *Crain’s* the hundreds of jobs Equinor plans to create “will ensure manufacturing and maritime uses will be in New York City for decades to come.”

Each wind turbine blade will stretch over a 165 feet long and must be transported to the wind farm via water since they are too heavy for concrete roads to bear. Nonetheless, given their location about 30 miles off the coast, the turbines won’t have much of a visual impact on the horizon from the shore.

“There’s a slight chance that on the clearest of days, if you have really good eyesight, when you look out you’ll see something that looks like the tip of a pin,” said O’Reilly, adding that state officials took into account migratory patterns of wildlife when selecting the site, so as to have a minimal environmental impact.

Though Al Gore sat by Cuomo’s side when the project was announced and the CLCPA signed, that is the extent of the vice-president-turned-celebrity-climate-champion’s involvement in either achievement. It is activists like Shay and Fraczek who made it all happen.

As for next steps for New York’s climate movement, Sane is working to halt Con Ed

rate hikes, warning that the utility wants to overcharge consumers in order to beef up its fossil fuel infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Sierra Club is sounding alarm bells over plans to meet New York City’s own emissions reductions targets by importing Canadian Hydroelectric power. Shay and others warn the dam and transmission-line construction would offset any progress made toward cutting emissions. Environmentalists want more of the kinds of projects under way off the coast of Long Island that put people to work locally and address the planetary emergency of climate change.

WORKING CLASS HERO

One Foot in the Grave: A Lenny Moss Mystery
BY TIMOTHY SHEARD
HARD BALL PRESS, 2019

By Nicholas Powers

“A working-class hero is something to be,” sang John Lennon, author and activist, Timothy Sheard proves him right in *One Foot in the Grave*, his 18th in the Lenny Moss mystery series. The novel delves into the struggle between labor and management

They plan a union knowing they’ll be betrayed. Sheard details their interactions with the casual intimacy of a man who knows this world inside and out.

The characters feel like old friends. It’s hard to read their squabbles and anxieties and not feel like you’ve met them before, whether it’s the nurse Mimi or the Dr. Austin or Moss. The saving grace of this novel is less the plot than the care given to portraying working-class life.

Yet Sheard, a communist, makes a solid political point without using any jargon. The nurses are required to wear GPS



TYRONE WALLACE

over work safety as a new Zika virus strains threatens lives. Sheards channels real working-class sensibility and the plot moves like a jet.

Toiling away at James Madison Hospital as a custodian, Moss holds down two jobs and is the union steward. A new Zika strain appears and scares the staff into starting a union to force better safety rules. A race starts between the pressure to treat Zika in a hospital with no real equipment and the anger and frustration of nurses who risk infection.

The pleasure of *One Foot in the Grave* is Sheard’s invocation of workers in struggle with their own fears and management. They are terrified of Zika but loyal to their patients. They shoulder the blatant disrespect of those higher in rank.

tracking devices. “I hate the GPS units we have to wear,” said nurse Kim, and the others chimed in. It cuts into their physical freedom and autonomy. Sheard smartly makes it a major conflict that drives the novel because it taps into the ever-present desire to control labor.

One Foot in the Grave is fun, provocative and well told. In its pages, you’ll get a reflection of working-class life, missing from so much of American writing. You’ll see people you know and relationships you’ve lived. You’ll see yourself.

WHEN YOUR CHILD ONLY SAYS ONE WORD

Degrees of Difficulty
BY JULIE E. JUSTICZ
FOMITE, 2019

By Eleanor Bader

At first glance, the Novotny-Clissold family, protagonists of Julie E. Justicz’s *Degrees of Difficulty*, seem pretty garden variety: white and middle class with two good looking, well-put-together, opposite-sex parents and two kids. But that’s only when third child Ben is away — in a residential school or hospital.

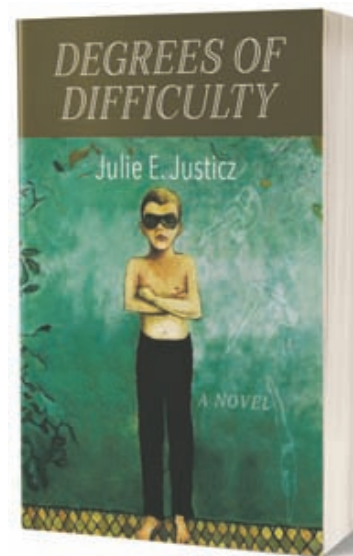
When Ben is around, people stare, sometimes sympathetically and sometimes not, at the large, drooling, non-verbal boy whose only word, “guh,” is sometimes repeated over and over at high volume. Ben is also prone to grand mal seizures which occur at all hours of the day and night.

caring for Ben, cajoling him, playing games with him, and simply hanging out with him. After Ben’s umpteenth school dismissal, teenaged Hugo seems thrilled to have his brother nearby, and in short order becomes Ben’s default caregiver. Perry and Caroline know, intellectually and emotionally, that this is a

bad idea, but later, when Hugo graduates from high school, they allow him to move out of the family home with Ben in tow.

Hugo seems to take everything in stride: he makes sure Ben takes his meds, attends all appointments, and eats, bathes, and follows long-established routines; for a while, everything appears to fall into place, thanks to a loose and frequently changing network of home health aides. Still, when the inevitable crisis comes, it jostles each family member’s sense of self and exposes deep-seated guilt, remorse and shame over tasks left undone and sentiments left unexpressed.

This makes *Degrees of Difficulty* a powerful, emotionally resonant and deeply



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In addition, Ben’s IQ, 32, has meant that he needs near-constant oversight, a challenge that each member of the household responds to differently.

Dad Perry Novotny, a successful building contractor, is relentlessly optimistic, and spend his off-time researching boarding schools for the disabled in each of the 50 states. Ben has tried dozens, with each sending him packing after he unwittingly uses his physical strength to menace or hurt other children. Still, Perry is unfailingly positive, sure that one day he’ll find the perfect program.

Caroline Clissold does not share her husband’s enthusiasm. A renowned Shakespeare scholar and professor at Emory University, Caroline wants nothing more than to write and do research. She’s frustrated, and finds Ben’s 24/7 needs depressing, even maddening. Over time, she stifles her feelings with pills and alcohol, in essence removing herself from the turmoil that surrounds her.

Similarly, only daughter Ivy, the eldest sibling, copes by losing herself in school work and dreaming of the day when she’ll be able to leave her family of origin forever.

And then there’s middle child Hugo. A star on his high school swimming team, Hugo nonetheless loves nothing more than

moving story. At the same time, Justicz — who drew on her personal experience with a profoundly disabled family member — has created a work of fiction that highlights the dearth of programs available to families desperate for respite care. Additionally, it addresses the shortage of well-trained workers who can provide compassionate in-home assistance.

What’s more, that the Novotny-Clissolds are privileged — college educated professionals with enough money to buy the care Ben needs — but still hit wall after wall, speaks volumes.

To its credit, the novel resists preaching and instead offers characters whose insights beautifully illustrate the toll of inadequate social supports on those who need them. By introducing thoughtful people who are neither wholly likeable nor wholly monstrous, it prods readers to empathize and maybe even begin to imagine how they’d handle being thrust into the complex, chaotic, exhausting world these folks inhabit. The limits of love are writ large here. Elegant and provocative, *Degrees of Difficulty* is a great read.

TRUMP GOES TO HADES

No Brainer Or The Solution To Parasites
BOOK, LYRICS & DIRECTION BY CRYSTAL FIELDS
THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY

By Hazen Cuyler

During the 1970s, Theater for the New City played a crucial role in Off-Off-Broadway's emergence, revolutionizing New York City theater. Today, an East Village staple, the theater's dedicated artists and audiences are more family than ensemble. Housed within an expansive honeycomb of gritty theaters and scene shops, each summer they take a show on the road. That traveling event is called "Street Theater" and their production this year is *No Brainer or the Solution to Parasites*, written and directed by Crystal Field, the company's executive director. It's a sharp, playful, political satire running through September 15. And it's totally free.

Social Worker (that's the character's name), played with bravado by Michael-David Gordon, is confined to a system of crippling bureaucracy, withholding social services from those in need. When, during a standard government home visit, he assists in an emergency childbirth, Social Worker questions his vocation while gazing into the newborn's eyes.

The play then transports us to Hades, where a wicked cauldron simmers and pops, boiling with history's most horrific events. War, genocide, slavery, every black mark on humanity bubbles in the pot. A familiar-looking business mogul appears. Sporting a long red tie, a head full of wispy blond hair and relatively small hands, he bears a resemblance to the former host of NBC's "The Apprentice."

TV Host, performed as an impressive and entertaining caricature by Alexander Bartenieff, leaps inside the caul-

dron, splashing Hell's demented parasites out and into the world. TV Host wants to become president so TV Host becomes president. TV Host desires to be king so TV Host becomes king. The whispers of parasites guide his conquest every step of the way.

Field's script is full of insight and of course it's about Trump. But more broadly it's a warning against an archetype. The archetype of a vessel for evil. An archetype of a very powerful and ambitious person act-

Phillip Guston painting. Gordon's Social Worker mistakes a garbage bag for what is in fact a fuzzy cartoonish ball of bright pink-tailed rats. A scooter rode on stage isn't one you'd buy from a store. It's made from thick metal pipe, a board, a single wheel and a triangular stand. Simple pieces and yet every work is a bold spark enhancing the

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: *Theater For the New City's annual Summer Street Theater debuted Aug. 3. It will perform at 13 outdoor venues across all five boroughs during August and the first half of September.*



ing as a conduit for humanity's evil ideas. Field cautions us against any capricious man stunted in independent thought, easily persuaded by advisors and dogmatically commanding everything suggested to him.

Of course, her sharp criticism is also aimed at us. Gordon's Social Worker means well, but by adhering to arbitrary rules of bureaucracy he harms others again and again.

No Brainer's visually infectious silliness is like visiting a funhouse art salon. Lytza Colon's playfully inventive props pop like textures and colors ripped from the canvas of a

necessary. If theater has anything above all other art forms, it's community. Without community, theater does not exist. Crystal Field and Theater for the New City is a pointed force in our art world, hellbent on provoking change within society. And I can't think of a better reason to go to the theater.

play's homemade feel, perfectly accenting the vivid and playful hand-painted backdrop from a talented Walter Gurbo.

His large scenic murals are intentionally two-dimensional and yet you are captive to a unique perspective of place and atmosphere. Gurbo transports us to a city-sanctioned, affordable household, to the depths of Hades, to an isolated blue office that is immediately reminiscent of Van Gogh's bedroom.

A great deal of this production is also committed to protecting immigrants living in our city. Near the play's conclusion, a search warrant is displayed as actors describe what is required of authorities before they may enter your home.

There's no Broadway budget here. No naturalistic, kitchen sink drama. But for Theater for the New City's work, it would be totally un-

EAST RIVER PARK

Continued from page 11

choose a life," Napoleon said.

Mercedes was incensed. "No one is telling us anything," she said. "[My] tenant association hasn't had a meeting at the complex for well over a year, and they're making decisions but not consulting or including us, the tenants."

• • •

THE BATTLE OVER THE FUTURE of East River Park comes at a time when the Lower East Side's poor and working-class residents are being squeezed from all directions. Decades of government disinvestment have created an excuse for the city and federal government to begin transferring the day-to-day management of NYCHA developments to private companies. Plans are afoot to build market-rate housing on "infill" spaces currently occupied by se-

nior centers and parking lots. Extell is putting the final touches on One Manhattan Square, an 80-story glass condominium tower at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge, and developers want to place four more luxury towers (SEE BRIEFING ROOM, P6) along the same shorefront.

The drive to complete the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project is part of a larger project to build a protective barrier around Lower Manhattan known as the "Big U." It would stretch from East 25th Street to the Financial District and swing on over to the top of Battery Park. For Tom Angotti, a retired professor of urban planning at Hunter College and co-author of *Zoned Out! Displacement and City Planning in New York City*, that's where the larger scandal lies.

"This is about the consolidation in Lower Manhattan of a giant Noah's Ark for the wealthy with beautiful waterfront views while the outer boroughs get flooded," he told *The Independent*. There will only be a place for public housing, he added, "if there are opportunities for private investment."

In the meantime, the city hopes to win

final approval for its plan this fall and send in the bulldozers beginning March 1. The City Planning Commission is slated to cast its vote in late September. If it approves the plan, the matter will go to the City Council, which has the final say. By custom, the Council defers in land-use decisions to the wishes of the member whose district is most heavily affected. On the Lower East Side, that's Carlina Rivera, the first-term Councilmember who rose through the ranks of the political club that has held the neighborhood's seat since 1998.

Rivera has said she supports the city's plan but wants it done in phases. That's not good enough for its most ardent critics.

"You would still be killing every living thing in the park, just in stages," said Howard Brandstein.

• • •

IN MID-JULY, Brandstein's Sixth Street Community Center hosted the first meeting of East River Park Action (ERPA) in a

room packed with about 80 people. They were eager to mount a feistier, more vocal opposition to the plan with more rallies, press conferences, public outreach and creative public protests, to try to spur Rivera, who is up for re-election in 2021, to speak out firmly against it.

With time running short and the power of City Hall backing the plan, stopping the bulldozers feels like a long shot at best. Yet, the park's destruction seems so senseless as to be inconceivable — like the death of a close friend in the prime of their life — that it becomes impossible to accept.

"I don't know how we're going to win, and it scares me. But, we have to fight because it's such a wonderful space for so many people," said Pat Arnow, an East River Housing Co-op resident who helped start ERPA.

For Mercedes and Merlin, it means stepping up outreach efforts to their neighbors.

"We have a few weeks of intense work to do," Mercedes said.

ONLY IN THE INDY

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