

**THE**

INDY RADIO NEWS — MONDAYS 6-6:30PM — WBAI 99.5FM

# INDYPENDENT

#254: FEBRUARY 2020 • INDYPENDENT.ORG



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**BEYOND  
IDENTITY  
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## WINTER WARRIORS

**MEET THE NEW YORKERS MAKING A LIVING  
IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS. P10**

MARTIN MAHONEY

**MAKE THEM COUNT YOUR VOTE**

**!ATTENTION!**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14** is the deadline to change your voter registration to Democrat in order to be able to vote in New York's April 28 presidential primary. Otherwise you won't be allowed to vote!

**TO FIND OUT MORE, SEE BACK PAGE**

**MAKE SURE YOU'RE ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THE POLITICAL REVOLUTION!**



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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## FEBRUARY

**THU FEB 6**

7:30PM • Donations re-  
quested  
**PERFORMANCE: GREEN-  
LIGHT BOOKSTORE CIVIC  
ENGAGEMENT SERIES:  
WRITE FOR DEMOCRACY**  
When he's not working late  
at 388 Atlantic Avenue, *The  
Indy's* managing editor moon-  
lights as singer-songwriter.  
Catch him and fellow Busy  
Busy bandmate Alec Better-  
ley together with Ditmas Lit  
cofounders Sarah Bridgins  
(*Death and Exes*) and Rachel  
Lyon (*Self Portrait with Boy*)  
for an evening of music and  
readings, raising funds to  
combat voter discrimination  
in North Carolina. Attendees  
will have the option to donate  
directly to the organization at  
the event or online through  
WriteForDemocracy.org.  
**GREENLIGHT BOOKSTORE  
PROSPECT LEFFERTS GAR-  
DENS**  
632 Flatbush Ave., Bklyn

**FRI FEB 7**

6:30PM–8PM • FREE  
**TALK: JUDITH BUTLER AND  
SIMON CRITCHLEY IN CON-  
VERSATION**  
Join Judith Butler and Simon  
Critchley in conversation  
around Butler's new book,  
*The Force of Nonviolence:  
The Ethical in the Political*,  
which shows how an ethic  
of nonviolence must be con-  
nected to a broader political  
struggle for social equality.  
**THE PEOPLE'S FORUM**  
320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn

**MON FEB 10**

6PM–8PM • FREE  
**HISTORY: RADICAL AR-  
CHIVES HAPPY HOUR**  
Hang out with folks who love

archiving and who want to  
celebrate the work of radical  
archivists. One dollar of  
every drink goes to Interfer-  
ence Archive.  
**STRONG ROPE BREWERY**  
574 President St., Bklyn

**WED FEB 12**

7:30–9PM • \$8, suggested  
**TALK: EPSTEIN, A CAPITAL-  
IST SAGA**  
Dr. Harriet Fraad, host of  
"Capitalism Hits Home"  
is joined by radio and tv  
personality Julianna Forlano  
for a special CHH event. Dr.  
Fraad talks about what hap-  
pened with Jeffrey Epstein,  
how and why it could happen  
and the question of justice.  
**JUDSON MEMORIAL  
CHURCH (SIDE ENTRANCE)**  
239 Thompson St., Mnhtn

**THU FEB 13**

7PM–9PM • FREE  
**BOOK LAUNCH: COMRADE  
WITH JODI DEAN**  
In the 20th century, millions  
of people across the globe  
addressed each other as  
"comrade." Now, among  
the left, it's more common to  
hear talk of "allies." In *Com-  
rade*, Jodi Dean insists that  
this shift exemplifies the key  
problem with the contempo-  
rary left: the substitution of  
political identity for a rela-  
tionship of political belonging  
that must be built, sustained,  
and defended.  
**THE PEOPLE'S FORUM**  
320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn

**FRI FEB 14**

7PM–2AM • \$45–\$65  
**PARTY: STEAMY VALEN-  
TINE'S NIGHT AT THE RUS-  
SIAN BATHS**  
Break out your bikini or swim

trunks and join a crowd of  
artsy, funky and nearly naked  
New Yorkers for the glorious  
return of this legendary Rus-  
sian baths party featuring a  
roaring brass band.  
**BROOKLYN BANYA**  
602 Coney Island Ave., Bklyn

**FRI FEB 14**

10:30PM–2:30AM • \$7, 21+  
**PARTY: IT'S FRIDAY, I'M  
(NOT) IN LOVE ANTI-VALEN-  
TINE'S DAY PARTY**  
Single, in a relationship, mar-  
ried, it's complicated. What-  
ever your status, Valentine's  
Day is for suckers. Avoid  
falling for the trappings of a  
manufactured holiday and  
dance to songs of heartbreak  
and liberation from the '80s  
today spun by DJ Cer-  
emony. But leave your pinks  
and reds at home: this party's  
dress code is strictly black.  
All black. Only black.  
**LITTLEFIELD**  
635 Sackett St., Bklyn

**SAT FEB 15**

12PM–5PM • FREE  
**CULTURE: NATIVE AMERI-  
CAN ARTS SOCIAL**  
An afternoon of artwork,  
drumming, singing, dancing,  
conversation, storytelling  
and community building.  
Native artists will also be  
sharing and selling their  
artwork.  
**FLUSHING TOWN HALL**  
137-35 Northern Blvd,  
Queens

**SAT FEB 15**

2PM–5PM • FREE  
**ACTIVISM: REGENERATIVE  
ACTION TRAINING**  
Humanity is sleepwalking to-  
ward climate change-caused  
extinction. The situation is

dire, but we still  
have time —  
that is, if we do  
something now.  
Join hundreds of  
New Yorkers who

have taken this compre-  
hensive training in nonviolent  
direct action with Extinction  
Rebellion (XR) NYC. This  
training will prepare you for  
future direct actions with  
XR and welcome you into an  
amazing community of folks  
working for climate justice.  
**WILLIAMSBURGH LIBRARY**  
240 Division Ave., Bklyn

**SAT FEB 15**

2PM • FREE  
**PANEL: DEFENDING JULIAN  
ASSANGE**  
A panel of experts will  
discuss the dangerous  
consequences of the U.S.  
government prosecuting  
Julian Assange under the  
Espionage Act. Speakers  
include Jim Goodale, the  
former *NYT* lawyer who  
argued for the paper's right  
to publish the Pentagon Pa-  
pers; Chris Hedges, Pulitzer  
Prize-winning journalist;  
Renata Avila, international  
human rights lawyer who has  
advised WikiLeaks; and Glen  
Ford, exec. editor of Black  
Agenda Report  
**CUNY LAW SCHOOL**  
2 Court Square W., Queens

**FEB 16–MAY 24**

SUN 9AM–8PM • \$200–\$400  
sliding scale, course materi-  
als included  
**LEARNING: SPANISH FOR  
SOCIAL JUSTICE WINTER/  
SPRING SEMESTER**  
Courses are offered by  
Mayday Space and Algar-  
abia Language Co-op and  
are designed to help lan-  
guage learners develop the  
listening, speaking, reading,  
writing and comprehension  
skills that are required for  
everyday life and community

organizing in New York City.  
**MAYDAY SPACE**  
176 St. Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

**THU FEB 20**

6:30PM–9PM • FREE  
**PANEL: THE TERRORS OF  
TOXIC MASCULINITY**  
Panelists Tarik Caroll, Tyler  
Modele and Spencer Os-  
trander speak about the tox-  
icity of hypermasculinity and  
its impacts on relationships,  
health (mental and physical)  
and perceptions of women  
and LGBTQIA+ folks.  
**THE LESBIAN, GAY, BI-  
SEXUAL & TRANSGENDER  
COMMUNITY CENTER**  
208 W. 13 St., Mnhtn

**THU FEB 20**

7PM–9:30PM • FREE  
**BOOK RELAUNCH: THE  
ROMANCE OF AMERICAN  
COMMUNISM WITH VIVIAN  
GORNICK**  
Writer and critic Vivian Gor-  
nick's long-unavailable clas-  
sic explores how left politics  
gave depth and meaning to  
American life. A landmark  
work of new journalism, it  
profiles American Communist  
Party members and fellow  
travelers as they joined the  
party, lived within its orbit,  
and left in disillusionment  
and disappointment as Sta-  
lin's crimes became public.  
**MCNALLY JACKSON INDE-  
PENDENT BOOKSELLERS &  
CAFE**  
52 Prince St., Mnhtn

**THU FEB 20**

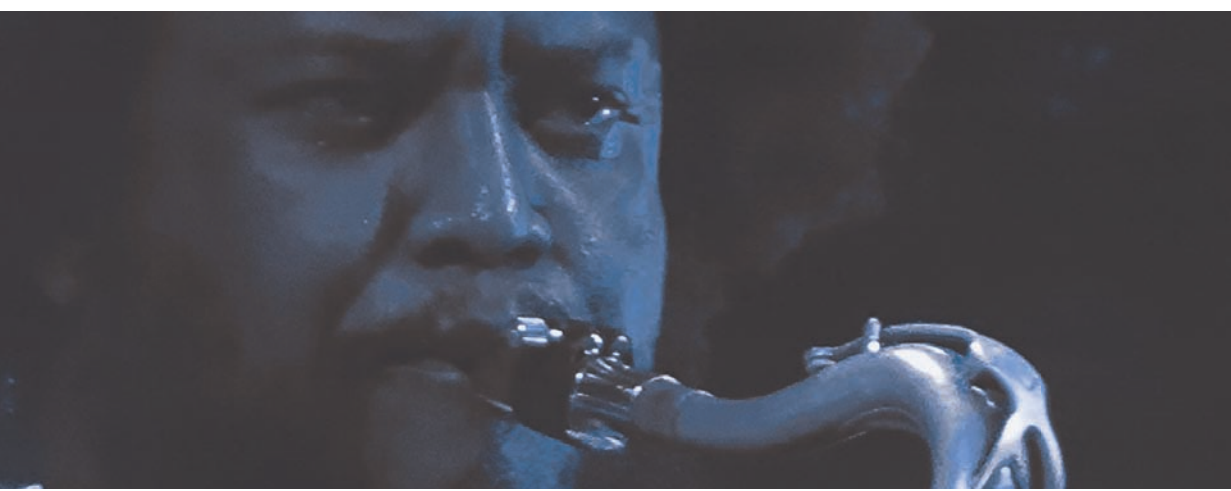
8PM–11PM • \$35–\$55  
**MUSIC: KAMASI WASHING-  
TON**  
Incorporating elements of  
hip-hop, classical and R&B  
music, this young saxophon-  
ist and bandleader exceeds  
all notions of what "jazz"  
music is.  
**KINGS THEATRE**  
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## THE INDYPENDENT





RENEPASSET

**STELLAR SAX:** When Kamasi Washington blows he stretches the limits of jazz. Catch him at Kings Theatre this month.

**NOT EXACTLY FUNNY PAGES:** A 40-year survey of European comic book art launches on Feb. 27 at the Danese-Corey gallery. Don't miss it.

**FRI FEB 21**  
10AM-5PM • FREE  
EXHIBITION: REMEMBERING MALCOLM X  
Curated from archives, this pop-up exhibition will feature handwritten notes, rarely seen photos, and historic papers from the civil rights leader. Attendees are invited to take part in our oral history project, which includes sharing how Malcolm X's words have made an impact on their life.  
**SCHOMBURG CENTER**  
515 Malcolm X Blvd., Mnhtn

**SAT FEB 22**  
12PM-3PM • FREE  
HISTORY: NEW YORK DAY OF REMEMBRANCE 2020  
Mark the unjust roundup and incarceration of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans during WWII. The Day of Remembrance is held every year to keep the memories of the incarceration alive and to prevent such actions from occurring again.  
**JAPANESE AMERICAN UNITED CHURCH (JAUC)**  
255 7th Ave., Mnhtn

**TUE FEB 25**  
8PM • \$15, 21+  
MUSIC: ROSS JAMES' GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY: A CEL-

EBRATION OF DYLAN & THE DEAD  
A Mardi Gras party in grateful tribute to Bob Dylan, featuring Nicki Bluhm, Grahame Lesh, Scott Law and Alex Koford.  
**BROOKLYN BOWL**  
61 Wythe Ave., Bklyn

**FEB 27-MARCH 14**  
TUE-SAT 10AM-6PM • FREE  
EXHIBITION: LINE AND FRAME: A SURVEY OF EUROPEAN COMIC ART  
The first comprehensive exhibition of European comic art in the United States.  
**GALLERY DENESE-COREY**  
511 W. 22nd St., Mnhtn

**THU FEB 28**  
6:30 PM-10:30PM • \$6-\$15, suggested  
FILM: MANDABI (THE MONEY ORDER)  
Written and directed by Ousmane Sembène, in French and Wolof with English subtitles. The film is based on Sembène's novel. It was the first full-length African language film from West Africa.  
**THE PEOPLE'S FORUM**  
320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn



ENKIBIAL: "VERTEBRATI COUPLE II", 2014, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

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Coney Island gentrification, El Bloombito, Cuomo's AirTrain boondoggle and more.

**GETTING HIGH ON A LEGAL SUPPLY, P5**  
Will Albany finally lift New York's marijuana prohibition?

**SHOW ME THE MONEY, P6**  
Frank Seddio nearly bankrupted Brooklyn's Dem machine. He's out, but don't expect reform.

**TROUBLE IN CHINATOWN, P7**  
Locals are fighting off a developer frenzy between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges.

**ME, MYSELF & WE, P9**  
From identity politics to collective liberation.

**WINTER WORKERS, P10**  
NYC's icy weather is no match for these folks.

**MEET INDIA'S TRUMP, P12**  
...And the mass movement taking him on.

**INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF, P13**  
Iraq to U.S.: "Bye, Felicia." Plus, global warming heats up, Glenn Greenwald's "cyber crimes," whistleblowers muted.

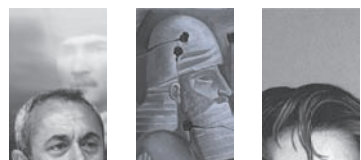
**WHEN A COMMUNIST IS YOUR MAYOR, P14**  
Meet the moustached man transforming life for Kurds in one Turkish city.

**ART NOT BOMBS, P16**  
At MoMA P.S. 1, works from the West and Mideast offer insight into the legacy of the U.S.'s military adventures in Iraq.

**COUNTING THE DAYS, P17**  
This calendar breaks down walls wherever it hangs.

**THE NEW JIM CROW OF HOUSING, P18**  
How Wall Street and the real estate industry exploited policies meant to end housing discrimination.

**TRUMP HELP HOTLINE, P19**  
Rev. Billy offers advice on finding your resolve and taking on bullies.



## THE INDEPENDENT

FUND DRIVE UPDATE

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS HELPED US RAISE  
**\$31,680**  
SO FAR IN OUR WINTER FUND DRIVE. TO REACH OUR GOAL OF

**\$40,000**  
WE'VE EXTENDED OUR FUND DRIVE DEADLINE TO  
**FEB. 21**

IF YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN ALREADY, WE CAN REALLY USE YOUR SUPPORT.

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OR SEND A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO THE INDEPENDENT//388 ATLANTIC AVE, 2ND FL//BROOKLYN, NY 11217



# BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

**OH NO YOU DON'T:** AOC wants answers.

## BYE, BYE BYFORD

When a subordinate of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's gets too much good press, he had better watch his back. Such was the case of "Train Daddy" Andy Byford, who resigned in January after increasing interference at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority by his boss. Byford, who helped turn around the transit systems of London and Toronto prior to his appointment as MTA chief by the governor in 2018, started to do the same here in New York. He arrived at a moment when the aging subway network's on-time rate was just 58 percent. As he departs, more than 80 percent of trains are running on schedule. Byford's efforts won him accolades in the press and from commuters. But his work was consistently undermined from Albany. Cuomo, who once claimed he didn't know who was in charge of the MTA (he is), couldn't help but butt in. Byford was reportedly on the verge of resigning at multiple moments throughout his tenure but Cuomo's plans to reduce his duties to covering "day to day" operations proved too much for him. Wary riders are left wondering what comes next.

## AOC VS. CUOMO

Queens Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wants to know why the Port Authority and the Federal Aviation Administration dismissed numerous proposals for improving access to LaGuardia airport, which lies in her district, in favor of Gov. Cuomo's AirTrain. The authority's board, half of whom are appointed by Cuomo, approved his plan in 2018, which calls for connecting the 7 line and the Long Island Railroad to an AirTrain at Willets Point, Queens. The FAA, which Cuomo hopes will help the state recoup some of its cost, followed suit in November. But the majority of the public comments Cuomo's proposal received were negative, with locals pointing out the LIRR line to Willets Point only runs every half an hour and that the 7 train is already packed. They also cited the cost, which has ballooned from \$450 million when the project was initially proposed to over \$2 billion. Far less costly proposals such as dedicated bus lanes were apparently ignored by officials. In a January letter to the FAA, Ocasio-Cortez accused the agency of denying a voice to her constituents.

STALE GRUT/NRK/BETA

## CONEY ISLAND EXTORTION

New York's always been a town where the poor and the bohemian have coexisted beside the rich and money-grubbing. But the balance has tilted farther and farther in favor of Wall Street and the corporate landlord. Enter Alessandro Zamperla, president of Zamperla, Inc., the Italian amusement ride company that leases a vast portion of Coney Island from the city. Zamperla is now seeking to jack up rents on his commercial tenants by as much as 400 percent. If he gets his way, small shops will close and bigger operations like Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs could be forced to raise the cost of already pricey Coney staples. Noting that the City of New York is Zamperla's landlord, Dianna Carlin, who operates the Luna Star boutique on the boardwalk, is calling on the city to lean on her landlord for more favorable terms or else void its contract with him. Mum's the word from City Hall.

## EL BLOOMBITO CAN'T BE BOUGHT

Campaign representatives for Democratic presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg reached out to the parody Twitter account "@ElBloombergito" in January, hoping to partner with it. Rachel Figueroa, the 33-year-old mother of two from Staten Island, adopted the online persona of Miguel Bloombitito in 2011 when Bloomberg was mayor. With statements like "Speako que softlyo y carryo un big stacko of dinero," the account mocks the multi-billionaire's abysmal attempts at speaking Spanish and his gratuitous stores of wealth. Figueroa declined the campaign's offer to work with it to "create content." "I don't think any candidate should get a major party nomination if they refuse to participate in debates," Figueroa wrote on Twitter.

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212.757.2670





GARY MARTIN

## LEGALIZE IT NY POT REFORM PUSH GAINS NEW SUPPORT IN ALBANY. BUT WILL IT GO UP IN SMOKE AGAIN THIS YEAR?

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Last year, New York State legalizing marijuana was considered an almost-sure thing.

In December 2018, Assemblymember Richard Gottfried, the veteran Manhattan Democrat who sponsored both the state's 1977 pot-decriminalization law and its 2014 medical-cannabis measure, said that the debate on legalization was no longer "about whether to allow adult use, but how to structure the industry."

But that debate was what tripped up legalization legislation last year, with two separate bills — the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes and state Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), and Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Cannabis Regulation and Taxation Act (CRTA) — offering different versions of that structure. Cuomo dropped his proposal from the state budget and the Krueger/Peoples-Stokes bill never made it out of committee.

The key differences remain on "community reinvestment" and "equity." In other words, on whether a piece of ganja-tax revenues should be earmarked for the largely black and Latino urban areas where petty pot busts were concentrated, and how much state regulations should give the inner city residents, small-time dealers, and rural hippie growers who took the brunt of prohibition a leg up in getting into the legal pot business, rather than have it dominated by wealthy investors.

Gov. Cuomo's revised Cannabis Regulation and Taxation Act, included in the state budget he unveiled Jan. 21, would recommend but not require community reinvestment, says Krueger. In contrast, the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) is "very explicit" about how revenues should be used for education, treatment and "money for communities of color most affected by the War on Drugs."

"We feel that we cannot let go of that fundamental part," she adds.

A spokesperson for Peoples-Stokes said that her staff was still pouring over the governor's 230-page bill, but "community

reinvestment is the biggest deal for the Majority Leader."

"We are pleased to see Gov. Cuomo's commitment to passing comprehensive marijuana legalization in the state budget this year, and to see him include social equity and small-business incubator programs," Cassandra Frederique of the Drug Policy Alliance said in a statement. But she was "disappointed" that his bill doesn't clearly guarantee a portion for community reinvestment. "Legislation must include specific language to resolve the devastating collateral consequences of marijuana prohibition in the fields of housing, employment, child welfare, and immigration," she added.

A spokesperson for the governor's office said his CRTA bill was designed to provide "flexibility in implementing a social and economic equity plan that adapts to industry needs and encourages participation from individuals disproportionately impacted by the War on Drugs."

The governor's budget projects that taxes on legal marijuana sales will bring in \$20 million in fiscal year 2021 and \$63 million in 2022. It would tax cultivation at the rate of \$1 per gram of bud and retailers would pay 20 percent on what they purchase, with one-tenth of that going to local governments.

The CRTA would allow very limited home cultivation for medical use. Certified patients or their caregivers would be able to apply for permission to grow up to four plants. Cities with more than 100,000 people and counties would be allowed to prohibit retail sales. It would also attempt to set standards for driving while high and require licensed businesses not to interfere with union organizing and to ban gambling on the premises.

Krueger cautions that if legal marijuana is overtaxed, customers will stay with the illegal market. For example, Massachusetts' 20 percent tax means 1/8 ounce sells for \$60 — the black-market price of \$50 plus \$10 tax. The point, she explains, is for people to buy pot that is "pure and safe and documented," rather than a vape cartridge that contains Vitamin E acetate, an

Continued on page 8

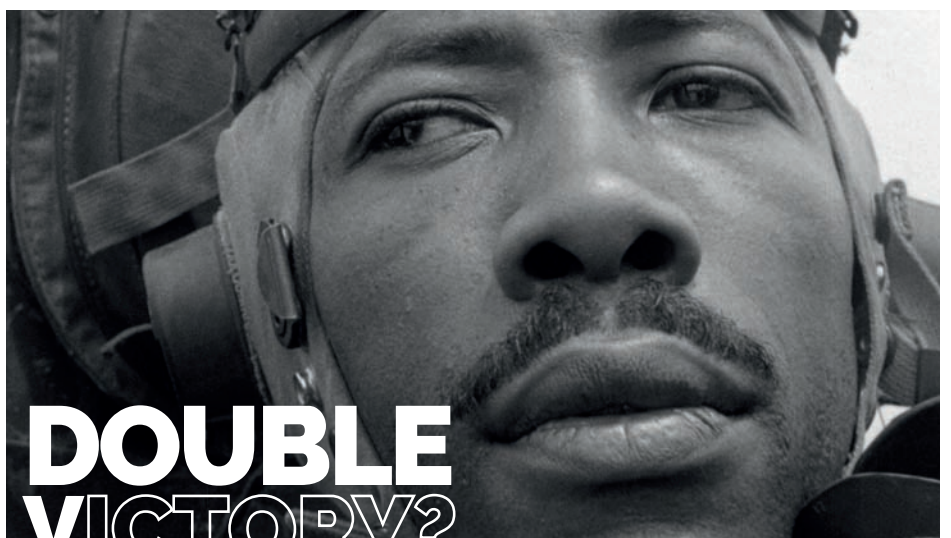
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Global News Hour  
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DOUBLE  
VICTORY?

BLACK SOLIDARITY  
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

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FEB 6: CONVERSATION WITH CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) @GOETHE INSTITUT

FEB 13: SCREENING OF LEO HURWITZ'S STRANGE VICTORY @MAYSLES CINEMA

FEB 18: SCREENING OF AUDRE LORDE IN BERLIN @ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

FEB 25: SCREENING OF FREE ANGELA DAVIS AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS @GOETHE INSTITUT

FEB 29: BLACK SOLIDARITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT: A TRANSATLANTIC ROUNDTABLE ON BLACK SOLIDARITY @GOETHE INSTITUT

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OFFICE OF RODNEYSE BICHOTTE

# MEET THE NEW BOSS

## SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

BY THEODORE HAMM

**W**ith a decidedly modest amount of fanfare, the Brooklyn Democratic Party voted in a new leader on Martin Luther King Day. Rodneyse Bichotte, a Haitian-American assemblywoman who represents Flatbush and Midwood, became the first female county boss in New York City history.

But the real shotcaller in Brooklyn appears to be Mayor de Blasio, who's lining up his plans for 2022, when he and his wife Chirlane McCray leave Gracie Mansion.

Bichotte's elevation came in the wake of the surprising retirement of Frank Seddio, the straight-from-central-casting figure who had been Brooklyn's Democratic leader since Vito Lopez bowed out amid charges of sexual harassment in 2012. Before taking the reins as party leader, Seddio had been no stranger to scandal. After his election as a Surrogate Court judge in 2005, he was forced to resign over campaign finance irregularities two years later. But Seddio's cronies have continued to plunder Surrogate Court estates.

In addition to recent questions surrounding the party's finances, Seddio-allied judges have been running a foreclosure mill at the courthouse. Meanwhile, Brooklyn Supreme Court Judge Sylvia Ash, Seddio's pal who presided over the Commercial Division that handles business disputes, currently faces federal charges for allegedly helping the former CEO of the Municipal Court Union embezzle \$10 million.

Yet with ethical clouds hovering and rumors of a federal indictment swirling, the outgoing boss and the number two figure in the party, the ethically challenged Frank Carone (who is also Seddio's law partner) essentially anointed Bichotte as the new leader.

Although Kings County has one of the largest blocs of Democratic voters in the United States, Brooklyn's loyal readers of the *New York Times* may not be aware of the dubious transition, because the "paper of record" did not report it. But even as the party faces calls for reform, Bichotte promises to be business as usual.

As Clifford Michel reported in *The City*, Bichotte has been nothing if not transactional during her three terms in the State Assembly. Bichotte's most recent filing shows that she has more than \$450,000 in her campaign coffers. As chair of the Assembly's Minority and Women-Business Owned Enterprises (MWBE) Committee, the lawmaker has pushed through measures that exempt large MWBE entities from competitive bidding on city and state contracts under \$500,000. In turn, as Michel noted, "Bichotte's campaign account is packed with donations from the principals of registered MWBE's."

While Bichotte has vowed to recruit fellow female and immigrant candidates in order "to amplify the voices of their local communities," the new party boss is certainly not on the same page as the clean-money insurgents. In 2018, the Seddio-led party failed to thwart two grassroots insurgents, DSA-backed Julia Salazar and WFP-supported Zellnor Myrie, from taking State Senate seats away from veteran incumbents.

As the various 2020 races take shape, it seems quite unlikely that Bichotte will support the insurgents. The DSA's Assembly slate in Brooklyn — Boris Santos, Farah

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**RODNEYSE BICHOTTE**

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**FRANK SEDDIO**

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Louis and Marcela Mitaynes — is trying to unseat three entrenched Democratic incumbents, and the DSA's Jabari Brisport is up against Bed-Stuy Assemblywoman Tremaine Wright, Bichotte's colleague, for the seat of retiring State Senator Velmanette Montgomery.

While he says "it's obviously too early to say" what kind of party leader Bichotte will be, Santos tells *The Independent* that he "hopes she will be democratic, seeking a vote from County Committee members in districts on endorsements." The party appears to be moving in the opposite direction, however.

Meanwhile, Bichotte is likely to let Carone oversee which judge candidates the party backs. That the new boss also has close ties to Attorney General Letitia James doesn't bode well in terms of oversight of any games Bichotte and Carone will play.

One of Bichotte's first moves was to bring in the ubiquitous consulting firm Berlin Rosen to handle the party's communications. The move is not surprising, given that outfit's ties to Mayor de Blasio. Bichotte is one of only two elected officials who endorsed de Blasio's presidential vanity run. The new boss then hired Jon Paul Lupo, senior advisor to that campaign, to fill seats in the party's county committee.

All of these moves lay the groundwork for Chirlane McCray's likely run for Brooklyn borough president in

## BICHOTTE'S ELEVATION FOLLOWED THE SURPRISING RESIGNATION OF FRANK SEDDIO, THE BROOKLYN DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER SINCE 2012.

2021. Last spring McCray had trouble explaining to the city council the basic work of ThriveNYC, her signature mental-health program that has cost the city over \$800 million to date. And she's even more dismissive of criticism than her notoriously peevish husband.

But with the party's backing, and older black voters a dominant force in Brooklyn elections, McCray will be difficult to beat. Outgoing Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams also stands to gain from his close ties to de Blasio and the Brooklyn machine in his 2021 bid for mayor.

The borough's leading developers no doubt would be pleased to continue partnering with de Blasio, who somehow believes that luxury condos are consistent with his administration's fight against inequality. The mayor recently has started talking up the stalled BQX trolley plan for the Brooklyn waterfront (aka, a flood-zone). It's a pet project of the Walentas clan, whose Two Trees Management owns much of DUMBO as well as the large Domino site in Williamsburg.

Two Trees, of course, is a preferred client of Berlin Rosen. In Bill de Blasio's Brooklyn, the developers always manage to come out ahead.



ASAF SHALEV





SUE BRISK

# 700 FEET TOO TALL

## CHINATOWN FIGHTS BACK AGAINST LUXURY SUPER TOWER PLAN

BY CHELSEY SANCHEZ

In the weeks preceding the Lunar New Year, Manhattan's Chinatown bursts with crimson and gold. Residents tack upside-down fu, or good fortune, signs on their doorways. Lanterns with red tassels and gold embellishments hang from storefronts, swaying gently. This will be the year of the rat, marking the beginning of the Chinese zodiac's 12-year cycle. In Chinese culture, the rat is an omen of prosperity and wealth.

But who will the riches belong to?

A few blocks southeast, in the Two Bridges neighborhood, a group of four developers — JDS Development Group, CIM Group, L+M Development Partners, and Starrett Development — are planning to erect four luxury towers on the East River waterfront. All four would be more than 700 feet tall, and the development as a whole would contain about 3,000 apartments, with 25 percent marked as “affordable.” The developers have promised to invest in neighborhood improvements, such as creating an accessible entrance at the East Broadway F train station and renovating park playgrounds. But in neighborhoods like these, high-rises bringing more than 2,000 luxury apartments are an omen of gentrification and displacement — and one that locals easily recognize by now.

“The thing about this is that when it's too late, it's too late,” said Briar Winters, co-chair of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG), a patchwork of local organizations and the two community boards from Chinatown and the Lower East Side. “Once neighborhoods are destroyed, people are displaced. It's a crisis, and there's really no going back.”

When the City Planning Commission greenlit the Two Bridges towers in December 2018, public outrage was palpable. The CPC designated it as a “minor” modification to the area, meaning that it would not have to go through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), which allows community boards to make recommendations and gives the City Council a final vote.

The council acted swiftly. Along with Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, they filed a lawsuit arguing that such extensive projects must undergo ULURP. Last August, State Supreme Court Justice Arthur Engoron ruled in their favor. “First, a community will be drastically altered without having had its proper say,” he wrote. “Second, and arguably more important, allowing this project to proceed without the City Council's imprimatur would distort the City's carefully crafted system of checks and balances.”

“There's still people who have no idea what's happening and even more people, I think, who feel like there's nothing that we can do. And that, I think, is the most dangerous thing of all,” says Winters, who has lived in the area for 15 years. “This idea that, ‘Oh, it's done. What can we do?’ It's not true.”

The Chinatown Working Group was formed in 2008 after the neighborhood was left out of the city's East Village rezoning plan, which set height caps on some blocks to protect a more affluent community from overdevelopment. In 2014, after working with the Pratt Center for Community Development, CWG released its own rezoning plan for Chinatown and the Lower

**TAKING A STAND:** Opponents of highrises in Manhattan's Two Bridges enclave rallied in front of City Hall on Jan. 20.

East Side. It calls for height caps for new buildings, limiting the number of hotels allowed, and affordable housing based on the local income level, rather than

the federal standard, which uses the “area median income” for the city and its more affluent northern suburbs.

The CPC rejected the plan in 2015, saying it was “not feasible at this time.” Since then, One Manhattan Square, a 72-story luxury-apartment building, has replaced the only supermarket along the Two Bridges waterfront.

In March, a coalition of local organizations filed another lawsuit, asserting that building any towers in the area would be illegal. “ULURP doesn't help anyone,” says Tony Quey Lin, a member of the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops and a plaintiff in the lawsuit. “ULURP is for community input and everything else, but they never listen to the people in the community. They listen to the councilperson.”

In ULURP votes, the council typically defers to the member from the district where the development is planned. In Lower Manhattan, that's Margaret Chin, who many in the coalition that filed the suit distrust. They have accused her of paving the way for schemes like New York University's expansion project in 2012.

“From the beginning, Councilmember Chin has relentlessly opposed the proposed luxury developments in Two Bridges and has stood with residents and advocates by filing an unprecedented lawsuit to stop this plan,” a spokesperson responded.

In 2017, Chin and Borough President Gail Brewer told neighborhood residents in a letter that “we will not be able to stop these buildings from going up.” Since then, public pressure has mounted, and Chin has begun work with some advocacy groups to rezone the Two Bridges waterfront in an effort to halt construction. Still, a partial rezoning isn't good enough for the CWG plan's proponents. At a rally outside City Hall Jan. 20, protesters carried petitions with 5,000 signatures demanding that Chin, Mayor Bill de Blasio, and Council Speaker Corey Johnson pass the CWG plan in its entirety and halt the “racist development” of the Two Bridges towers.

“It's the same thing that we've seen in the East Village, where you just downzone or protect a certain area,” says Lower East Side resident Michael Perles, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America's Lower Manhattan Housing Group. “If you don't do the whole neighborhood, it's just gonna push the extreme luxury development to the areas directly outside of the boundaries of what has been rezoned.”

Perles also contends that neighborhood improvements do not justify new luxury residences. “We're not going to compromise and get scraps during ULURP for a little bit more money towards park renovations or accessibility upgrades,” he said. “Those things, everyone in our neighborhood deserves, whether or not we get new housing.”

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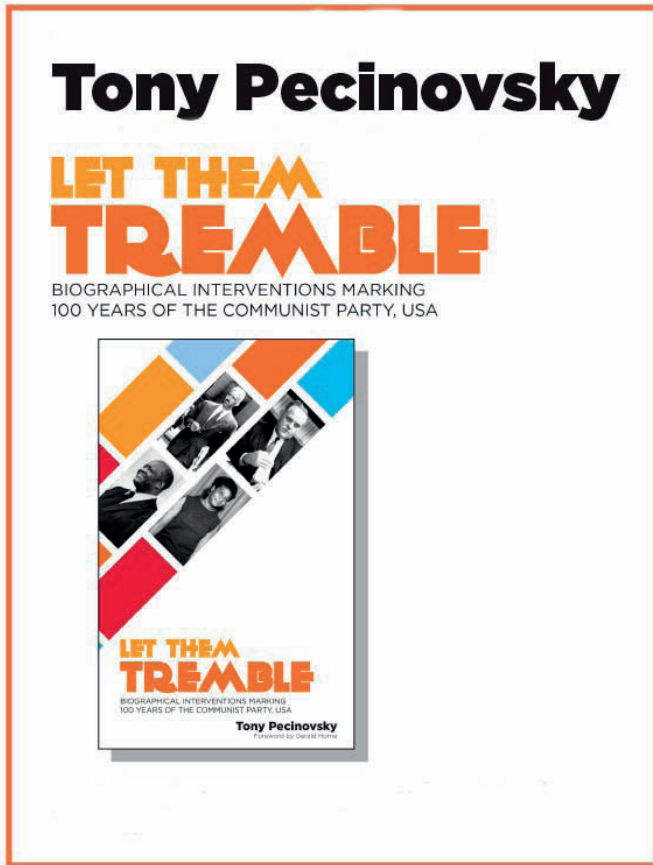
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## LEGALIZE IT

Continued from page 5

adulterant that condenses back into oil in the lungs and is believed to be the cause of 60 vaping-related deaths and more than 2,600 hospitalizations in the past year.

Both bills would follow the model New York State uses for alcohol, requiring separate businesses for production, distribution and retail, with exceptions for "microbusinesses." This would help smaller entrepreneurs, Gottfried says: While alcohol manufacturing is dominated by large corporations, retailers are mostly independent businesses and the state bans chain liquor stores. The CRTA would limit owners to three retail stores.

Legalizing marijuana for pleasure, however, might undercut the state's medical-marijuana companies, which are vertically integrated and thus mainly national chains such as MedMen, PharmaCann and Vireo that could afford the seven-figure startup costs required. Under restrictions Cuomo insisted on in 2014, they are only allowed to sell cannabis extracts.

The CRTA would allow their dispensaries to sell marijuana buds, which would be cheaper and more efficacious for many patients. It would also authorize the state to auction off licenses for them to open pot stores, exempt from the three-shop maximum.

The CRTA, however, would not expand the limits on what conditions doctors can recommend cannabis for. No other controlled-substance medication has such restrictions, Assemblymember Gottfried points out. If recreational marijuana were legal, he adds, people with ailments not on the approved list could simply buy it from a pot store, a situation he says "does not make sense."

A bill to remove those restrictions, sponsored by Gottfried and Sen. Diane Savino (D-Staten Island) passed the Assembly Health Committee last year, but did not get a floor vote.

A related issue is expunging marijuana-possession convictions. The Legislature passed a bill to do that last year, part of the last-minute measure enacted to

close the "possession in public" loophole in decriminalization that had enabled more than 600,000 arrests over the previous two decades. (New York City police had deemed pot they found in someone's pocket during a stop-and-frisk "public," making it a misdemeanor instead of a violation.) But "the state has not expunged the records yet," says Krueger.

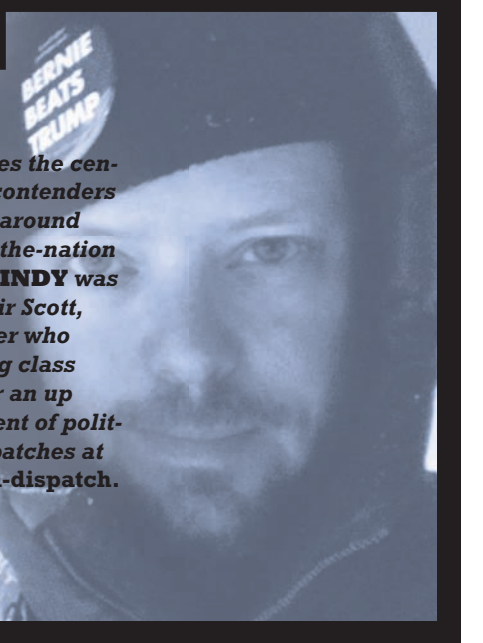
The problem appears largely technical, she explains, but the difference is whether the state court-administration and criminal-justice agencies automatically expunge convictions, or just send letters to some 300,000 people informing them that they can apply to have their convictions expunged. This is important, she adds, because it would clear the way for "people running a small business with an illegal product" to become part of the legal trade.

Gottfried says he was "overoptimistic" last year, as a number of legislators opposed legalization, most prominently first-term Democrats from New York City's suburbs. Some are now more favorable, he adds.

Senate Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Committee chair Pete Harckham, a Democrat who represents northern Westchester and the Hudson Valley, last year argued for delaying legalization, but announced his support for the MRTA on Jan. 23, saying that money from pot sales should go to "social good." He told the *Buffalo News* that in visiting Massachusetts, he'd learned that "the sky is not falling" — and noticed the number of cars with New York license plates in pot-store parking lots.

## INDY CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

Every fourth year in January, Iowa becomes the center of the political universe. Presidential contenders and legions of staff and volunteers tromp around the state looking for support in its first-in-the-nation caucuses. 2020 was no different. And the *INDY* was there with regular dispatches from McNair Scott, a Brooklyn-based Bernie Sanders volunteer who knocked on doors all month in the working class neighborhoods of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. For an up close and personal perspective of a moment of political history as it unfolded, see Scott's dispatches at [independent.org/section/columns/iowa-dispatch](http://independent.org/section/columns/iowa-dispatch).





# MOVING BEYOND IDENTITY POLITICS

## HOW THIS ACTIVIST OF COLOR FOUND A NEW LANGUAGE OF STRUGGLE

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

**H**ere we slept outside. Here we painted protest signs, played drums and danced in a sweat-flinging frenzy. Here we yelled, “mic check” and our chant of the 99 Percent rippled through the city.

Walking to Fulton Station, I usually zip past Zuccotti Park, my mind on a million other things but today I stopped. Eight-year-old memories returned. I saw the tent city we erected, Occupy Wall Street. I saw again the radiant faces. Some beautiful lightning had struck us and we were dizzy with hope.

The park is half-empty now, crisscrossed by businessmen and construction workers but lately I’ve felt something big looming. A need to hope and be vulnerable, to play and be dizzy. I take out my cell phone and hold it up. Onscreen an article shows a Bernie rally. I imagined it was 2021, the 10th anniversary of Occupy, and were gathered here again but now Bernie was president.

The fantasy lasted until I thumbed the next article, “Bernie Draws Criticism for Touting Joe Rogan Endorsement.” Turns out, Rogan is problematic. We all are in some way, but I shook my head. The Republicans fight us. The liberals fight us. And we fight us.

### FROM CONSCIOUS TO WOKE

Live in New York long enough, memory piles upon memory until it breaks into waking life. I left Zuccotti for the Brooklyn Bridge. Each street had been a battleground between activists and police. I remembered younger versions of me, dreadlocks swaying down my back, as I scribbled in my reporter’s notebook. As much as I wanted to be the solution, I was also part of the problem.

In the ’90s we called it being “conscious,” today we say “woke.” It began as heartfelt work to reconnect with our ancestral struggle. It sometimes ended with us activists of color wearing the mask of the victim out of insecurity or guilt or vainglory. We attacked the white left for not “getting it” or shamed it. They sensed something odd but were hamstrung by not wanting to reinforce the same oppression they vowed to fight.

Today, we call it “identity politics” and the first time I discovered it, I fell in love. It was 1998 at a Puerto Rican independence march. I watched a giant flag carried by old and young activists. One man wore a Taino loincloth and blew a conch shell that made a huge horn blast. I was like “What next, is he going to call forth a hurricane?”

One side of the flag sagged and they did not want it touching the street, so a young woman yanked me in and I picked up the slack. By accident, I was carrying a sacred symbol of my parents’ homeland whose language I did not speak. Mr. Taino blew his horn. I repeated the Spanish chants. The Puerto Rican flag billowed in our hands like the sail of a ship. Our voices were the wind, blowing that precious word, “libertad.”

A lot of us went through a transformation. Sistahs I knew cut off chemically straightened hair. They paraded bald heads or fluffy afros, Africa earrings and Bob Marley shirts. Brothers wore dreads, Malcolm X hats and carried his autobiography like a Bible. We needed to see ourselves in the future we tried to create. It worked. Almost.

What we did not know was the language of identity was being sold back to us. Street vendors hawked the latest gear. Later mannequins in high-end downtown store windows wore conscious fashion. We could stand in front and see reflections floating over more expensive versions of us. Years later, we entered graduate school or nonprofits or corporate America and again the language of diversity was sold back to us. An insidious thing began to happen. We learned how to commodify our pain.

### SHOCK DOCTRINE

Trauma. Reparations. KRS One. Dead Prez. Jeru the Damaja. The Fugees. Social justice. Deconstruction. My head buzzed

with new language, new music that was my New York soundtrack, one that cast the city as a modern Babylon.

In graduate classes or in the street, I traded with others the latest radical ideas like rare baseball cards. Who had the authentic one? Who had new pain? The

more I used them, the more I became trapped in a performance of oppression. Friends, good deep friends, struggled to balance the reality of their lives as full complicated beings with the image of the victim or activist that was marketable to liberal institutions.

Just then, I shook my head at the foolishness and realized, somehow, instead of going to the Brooklyn Bridge, I was at the 9/11 Memorial. A cascade of water washed into dark holes as if to cool the rage of 3,000 souls. Feeling the ground shake. Seeing towers collapse. Breathing human ash. It shook me and a lot of us out of language.

I felt so helpless that day that I spent the next decade traveling to wars and natural disasters, trying to help. I was not good at it. I saw gang-raped women I could not help. I saw a child dying of starvation I could not help. I saw hills of corpses and people waking up from surgeries without arms and legs. I could not help any of them.

The word “victim” takes on a different weight when you see a family weeping at a house reduced to rubble. Every time I returned to the U.S. the rhetoric of social justice felt increasingly theatrical. Yes, most used it sincerely if clumsily. Too many used it to leverage power dynamics in a room to advance untested ideas. Or to just advance themselves.

I sat in meetings and seminars, marched in protests and read essays where victimization was used to take historical pain and privatize it. Was this a neo-liberal form of identity politics? If so, a full circle had been drawn. The new generation not only bought the language of diversity, but sold it back to the very liberal institutions that had set its value. Triggered? Traumatized? Outraged? Appropriated? Call them out. Cancel them. Be rewarded.

### CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Finally, I got to the Brooklyn Bridge, sometimes the only quiet place in the city is a long cold walk over the waters. The air was biting. Another memory rose up.

Five years ago, we marched across this bridge in a Black Lives Matters protest. It was night. Our voices shook the air. Giddy and grim, we leapt in front of the bright headlights of cars, holding signs. In the eye-burning glare, we were silhouettes that stopped a city.

Afterwards, I was startled to see how mixed the protest was. A lot of whites. A lot of people of color. A lot of loving solidarity. We protested to stop the killing of unarmed Black people and also to stop the way America kills pieces of us, sometimes the most precious parts in ways great and small every day.

The great promise of identity politics and intersectionality comes for me not in discovering how to name my pain, but when it leads me to other people. No one can own pain. Too often, it owns us. Too often, we blindly give it to anyone weaker. The way to stop it from destroying more lives is to transform it into love. Free. Wild. Love.

The memory of the march dissolved but the glow of solidarity rose higher. Something big was looming. These days also have a static charge. It’s Bernie Sanders but bigger than Bernie. It is the victory that comes when we lift each other up, up, up until that strange lightning strikes. And everything we could be appears again.



TIFFANY PAI





# IT'S A COLD, COLD WORLD

## MEET SOME OF THE MEN AND WOMEN EARNING A BUCK OUTDOORS IN NYC THROUGH THE WINTER

BY PETER RUGH

**T**hey're brewing our coffee, netting our fish, shoveling snow from our sidewalks. They rise before the sun and are at it long after the last lamp blinks awake along Broadway. You might overlook them — that hooded figure salting your path, that arctic explorer on an electric bicycle. They are overwhelmingly recent arrivals who have come to this city of 8 million to carve out a life in the ice and concrete of its streets. They give this town legs, set it in motion, help its skyscrapers stand tall, wipe away its trash and imbue it with beauty.

This January, *The Independent* spoke to some of the people who perform the often thankless task of working in New York's great outdoors through the winter. Here's what they had to say (edited for clarity and concision).

### WADE LONG ISLAND FISHERMAN

I've been commercial fishing all my life with my father. He's been a commercial fisher for, God, 54 years now. He was originally a potato farmer out in Calverton on the east end of Long Island but he left farming around 1965, '66. He basically taught me to fish. It was myself and my brother who no longer fishes with us. He got out of the business.

My typical day depends on the time of year, but we go out in this kind of weather, as long as it's not too windy. This time of year you got to pick and choose when you're going to go. In the summertime the engine on the boat never gets cold. It's seven days a week. You're grinding.

In the summer, we do a lot of fluke, a lot of flounder. I do a lot of striped bass. That's my big bread-and-butter thing. But we go for monkfish, skate, tuna, sword. Anything. Right now, we're catching a lot of cod, haddock. Still doing flounder. I got one tuna. The monkfish is still heavy. The skate is still heavy. We'll do pollock, which is like cod fish. We do a lot of netting. We do a lot of dragging.

Dragging is basically when you have a large net and you're pulling it along the bottom or just off of the bottom, depending on what you're going for. Because we're such a small operation we don't really impact the bottom that badly and we're not killing a lot of species which is great. Unlike a lot of big draggers we're more sustainable.

You're up in the morning, you're out fishing by four-thirty, five o'clock. Depending on how you do, you could be out there till noon or you could be out there till five. Although, sometimes we don't even leave the dock until we do something called a "sunset tow." You wait until the sun starts going down and then you go night fishing. I do

a lot of striped bass fishing at night. That's when they're more prevalent.

Fishing is labor-intensive work. We cut everything and get everything ready for the market, which is a job in itself. We have our ice machine, coolers, stuff like that. We load it all up. I was up this morning at three, on the road by four. We're here at the Union Square Greenmarket by five-thirty and we're selling by seven. At a quarter to seven, the diehards show up.

My tip for keeping warm outdoors in the winter is layers. Layers, layers, layers. It's different for everybody. I know for me, if my feet get cold, I'm done. I try to keep my feet warm as I can, try to keep my hands warm. Luckily Aunt Jan here always has pocket warmers. She's tossing them out to everybody.

Dress in your Carharts. Get your insulated underwear on. I just got into compression socks to help with the standing all day. It helps with the legs. The key is to dress in layers, get something for your face, a wrap or something, and just be ready for it.

I do admit there are times when I'm like, "Damn it, I wouldn't mind being indoors right now." But the thing I dig about this job is that tough as it can be in the wintertime, it's still a job that allows you to have a sense of independence. Okay, I have to stand in the cold. But, hey man, five weeks from now, I'm going to be in Costa Rica and I just got back from Vietnam. In the wintertime, there's a little more leeway. April through December, you're balls to the wall.

*Catch up with Wade and taste what he's caught at the PE & DD Seafood stall at Union Square Greenmarket every Saturday.*

### MICHELLE COFFEE CART OPERATOR

My sister-in-law told me about this job. It's easy. It's so slow, but it's a good job. I like it.

At five in the morning, I start selling coffees and breads. There's a lot of customers, a lot of Hispanic people coming to work. Most of the people come at around six and it has to be ready every time. I have a lot of regulars.

I have a small heater here, that's how I keep warm.

### JOSE BICYCLE DELIVERY WORKER

I work at Trufa, a small restaurant at 140th and Broadway. During my 8-hour shift, I alternate between preparing food in the kitchen and making deliveries. It's difficult when it's raining or cold outside, but you have to make the delivery. I wear gloves and many layers of clothes and the electric bike helps. You want to travel quickly so the customer gets the food while it's still warm. The most common orders I deliver are for our hamburgers, sandwiches and pasta.

Some apartment buildings don't have elevators so I walk up the stairs. If it's a big building, sometimes it's hard to find the apartment. Other times, if the customer doesn't answer the buzzer at the entrance to the building, you have to call or go looking for them.

I would say 80 percent of customers give tips. Three or \$4 is a good tip. On an average day I make \$40 to \$50 in addition to the \$15-per-hour salary I receive. The extra money is a big help to me.

I've been robbed twice in the three years I have been working this job. On both occasions two men would meet me at the entrance to the building, grab the food from me and run back inside. They didn't try to rob me of my money. They must have been hungry.

Bicycling through all the cars is dangerous, but I've only been hit once. I fell to the ground but got up and was okay.

I have a cold today. Going in and out from the warm to the cold causes that. I would like to go home right now, but I need to keep working.

Weekends are the busiest days for making deliveries. Tuesdays and Fridays are my days off. When I am at home and the weather is really bad, I sometimes place an order for delivery. I understand the effort it takes, and I give a good tip.

I am 24-years old. I have been here in the United States for five years. I also have uncles and brothers who are here. I come from the province of Morazón in the north of El Salvador. I send 60 percent of what I earn back to my family that is still there. I want to return there some day to build a house and start my own family.

### MARIAN CHURCH GROUNDSKEEPER

I am from 6th Street. Before that, I am from Poland. Thirty-four years in America. Now I am retired. I help part-time for this church. Before that I worked for Old Dominion trucking company. A very hard job. We made local deliveries — Queens and Brooklyn, the terminal in Greenpoint. Now I take it easy.

I always put the salt on the snow, and shovel when there's

a lot of snow. Today is not bad. It's only 3 inches — very easy for me. Sometimes, there's big snow. A couple of years ago, there was five or six feet. It was terrible. This year, last year — very small. It's nothing. Maybe it's global warming. Last year, for all of winter the snow only came one time. This year, it's the second time. How many more times? Nobody knows. God only knows.

### IAN SCULPTOR

I've been sculpting probably since I was 14 years old. I was born in Zimbabwe. I've been doing stone sculpture, wood sculpting for over 35 years. Sculpting tree stumps is something I've always done.

When I went out camping in Colorado or New Mexico and I'd see a stump, I'd always carve it. But these were in the middle of the wilderness, so nobody got to see them. But when I moved to the city, I started doing these. Man, people started paying attention, started taking pictures and posting them to social media.

## 'THE MORE YOU KEEP WORKING, THE MORE YOU KEEP YOUR MIND OFF THE COLD.'

But there's this tagger, tagging on my art work. Man, I want to hunt him down. I just want to surprise him while he's doing it, come up behind him and slap him. That's a big violation. You don't tag on somebody's artwork. Street artists understand: someone's piece is someone's piece. The moment you go put your tag on it, that's fighting words, you know?

I'm leaving these in the street so it's community property. It's not mine no more. I can't take this home. I can't sell this. I can't make money out of it. This takes four or five days out of my life. I'd value this piece at probably \$3,500 to \$4,000 dollars if I was selling this in a gallery. So I'm putting a \$4,000 piece in the street for free and somebody comes and puts their little graffiti mark on there. That's so disrespectful.

Tree-stump sculpting is just something I do. I'm a visual artist. I paint and I sculpt to make a living. So I'm hoping that people understand that the carvings are my way of giving to the community.

I meet a lot of people. The whole thing sparks conversations. People come by, they see this stump and then all of a

sudden there's a guy who's sitting there carving it and they want to know what the process is. I was walking by here one day. I saw this stump and thought, "My friends live here. Maybe I'll just do a piece that they can watch, man. That they can enjoy on their morning stroll everyday."

A lot of the designs are determined by the natural shape of the stump. With this stump, you can see it already had this decay in it. That's the colors. And there's this green here. That's the natural color of the moss that grows on it. I just came and started carving and it turned out a flower. I have no clue what I'm going to do when I start.

I'm a political refugee from Zimbabwe. I've been involved in a lot of uprisings and demonstrations in Zimbabwe. I got a severed Achilles tendon. That's from being tortured. They were going to kill me. I fled. I fled home, man. That's the one place you never think of fleeing. Home is where you want to go to when you face troubles. You don't want to run away from home, you know? So I've been out of Zimbabwe for 28 years now.

Swinging the hammer works best for keeping warm out here. I swing the hammer nonstop. I start sweating,

man. Next thing I know, I'm taking my jacket off. I'm like in a t-shirt. The more you keep working, the more you keep your mind off the cold, the more your body is going to naturally build-up the warmth you need. It's when you stop that you really get cold.

Visit [IanKnife.com](http://IanKnife.com) to view Ian's work. He's also on Instagram: @[KnifeIan](https://www.instagram.com/KnifeIan). Hit him up, especially if

you have an idea of who's tagging his street carvings.

**UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL PHOTOS ARE BY MARTIN MAHONEY, WHOSE WORK IS ON VIEW AT THE WESTBETH GALLERY (55 BETHUNE ST.) FROM MARCH 19–APRIL 19 AS PART OF "THE TIMES" EXHIBITION.**



# WHEN BIGOTRY IS ENSHRINED

## BACKLASH GROWS AFTER INDIA'S TRUMP PASSES NEW CITIZENSHIP LAWS

BY MANVI JALAN

MUMBAI, INDIA — I follow the low hum of voices to the historic Gateway of India, a massive archway built in honor of Britain's monarchs over a century ago. Protesters have been camping out here for the past two nights.

A man stands on a pole, waving India's tricolor flag against the backdrop of a near full moon. Across the street, tourists staying at the iconic five-star Taj Bengal hotel observe the peaceful crowd from a distance. "*Hum ek hai*" — we are one — it chants to a tabla beat. A little girl, clutching her father's side, erupts: "*Azadi! Azadi!*," she calls — freedom, freedom.

Her father wears a traditional taqiya cap, identifying him as Muslim. But it's not just Muslims here. There are Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, university students, mothers, grandmothers and working professionals who have just clocked out.

By midnight, the crowd grows to about 2,000. Voices harmonize folk poetry, speak about freedom. All markers of diverse backgrounds blend into a singular desire for justice. There is hope in the crowd. In the unusual winter heat, volunteers pass out boxes of rice, fruit and energy drinks to campers.

My friend remarks on the friendly disposition of the cops. A volunteer who overhears us cautions that the police are not our friends: "They just haven't received orders from up top yet."

He isn't wrong. By the morning, the demonstrators are cleared out. Those who refuse to leave are taken to Azad Maidan, a public park about a mile away. Its name translates to Freedom Ground. Protesters camping out opposite the luxury hotel in a tourism center is a bad look for the government. But things don't turn violent like they have in other parts of the country. The demonstrators are detained and released the following evening.

India is increasingly becoming an authoritarian state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a member of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), came into power in 2014 with an overwhelming majority, promising neo-liberal economic policies and, much like Donald Trump, an "India first" policy. In 2019, he won again with barely any opposition, emphasizing the fight against terrorism, pledging to establish peace in Kashmir by lifting Article 370, which grants the region autonomy, and to introduce the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The new law, which was approved by both branches of parliament in December, grants citizenship rights to those fleeing persecution in three surrounding countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But it also strikes at the heart of India's 69-year-old secular constitution and thereby what it means to be an Indian. Under the measure, Muslim migrants are excluded from citizenship.

Across the country and abroad, Indians are protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and a nascent government bureau charged with enforcing it, the National Registry of Indians (NRC). The fundamental fear of the students and activists leading the demonstrations is that the CAA is exclusionary in nature.

The law "provides a path to Indian citizenship for members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian religious minorities" who fled persecution from the country's Muslim-majority neighbors before December 2014. The government's logic in excluding Muslims in the clause is that it is seeking to support persecuted minorities from the region.

"We are not taking anyone's citizenship," Modi told the *Hindu*. "A person, irrespective of his or her religion, whether he [or] she believes in God or not but has faith in the Constitution of India, can seek citizenship under already laid down procedure."

But the law's opponents charge that it is unconstitutional and discriminatory and that it will be used to displace Muslims, as well as Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, Rohingyas from Myanmar and Buddhists from Tibet who are also excluded under the CAA. The law declares them illegal foreigners, "guilty until proven innocent," as Ibad Mustaq, an attorney and critic of the law, puts it. Labeled "illegal," they can be picked up and detained until they show proof of Indian birth.

Advocacy and civil society groups, even the European Parliament, have filed close to 200 petitions with India's Supreme Court, urging it to overturn the law, but so far it has only asked the government to respond to their criticisms.

### ONE NATION, UNDER GODS:

Students in New Delhi protest new citizenship law requirements.

The violent retaliation of the government against those protesting the act, along with a six-month internet shutdown in Kashmir that only partially

ended in January, has further fueled concerns over the encroachment of proto-fascism. So far, 30 people have been killed in demonstrations nationwide, many of them in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, home to an impoverished Muslim minority and numerous right-wing Hindutva groups.

Prior to plans for national implementation, a registry of citizens was undertaken in Assam and monitored by the Supreme Court beginning in 2013 as a way of addressing a continuous influx of immigrants from Bangladesh into the northeastern state. The government now plans on implementing the NRC nationally under a new name, the NPR or National Population Register.

If the registry is implemented as it was in Assam, Mustaq, who has sat in on hundreds of citizenship hearings, says there is grave reason for concern.

So far there are six detention camps in Assam that are quickly filling up. Over 1,000 people have reportedly been detained so far. The national implementation of this model will lead to "widespread statelessness" and the devastation for India's poor, Mustaq fears. It will lead to the displacement not just of Muslims but of India's tribal communities.

"Out of 1.9 million people who have been declared illegal in Assam, not all are Muslim," Ibad says. "But they are all poor."

The issue lies in documentation. India's tribal and nomadic minorities have historically faced the threat of persecution and many lack legal documentation, like a birth certificate to prove they were born on Indian soil. Common and accessible documents like a passport and aadhar card (India's version of a social security card) are "not enough" to prove citizenship under NRC.

Protests in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi have been exceedingly violent, with police detaining peaceful crowds and beating them with batons. Internet shutdowns, the first of which was instituted when Modi's government revoked Kashmiri autonomy in August, are becoming common in multiple states, including Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi.

Unrest in Assam has only grown, despite Modi's promise to "protect the linguistic, cultural and social identity of the people of Northeast."

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, masked men attacked protesting students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, clubbing them and splattering them with acid while police looked on. Nearly 40 people were injured. Ironically, the Delhi Police used the outrage the incident sparked across India to obtain special detention powers that allow it to hold protesters without cause and deny them the right to an attorney.

To many observers, the government's authoritarian, defensive reaction to the demonstrations confirms their fear of losing India's pluralistic democracy.

Indian media is riddled with fake news that circulates on WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter, including claims that anti-CAA protesters have attacked authorities and saffron-clad squads of Modi supporters who have launched counter-demonstrations. BJP's IT cell is notoriously effective at monitoring anti-BJP hashtags and overshadowing them with pro-government messaging on social media platforms. Journalists are being prosecuted. Without the support of international media and the opposition's endangered online presence, the truth would die with the voices of the buried and jailed.

But there is reason to hope. Jan. 8 saw 250 million Indian workers launch a one-day strike, against Modi, his economic policies that favor the wealthy and the citizenship law. If this momentum grows it could pose a future threat to his power.



WIKICOMMONS





SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR MAINA KIAI/FICKR

# GLOBAL BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

## HOTTEST DECADE IN RECORDED HISTORY

The previous 10 years were the hottest decade since tracking of global temperatures began in the 1880s, according to findings released in January by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Last year was the second hottest year on record, after 2016. Global greenhouse gas emissions continue to climb, with the U.S. and the far more populous nations of India and China leading the way. With the heat-trapping GHG's come rising sea levels, drought, forest fires and severe storms. As a 2018 UN IPCC report warns, the world must dramatically lower carbon emissions by 2030 to prevent the worst effects of climate change from occurring in the following decades.

## IRAQ TO US: DON'T LET THE DOOR HIT YOU ON THE ASS

In addition to killing Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and pushing America to the brink of another war in the Middle East, the Jan. 3 drone strike near the Baghdad airport has led to increased calls for the U.S. to withdraw its troops from Iraq. Nine other people were killed in the attack, including several Iraqi leaders in the fight against ISIS. Two days later, Iraq's parliament voted unanimously for U.S. troops to leave the country. Since then, calls for the troop withdrawal have only gotten louder, with Jan. 24 seeing 200,000 people in Baghdad's streets demanding America get out. A couple of days later, the U.S. Embassy dining hall was hit by incoming rocket fire. Can anybody take a hint?

## JULIAN ASSANGE CONTINUES TO FIGHT EXTRADITION TO U.S.

The extradition hearing for Julian Assange in England is slated to begin on Feb. 23. It is set to last one week before an intermission that is expected to last until May as attorneys representing both the U.S. government and Assange say they need more time to gather evidence. The U.S.

## JULIAN ASSANGE

wants Assange extradited to face espionage charges that could land him a 170-year prison sentence, a first for a publisher in American history. Assange published the Iraqi and

Afghan War logs, State Department cables and the "Collateral Murder" video that showed U.S. helicopter pilots massacring a dozen Iraqis in cold blood, including a pair of *Reuters* journalists. Chelsea Manning, the former U.S. Army private who helped Assange carry out his most prolific leaks, remains in jail for refusing to testify to a federal grand jury investigating him. Assange is currently being held in London's notorious Belmarsh Prison.

## BOLSONARO V. GREENWALD

A far-right judge in Brazil has charged Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist and *Intercept* co-founder Glenn Greenwald with cyber crimes for his role in publishing messages that exposed the corrupt nature of a supposed anti-corruption task force. Greenwald, who lives in Brazil with his husband and children, angered the ultra-right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro last year when he published emails exposing the trumped-up investigation that landed former President Lula da Silva in prison in 2018 and cleared the way for Bolsonaro's election. The charges come after months of threats, many of them violent, against Greenwald, his colleagues and his husband, including from Bolsonaro himself, who in July threatened to cane Greenwald and warned he "might wind up in jail."

## GENERAL STRIKE CONTINUES IN FRANCE

A general strike challenging President Emmanuel Macron's neoliberal economic policies continues to rattle the country as *The Indy* goes to press. Plans to reform France's pension system and raise the retirement age set off the strike on Nov. 17. Now entering its third month with millions of workers participating, the strike is the longest France has seen in decades. Macron has talked of compromise but has not offered French unions any major concessions. They in turn accuse him of seeking to shred the last vestiges of the country's social contract.

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# THE COMMUNIST MAYOR OF DERSIM

## WITH COLLECTIVE FARMS, FREE PUBLIC TRANSIT AND A TRANSPARENT BUDGET, HE'S TRANSFORMING THIS CITY IN TURKISH KURDISTAN

BY JACLYNN ASHLY

DERSIM, TURKEY — Worn and ripped flyers of Fatih Mehmet Maçoğlu dot the outsides of homes and shops in Dersim, plastered there during Turkey's municipal elections in March of last year.

In Dersim's city center, a gift shop sells tote bags and trinkets of Maçoğlu, his prominent, bushy mustache — a traditional fashion staple for the Alevi Kurds who make up the majority in Dersim — is cartoonishly exaggerated on its lengths. Like the majority of Dersim's residents, Maçoğlu is a Kurd of the Zaza ethnicity.

As Turkey's first communist mayor of a municipality, he has become a popular figure among Turkish left-wingers. It's difficult to make an appointment at Maçoğlu's office at the municipality's headquarters in downtown Dersim, officially referred to as "Tunceli" by the Turkish government. Maçoğlu prefers the open-door policy, in which anyone can show up at his office unannounced.

Journalists, locals looking to air their grievances and supporters who travel from across the region to take a photo with him patiently wait to get a moment with Maçoğlu — often referred to as the "hero" of Turkey's opposition.

During a recent interview with *The Independent*, Maçoğlu, dressed in jeans and a baby blue polo, sat behind a large desk, surrounded by gifts bestowed upon him by his constituents and framed photos of him farming in his hometown of Ovacik, where he formerly served as mayor.

A large portrait of Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is positioned behind him, a typical fixture in all government offices in Turkey but atypical of Maçoğlu, whose former office in Ovacik was adorned with a painting of Karl Marx in the lobby where Atatürk's portrait is usually placed.

### 'CRITICIZING THE SYSTEM'

Maçoğlu's popularity soared during the five years he served as mayor of Ovacik, in the mountainous region of the wider Dersim Province, where he developed cooperative production models and was praised for his fiscal transparency, even posting the town's budget — including revenues, expenditures and surpluses — on the outside wall of Ovacik's town hall.

"This part of the country hosts the poorest people," said Maçoğlu, a member of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP). "They cannot afford a good standard of living. We started to list the problems in the region and we began to come up with solutions."

The mayor developed an agricultural

cooperative in Ovacik to grow and sell local produce. Its profits went to low-income families. Through a separate program he established, proceeds from farming chickpeas, potatoes and beans on state-owned land were repurposed to fund scholarships for the youth in the town. According to Maçoğlu, it now provides funding for all students in Ovacik to receive university scholarships. He also set up a free transportation system that shuttled residents to and from work.

Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared a state of emergency and dismissed more than 11,000 Kurdish teachers, Maçoğlu assisted the fired teachers in Ovacik, helping them establish dairy and beekeeping cooperatives.

"These programs were the result of criticizing the system we're living in," explained Maçoğlu, who easily switches from serious facial expressions to smiles and cracks jokes that quickly ease any tensions in the room.

"We tried to find a way out of this system in a way that we can still protect the plants animals, and human beings," he said. "We came to understand that we can do this by producing."

A 30-year-old resident of Dersim, who declined to provide his name, told *The Indy* that he supports Maçoğlu largely due to these policies.

The cooperatives "are exemplary of the revolutionary potential of the municipality," he said, adding that although Maçoğlu has become a popular figure, his "revolutionary program" was the outcome of collective socialist assemblies, which have long been active in Dersim.

Maçoğlu is extending the policies he developed in Ovacik throughout the city of Dersim. He tells *The Indy* that he has already established free transportation systems in three neighborhoods in the city and has begun developing industrial and agricultural cooperatives to tackle unemployment.

### 'WE REMINDED PEOPLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES OF THE PAST'

Kurds in Turkey have faced a long history of persecution, which has involved decades of bans on the Kurdish language and identity. The government has since eased some of its restrictions on the Kurdish community. However, Kurds continue to face serious repression.

In 1938, the Turkish government, headed by Atatürk, carried out a massacre in Dersim when a rebellion broke out. The revolt came in response to a Turkish army takeover of the region. Many residents were expelled to other parts of the country in order to forcibly assimilate



JACLYNN ASHLY



JACLYNN ASHLY



them into Turkish society.

The crackdown, which involved the indiscriminate killing of women and children, along with aerial bombardments and alleged gas attacks, resulted in the deaths of at least 40,000 Kurds, according to local sources. The official Turkish death count is closer to 13,000, although residents have long contested this number.

As part of the same operation, the Turkish government officially renamed Dersim “Tunceli,” which means “bronze fist” in Turkish. In May, about a month after Maçoğlu took office, Dersim’s city assembly voted to return the city’s original name to municipal buildings, but the move was blocked by the courts.

Maçoğlu tells *The Indy* one of his primary goals as a politician is to reconnect people with their rebellious heritage. While running for mayor of Ovacik “people were oppressed and hiding themselves and their ideologies,” he says. But while campaigning, he would blare the traditional music of Dersim in the streets, which he said has always been “revolutionary.”

“We started to remind people of the revolutionaries of the past,” he said. “This is why we gained so much support there.”

#### NEGLECTING THE KURDISH STRUGGLE?

Maçoğlu is not without critics, however, some of whom are within his own constituency.

Before Maçoğlu, Dersim was run by the Kurdish-led

Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). The party follows a co-mayor system, in which both a female and male mayor are appointed as part of an effort to promote gender equality. But following the 2016 coup attempt, Dersim’s mayors and other elected Kurdish leaders were dismissed, arrested along with thousands of HDP members and replaced with state-appointed trustees.

Erdogan has consistently alleged that HDP has ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party, which Turkey considers a terrorist organization. Dersim co-mayor Nurhayat Altun is still in prison and facing more than 22 years behind bars on charges of being an “administrator in a terrorist organization.”

Metin Albaslan, a 31-year-old resident of Dersim, told *The Indy* that while he supports Maçoğlu’s socialist policies, even volunteering to help farm in Ovacik when Maçoğlu was mayor there, he sees what he believes is Maçoğlu’s alignment with Turkish nationalists as a blow to his hopes for the Kurdish struggle and disrespectful to the sacrifices of Kurdish activists.

One event was particularly infuriating for him. Last year, Maçoğlu hosted an event for Asure Day, a holiday in the Alevi Islamic tradition, where he served soup to Dersim residents alongside a military official and the governor, an Erdogan appointee.

“Why would he create a public sight like this with people who have tried to erode our communities and values?” Albaslan said. “It’s disrespectful to everyone who has been imprisoned or killed for our struggle.”

Özgür Amed, a writer based in Diyarbakir and a member of HDP, says that Maçoğlu seldom speaks on Kurdish issues, which has made him an uncontroversial figure among the Turkish left wing, where support for Kurdish autonomy in the east is rare.

“He is focused more on popular politics than Kurdish politics,” Amed said, who spent three years in prison for

protesting the Roboski massacre, a 2011 Turkish army border strike carried out with U.S. intelligence that killed 40 Kurdish villagers, mostly teenagers. He and other HDP members continue to support Maçoğlu but “there are still criticisms that are important for him to address.”

For his part, Maçoğlu tends to prioritize the practical over the political and tiptoes around direct questions about the Kurdish struggle — possibly due to fear he might meet the same fate as the last elected mayors in Dersim.

“You can’t talk about democracy in countries where capitalism and imperialism rule,” he said when asked about the erosion of democratic freedoms in Turkey’s Kurdish region. “This country, like many countries, is ruled by capitalism and imperialism. Capitalism is breaking down and it’s showing its cracks.”

Following the coup, an Erdogan loyalist appointed to govern Dersim constructed a concrete wall around city hall and forced visitors to go through an X-ray machine before entering the building. A few days after Maçoğlu took over the mayoral post last year, he removed the walls and the X-ray machine. Dersim residents now walk into the building freely.

#### THE DOOR’S ALWAYS OPEN:

*Fatih Mehmet Maçoğlu at his office at City Hall.*

#### SOMETHING TO TAKE HOME:

*Market stalls in Dersim sell souvenirs with loving caricatures of the city’s mayor on them.*

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# IRAQI & AMERICAN ART MEET AT MOMA

*Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991–2011*

MoMA PS1  
THRU MARCH 1

By Mike Newton

They said it would keep us safe. They said it would keep us strong. They said it was proper retaliation for violence done to us or our allies. On Jan. 3, the Trump administration launched an airstrike in Baghdad that killed general Qasem Soleimani. It felt like the beginnings of yet another endless war at the behest of yet another unpopular Republican president. In claiming that Soleimani was a threat to American lives, Donald Trump was embracing the tactics used effectively by George W. Bush for his 2003 invasion of Iraq (and by Bush's father, George H.W. Bush for his 1991 invasion of Iraq). Vice President Mike Pence even tried to connect Soleimani to the 9/11 attacks, much as the Bush administration did with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. Seventeen years under the same banner, drawing from the same well.

Two months earlier, the "Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991-2011" exhibition opened at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City. Its timing would seem quite prescient, except that there's nothing unusual about this new attack. After all, the United States (along with some European allies) has been manufacturing conflict in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region for decades. Theater of Operations is an ambitious show: a sort of dense, mosaicked history lesson. Its paintings, sculptures, large-scale installations and many hours of video occupy the entire museum.

The show is split between artists from the Middle East and from the West (mainly the United States and the United Kingdom). The Western art is saturated with a grim, vexed, helpless mood. Though most Americans now see the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a mistake, it had broad popular support at first. It was championed as a well-stoked blast of Western supremacy, and as a proud, chest-thumping surge of American masculinity. Writing at the time, cultural theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff likened it to James Joyce's aphorism "And he war." For the United States, the invasion was very much a "he war."

In sad truth, for many on the anti-war left, it was a time of not knowing what to do. That feeling is captured in works like Rainer Ganahl's 2004 paintings of popular online news sites, or Michael Auder's *Gulf War TV War* (2017), a 102-minute compilation of TV footage, starting in 1991 and including war-hungry pundits and fetishistically shot military hardware like fighter jets and sand-colored tanks.

The work from Middle Eastern artists feels different, less despondent. A series of fluid, blue-tinted 1991 works by Thuraya al-Baqsmi, made in Kuwait City while it was under Iraqi occupation, shrouds wartime struggle in scenes of sensual, traditionalist allegory. Khalifa Qattan's luminous, near-psychedelic canvases hint at fiery conflict, but actually predate the early-'90s war. (He has claimed that they were prophetic visions of the wars to come.) The exhibit includes many handmade *dafatir* (small, portable and fairly cheap to make artist books), whose popularity in Iraq emerged — at least somewhat — out of the economic hardship after the 1991 war. Works by Ghassan Ghaib, Sadik Kwaish Alfraji, Kareem Risan and Hanaa Malallah find spaces for loamy,



ground-level immediacy within moments of chaos — a sharp contrast to the top-down aeriality that has come to define the Western position in the region. (Soleimani, for example, was killed with a drone strike.)

There's also straightforward social commentary, like the sculpture  $\infty$  (1991–2001) by Beirut-born British sculptor Mona Hatoum, which presents a battalion of bronze army guys, marching forever forward in a  $\infty$ -shaped loop. A bit blunt, yeah, but is it wrong?

Elsewhere, the exhibition wisely allots breathing room to some especially harrowing works. American video artist Tony Cokes's stark, direct *Evil.16 (Torture.Musik)* (2009–2011) reflects on the shameful and likely continuing U.S. military practice of utilizing loud American music (Guns N' Roses, Christina Aguilera, the Sesame Street theme) as a torture device; Cokes notes that this is war not only in the name of American culture, but actually waged with American culture itself as a weapon. Baghdad-born British painter Dia al-Azzawi's *Mission of Destruction* (2004–2007) is a personalized, muralistic riff on Picasso's 1937 *Guernica*: It takes a symbolic glossary of wartime violence created by a 20th-century European, and reconfigures it for a 21st-century horror waged, in part, by European powers.

Some of the exhibition's strongest moments, though, are from young Iraqi artists such as Ali Yass and Ali Eyal. Both were born after 1991, and both use colorful, airy visuals and intimate subject matter such as childhood drawings, nightmares to prod at the intractable weight of remembered violence. At least one exceptional work has been pulled from the show: British artist Phil Collins removed his 2002 video *baghdad screentests* in protest of MoMA board members Leon Black and Larry Fink's deep ties to war profiteering, military contractors and immigrant detention centers.

It's hard to know what to make of all these small signs of resistance in the face of the ashen, calamitous cruelty of the wars themselves, conflicts that launched at full bore, continue to this day and still serve as a wellspring of imperialistic force for the ruling classes. The fact that a lot of artists hated these wars is some very cold comfort. But right now there's hope, as it seems that the familiar Bush-era drum-beating tactics may have lost their immediate efficacy. The news media seems skeptical, polls show that Americans don't want another war and despite the overt aggression from our government, we are, as of this writing, not in an all-out war with Iran.

If there's a dominant mood in "Theater of Operations," it's one of futility, frustration, and pain. It's harsh in the moment, but there's reason to hope that this feeling will continue to color the legacy of the conflicts, to make it clear that on the ground, no one benefits from these long, sad, and incredibly destructive wars. There's reason to hope, in other words, that the well is starting to run dry.

Jamal Penjweny.  
*Work from the series Saddam is Here. 2010. Photograph. 23 2/3" x 31 1/2" (60 x 80 cm). Courtesy the artist.*

Afifa Aleiby. *Gulf War. 1991. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8" x 27 1/2" (100 x 70 cm). Courtesy the artist.*

Sue Coe. *Bomb Shelter. 1991. Photo-etching on white heavyweight Rives, 9 5/8" x 10 1/2" (24.4 x 26.7 cm). Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York. Copyright © 1990 Sue Coe.*



# ART WITHOUT WALLS

*Certain Days 2020 Calendar: Knitting Together the Struggles*

BY CERTAIN DAYS  
BURNING BOOKS, 2019

By Renée Feltz

It was a full circle moment when Herman Bell attended the launch of the 2020 edition of the *Certain Days* calendar and shared how he conceived the project while he was incarcerated, urging friends to buy a copy by telling them: “Don’t be a square!”

The former Black Panther’s archaically hip cajoling denoted his 44 years behind bars. Given a 25 years to life sentence in 1971 for killing two policemen, Bell was granted parole and released in 2018, after decades of grassroots organizing and critical reforms, which the calendar continues to support by raising funds for projects like RAPP (Release Aging People from Prison).

Bell had the idea for a collaboration between political prisoners and their supporters in 2000, and started the calendar with two other men held in New York maximum security prisons and some Canadian students who visited them. Robert “Seth” Hayes was a former Panther who got 25 years to life in 1971 for the death of a transit officer, and attempted murder of police who stormed his apartment. He died in December 2019, at home, after being paroled just the year before. David Gilbert, sentenced to 75 years to life after a 1981 Brink’s truck robbery with the Black Liberation Army, remains in prison and is still part of the project.

“The calendar arose from connections people made across prison walls and borders,” Sara Falconer, a Canadian collective member since 2003, told *The Independent*. “It’s amazing to see what we’re able to accomplish across all of these different barriers.”

Each new edition of the calendar features 12 original artworks and essays related to a theme — this year it is “Knitting Together the Struggles” — and marks key dates such as the Trans Prisoner Day of Action, radical history like the Attica Prison Rebellion, or the births and deaths of revolutionaries.

“The calendar, very particularly, is meant to be on your wall every day reminding you of things that you might not otherwise think about, and names and stories of political prisoners that you may not even know existed,” said Falconer.

“I always look at it as a bit of a Trojan Horse,” added Daniel McGowan, who first contributed to the calendar in 2008 while serving a seven-year sentence for charges for his role in a series of actions related to the Earth Liberation Front, and became a member of the collective after his release.

“It is really important to know one’s history, especially for new people, who tend to feel by themselves,” McGowan told *The Independent*.

When he hung the calendar in his cell he says the events he read about in it helped him understand, “you are part of something that extends deeper into the past and while your experience here feels very intense to you, it is part of a broader tapestry.”

As he used the calendar to keep track of filing deadlines, the art improved his spirits.

“People say it is important to send beautiful things to prison,” McGowan said. “It does make a difference to wake up to that.”

While there are other radical fundraising calendars packed with art and information, like the Slingshot Organizer, this project features lots of contributions from people who are incarcerated.

“We send out a call-out early in the year so prisoners have time to see what our theme is going to be and think about what inspires them,” said Falconer. “We’re getting pieces from amazing prison artists, despite the fact they have limited access to materials and that it’s hard to get the actual pieces to us.”

Other artists who have contributed include Molly



MARY TREMONTI



GAREN ZAKARIAN



MOLLY FAIR

Fair and Roger Peet, who are members of the Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative, and Brooklyn-based Sophia Dawson, whose vivid portraits aim “to convey the true stories and experiences of oppressed people from political movements in ways that more broadly form, shade and convey the individual and collective injustices they face.”

Editors also compile information about people who have died in prison and updates on newer cases, such as that of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, and Xinachtli, formerly known as Alvaro Luna Hernandez, a Chicano community organizer who was sentenced to 50 years for disarming a sheriff who attempted to shoot him.

“Even as we see political prisoner populations shrink,” McGowan noted, “as long as we have resistance movements the state will incarcerate people from those movements.”

In the United States, the calendar is now distributed by Burning Books, based in Buffalo, New York, whose co-owner Leslie James Pickering is a former spokesperson for the Earth Liberation Front who challenged the FBI’s attempt to surveil and intimidate him. It costs \$15 and all proceeds benefit RAPP, Addameer (Arabic for “conscience”) Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, and related campaigns. Groups can buy copies in bulk for \$10 each to raise funds and awareness, and prisoners can order them for \$8.

“We go to significant ends to make sure it gets in there,” McGowan said. If a calendar is rejected by prison censors, he cuts out whatever they find offensive and sends it back. “We are involved right now in re-sending one to a political guy at Angola in Louisiana for the third time.”

In March the *Certain Days* collective plans to announce a new theme and call for submissions as it prepares to celebrate a milestone 20th anniversary.

“To have something that is both symbolically inspiring and materially impacting makes me really proud,” Falconer told *The Independent*, “and excited to see what’s next.”

For more information visit [CertainDays.org](http://CertainDays.org)

Image for January 2020 in the *Certain Days* calendar.

Image of former political prisoner Marilyn Buck for August 2020. Buck played a key role in helping former Black Panther Assata Shakur escape from prison in 1979 and flee to Cuba.

Image for July 2020.



## HOODWINKED

*Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*

By KEEANGA-YAMAHTTA TAYLOR  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS, 2019

By Julia Thomas

In 1970, Janice Johnson, a Black single mother in Philadelphia, was facing eviction from an old apartment building condemned by the city. She was desperately seeking a place for her and her 8-year-old son to live, and her attempts to rent nearby apartments were coming up short. A landlord suggested she buy rather than rent a home, and just two weeks later, Johnson was approved for a Federal Housing Administration-backed mortgage loan of \$5,800.

Conditions in their new home quickly deteriorated after they moved in. The sewer line broke and leaked all over the basement floor. The electricity was sporadic and faulty, the windows were nailed shut and unusable, and Johnson's son once awoke to find a rat in his bed. But when Johnson complained to the landlord who'd recommended buying the house, he told her the problems were hers alone.

Janice Johnson's story introduces Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's new book, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Home Ownership*. It argues that federal policies intended to end racial discrimination in housing and encourage Black homeownership actually wound up enabling predatory real-estate practices.

Racism was deeply embedded in the U.S. housing market in 1970. "Restrictive clauses" in deeds that banned homes from being sold to Black people were common. Black people were barred from the Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village complex in Manhattan when it opened after World War II, and the developer, the MetLife insurance company, won a court ruling in 1947 that it had a right to discriminate because it was a private entity. Banks and the federal government routinely "redlined" neighborhoods that were predominantly Black or Latino, denying mortgage or property-improvement loans to homeowners and landlords on the grounds that those areas were bad investments.

Two federal laws enacted in 1968, the Fair Housing Act and the Housing and Urban Development Act, were intended to break these patterns, which had proven much more intractable than segregation in restaurants or voting restrictions. The Fair Housing Act was on its surface an attempt to end redlining and discriminatory housing practices, while the HUD Act called for massive construction or rehabilitation of housing units, abetted by new partnerships between the federal government and the private sector. Taylor argues that these partnerships perpetuated the racial gap in home ownership and were ultimately "intended to create greater penetration and mobility for capital, not people."

By expanding home ownership to an unprecedented number of Black Americans through small down payments and government-insured mortgages, a "collaborative relationship" between public and private sectors emerged. Rather than contribute to the false narrative of housing inequality as a decades-long "crisis," Taylor

instead says that this relationship gave disproportionate control over housing access to the real-estate industry and bankers who were encouraged to lend more than ever before — a phenomenon she calls

"predatory inclusion."

The HUD Act, she writes, made dilapidated housing valuable to developers, which ultimately overrode the

ter World War II — by 1960, 60 percent of adults in the U.S. were homeowners — cemented home ownership as a fundamental feature of life and the accepted norm for families. However, Taylor uses ample evidence to underscore the problems that have come from framing homes as a commodity and an indicator of economic mobility.

She also focuses on the demonization of Black Americans as "incapable" homeowners, which often manifested itself in "the prevailing wisdom that 'homogenous neighborhoods' were the most valuable." She points out that many of the issues orbiting around the appraisal of property values were rooted in a lack of uniformity in standards and licensing.

Similarly, when President Richard Nixon announced that the federal government would not enforce local compliance with the Fair Housing Act and thus would not "impose economic integration upon an existing local jurisdiction," he made the false assumption that people in the United States all had equal ability to buy homes within their means. This laid the foundation for weak enforcement of the Fair Housing Act and malpractice by real-estate brokers, bankers and local politicians alike.

She points out that the systemic foreclosure of Black-owned homes that followed deregulation in the 1990s, the erosion of house prices in Black communities and the embedded market assumption that Black buyers are "risky" were the factors that combined to allow "the re-emergence of naked, predatory practices in the real-estate market."

Taylor's book is compelling and artful in its presentation of a racist and manipulative housing market. After tying together the many components at work within the nation's housing horror story, she concludes on the note that "the partnering of public institutions in these private practices that are contingent on racial practices is a recipe for continued inequality, compromised inclusion, and unfair outcomes."

*Race For Profit* is an invaluable historical dive into a topic that needs much more attention, but I found myself wishing for Taylor's perspective on housing reforms and imaginative thinking about more anti-racist affordable housing policy. As it is, the book debunks the myths of home ownership as a just representation of market opportunity: History, Taylor writes, is not repeating itself with housing inequality, but cyclically proceeding as a "predictable outcome when the

home... continued to be promoted as the fulfillment and meaning of citizenship."

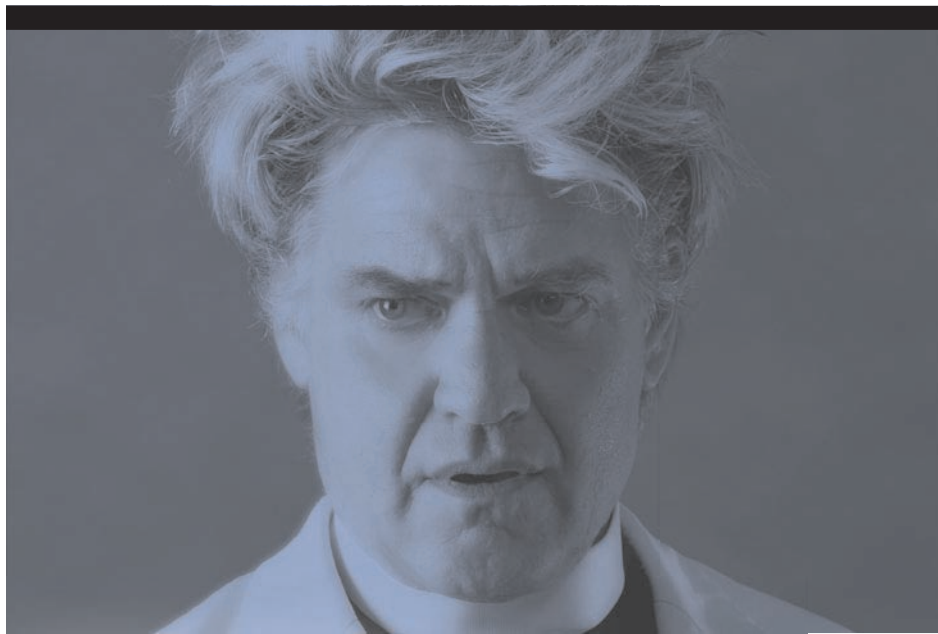


LYNNE FOSTER

incentives it gave them to build new affordable-housing units. Suburbanites consistently resisted the construction of low-income housing, and housing-industry executives lobbied hard for the use of existing housing units in city centers. As this new housing market came to be "almost out of thin air," the prospective homebuyers the law was targeting — mostly low-income Black families — were pressured by predatory real-estate brokers into buying overpriced properties, sometimes at over three or four times their value.

Taylor uses this angle to guide her explanation of the social conditions, policy changes, and economic ins and outs that have paved the way for the continued segregation and wealth dispossession of Black Americans. The vastly expanded access to affordable housing in the decades af-





JON QUILTY

# TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

Hey there, Rev,  
So those dire apocalyptic prophecies of yours are coming to fruition. Australia is on fire. It's a scary time to live on planet Earth. Which brings me to my question. I'm sure you get a lot of people asking you, "How do I stick to my New Year's resolutions?" this time of year. But I'm feeling a bit paralyzed. What I'd like to know is, how do I determine what my resolutions should be? Dieting and exercise don't seem like enough anymore.

— BURT, Upper West Side

Burt,  
This question is one that many of us are asking right now. How can I contribute when the scale of the Evil is so vast. The racist violence and the Earth's fire and flood and the pernicious infection called the 1 percent paralyzes us. Let's go straight from "feeling a bit paralyzed" to the CHANGE WE GOTTA SEE, Burt.

I can hear you asking, "How do I start?"  
One approach: look at different radical communities, from Rise and Resist to Extinction Rebellion to Decolonize This Place to local struggles against real estate thugs. Check in with New York Communities for Change or, in Sunset Park, UP-ROSE. There are many doorways to the struggle. But once you plug in, there's joy.

In 2020, most of us in the United States are still busy with our conveniences. We're nursing our hesitations. Living your life through products is a really dangerous kind of paralysis, because there are products that persuade you that you are already making change. I speak of our computers, for instance, which paralyze by taking us out of our bodies into a dream of revolution. But, to draw on Gil Scott-Heron, "The revolution won't be pixelated." Bodies and souls in the streets, Burt. Let's go into JPMorgan Chase and stop the Earth-killing money.

• • •

Hi Billy,  
I read in the New York Times today how Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin picked on Greta Thunberg at the World

Economic Forum. Mnuchin said Greta should go to college and study economics before she can talk to the likes of him about climate change. All this has me thinking, what's your advice for dealing with bullies — be they playground brats, barroom ruffians or government officials? It seems like bullies rule the world and they're destroying it! My climate anxiety has me grinding my teeth in my sleep and I'm about ready to kick the next guy who butts ahead of me getting on the train in the groin.

— BONNIE, Woodlawn Heights

Mnuchin's bullying comes from his upbringing by his father Robert, who should've been groin-kicked before he bought Jeff Koons' stainless-steel *Rabbit* for \$91 million. The elder Mnuchin, banker-turned-art-dealer, bought the famous silver toy for Steve Cohen, who in turn bought off the SEC for \$1.8 billion after some insider trading at his hedge fund.

These are the dregs of the scum of society, Bonnie. Bullies, well, of course. And bullying Greta Thunberg with the elitism of the professional, the proximity to the president and extreme wealth — yes, yes.

But there is a distinction to be made. Mnuchin, like his buddy Trump, is a murderer. The "bullies who rule the world," as you put it, are bullies all day long to individuals, and they bully the Earth too, with countless victims. The personal is global.

These fetid nincompoops have intersectionalities of Evil spitting from every hole in their heads. Very few full-on fossil-fuel capitalists are not bullies in person. You want my advice on dealing with bullies? Deal with the war-scale bullying first. Save life! Life-a-lujah!

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

The Political Economy of Silicon Valley

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Rob Larson

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the Air — Max Elbaum

FEMINIST THEORY  
FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

MON FEB 10 • 7-9:30PM  
MEMOIR: Trans writers Cecilia Gentili, Torrey Peters and McKenzie Wark go beyond confessional narratives.

SAT FEB 15 • 7-9:30PM  
READING: New and established female voices in horror, fantasy, sci-fi and weird fiction, plus a Q&A roundtable.

SUN FEB 23 • 7-9:30PM  
BOOK LAUNCH: Behind the Sun, Above the Moon, a short story anthology by nonbinary authors.

ING THE COLOR

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HISTORY  
ED STATES



# ***Dumped...*** ***On Valentine's Day?*** ***By New York's*** ***Democratic Party?***



Why? Because **VALENTINE'S DAY** is the deadline to change your registration to Democrat in order to be eligible to vote for President in New York's **April 28th Primary**.

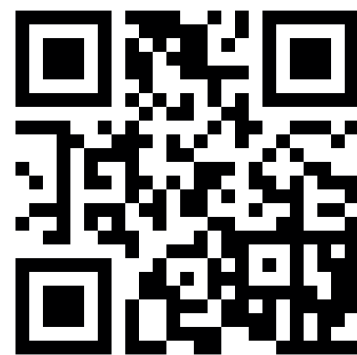
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