

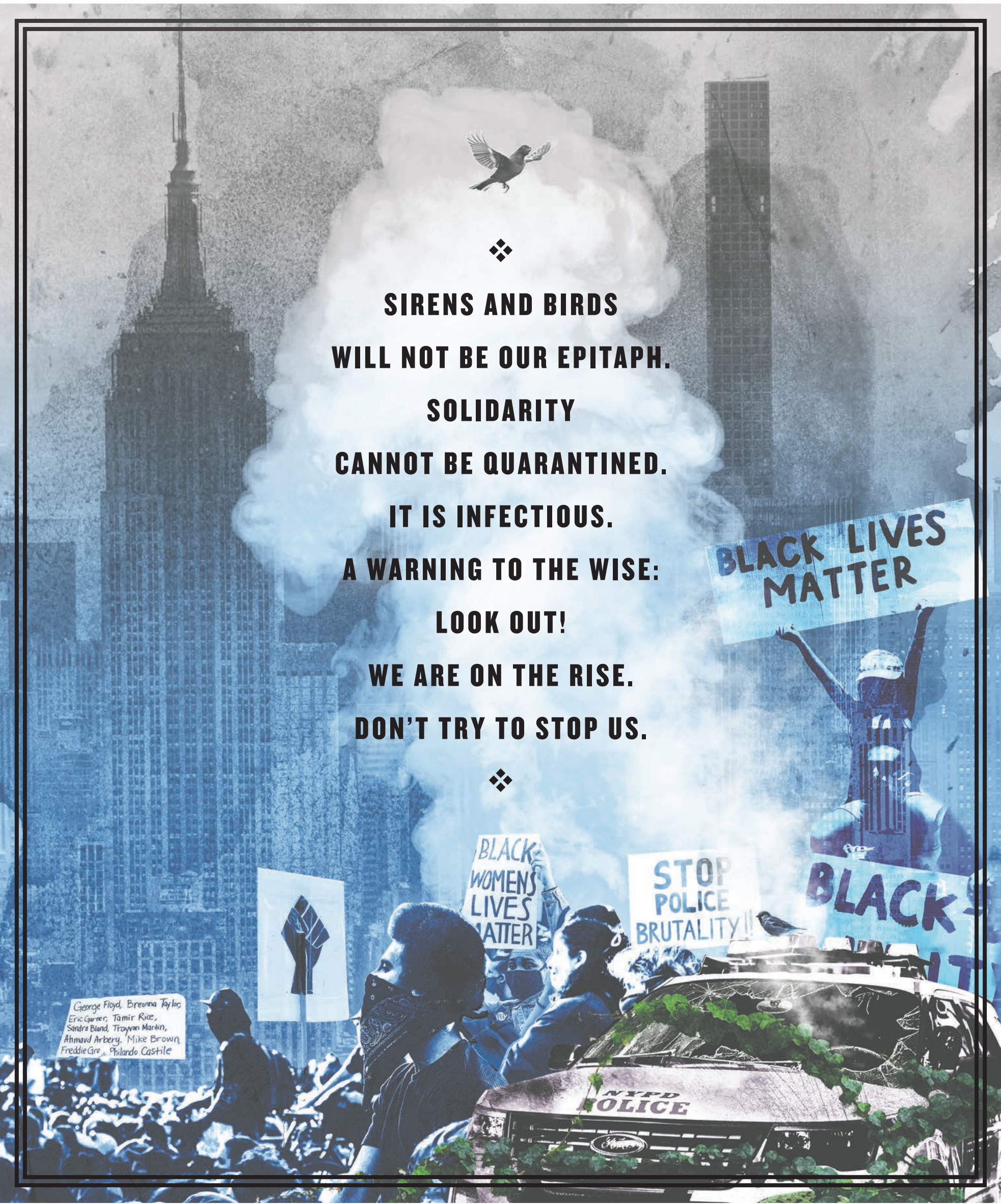
# THE INDYPENDENT



**SIRENS AND BIRDS  
WILL NOT BE OUR EPITAPH.  
SOLIDARITY  
CANNOT BE QUARANTINED.  
IT IS INFECTIOUS.  
A WARNING TO THE WISE:  
LOOK OUT!  
WE ARE ON THE RISE.  
DON'T TRY TO STOP US.**



George Floyd, Breonna Taylor,  
Eric Garner, Tamir Rice,  
Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin,  
Ahmad Arbery, Mike Brown,  
Freddie Gray, Philando Castile



LEIA DORAN

**BLACK LIVES MATTER COVERAGE, BEGINS P2**



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# NEW YORK RISING

PHOTOS BY SUE BRISK

TEXT BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

“I can’t breathe.”  
New Yorkers heard those anguished words before, from Eric Garner. When they heard them from George Floyd, they sprang into action by the tens thousands — marching, chanting, singing, kneeling, defying curfew, battling the police and setting their cop cars on fire.

The protesters come from all races and walks of life. Their demands are 400 years in the making — value black life equally. End police violence. End systemic racism. Lift the knee that crushes the hopes and dreams of the majority of people in this winner-take-all capitalist system.

As *The Indy* goes to press in early June, similar protests are taking place in cities and towns in all 50 states and around the world. With their spectacular, unrelenting displays of brutality, the cops have done more in a short time to advance the cause of ending policing as we know it than activists have in the past decade.

It’s impossible to say what direction this rebellion will take. But one thing is clear — we are living in extraordinary times and our assumptions about how far and how fast we can transform the institution of policing will continue to change.



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# WHY WE EXPLODE

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

I refused to see him die. I did not look at the newspapers in bodegas or on Facebook, or texts from friends. At a restaurant, a TV showed a white cop kneeling on a Black man's neck, and I left before eating.

The video of Officer Derek Chauvin killing George Floyd ripped the scab off our Blackness. Inside, where Color connects us, pain throbbed. We just buried our grandparents and friends who died from COVID-19. We just lost our jobs. Maybe the worst was over? I mean, damn, can we catch a break?

Outside the bodega, neighbors stared at cellphones, faces twisted in horror. "Did you see how they did that brother?" "I can't breathe?" "Fuck the police!" I saw open pain in their eyes. Beneath their mask of street machismo was a deep underground cavern where life's bitterness had pooled. And Floyd's death was a lit match falling in.

The next day the news showed Minneapolis burning. And then D.C. burned. And Brooklyn too. Headlines focused on the fire. Pundits focused on police brutality. But it was larger than Floyd's murder. The white officer who killed him was a symbol of racism. In this case, police brutality. In other cases, the violence is muted. Our bodies carry the hurt that sloshes inside like a sea of gasoline and it, not the latest headline, is what sets the world ablaze.

## TO SERVE & PROTECT

A police SUV whooshed by us. We swiveled our heads to follow it. Another police SUV sped by so fast it spun the sidewalk trash into mini-tornados. One. Two. Three more. Loud alarms echoed down the street.

"Man," T. said, "I keep tracking these cops, I'll sprain my neck."

We laughed. I asked him if he was protesting. He said "naw." He avoided my eyes. And fidgeted with his COVID-19 mask. We had had this talk before. When Sean Bell was killed by the NYPD, I went to the funeral and joined the protests. He did not. When Eric Garner was killed, the same. Most of my neighbors do not march.

In their long New York lives, they've heard too many gunshots and seen too many dead. They watched mayors make promises that never came true or protests that shook the city but left no lasting change. To protect themselves from the vulnerability of hope, they developed a stoic fatalism. Nothing gets better. Just do your hustle, man.

"I gotta go. Things to do," T. said and we bumped elbows. What hope he had left was stuffed into a zip lock bag and thrown into the cavern we carry. Splash.

He had been arrested once. When he got out, we cheered. Damn near everyone here has been in detention at one time or another. It is to be expected.

Jail gave us crazy hallway talk-a-thons, and midnight stoop confessions. I laughed at neighbors' tales of faking illness to get out of jail and into a hospital, or masturbating so much it hurt. At some point, the tone shifted. I heard of rape, or of learning after a funeral that an aunt or grandpa had died, or their child not running into their arms when they came out. They gasped, mid-sentence, as if drowning in themselves.

It is easy to get caught out there. Lord. I've seen old men stopped and frisked, and teens carrying groceries. My ex-roommate, a Nigerian student, went out for a loosie, and came back wild-eyed and sweaty. The police stopped and frisked him. His hands shook while lighting the cigarette. I tried to avoid that fate with middle-class camouflage. Nice clothes. Nice diction. Didn't work. I was busted for an unpaid fine. The cop clamped

**OUR BODIES CARRY THE HURT THAT SLOSHES INSIDE LIKE A SEA OF GASOLINE.**

handcuffs on me. I spent 16 hours in jail. I paced the dirty cell in an endless circle, breathing in and out slowly.

After I paid the fine and was released, that night in jail plummeted somewhere inside me. I'm not sure what happens there. I'm not sure I can open it again.

## BREATH WORK

Helicopters circled the city, needling the protests below with thin spotlights. I stood on the roof under a purple New York night, scrolling through my Facebook feed and seeing friends' protest photos. A beatific glow shined on them. The truth that guided them was so sacred and so strong. They marched fearlessly into rows of police armored in riot gear.

Text after text came.

"Are you coming?" "We'll be at this rally. Join!" "We're bringing this system DOWN."

"Maybe," I texted back. I knew I was going. But the video had to be seen first. Googling up George Floyd, I saw his face on screen, lifted it to sky where he looked like a patron saint, a big handsome man that could blow the helicopters away.

The link to his recorded murder was there and I pressed it. A wobbly camera showed three cops crushing him with their knees. "I can't breathe man. Please." Chauvin grinds his knee into Floyd's neck. "I can't move." He gasps. "Mama." Eyes shut. No breathing. I stopped the video.

His last words echoed in the night. Helpless and scared, he called for his mother. The father in me wanted to push the cops off and stand him up, wrap my arms around Floyd as if he were my son and tell him he's safe.

In a way, he was my son. He was my father too. And brother. He was my uncle and grandfather. He was my aunt, sister and mother. He was every one of us, because all of us can see ourselves or someone we love in him. When he died, a piece of us died.

I closed my eyes and Floyd's face fell like a shooting star, down, down into that place where the night in jail was buried in my body. The deeper it went, the more it illuminated. I saw again, Sean Bell in the casket, and remembered how young he looked, and I heard again T. saying how he missed his kid while locked up, and, further in, I saw again Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, even deeper, Emmett Till and the Scottsboro Boys, and the nameless burnt bodies of Black people lynched as white crowds cheered, and, deeper yet, was the memory of white boys in a car, shouted slurs at me and speeding off as I threw a rock, or hearing that my best friend's dad had called me a "nigger friend."

The obscene light of Floyd's death illuminated not my pain but the pain others shared with me, like the night a Black poet told me her sister, a sex worker who sold herself to mostly white men, died of a drug overdose, or a Black man I met walking home at night lifted his shirt to show me knife scars. Or a close friend, embarrassed at wearing wigs after years of straightening cream had burned her scalp bald. Story after story after story.

Voices poured into the basin of the soul to form a sea larger than space and time. And Floyd's face touched its surface and it ignited. In that brief moment, the ancestors' one demand was clear: Take responsibility for that pain and remake this world into one where everyone we love can breathe.

"Thank you, Floyd," I said to the sky, "Thank you, brother, for showing the way."





## BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

### NY LEGE LIFTS BLUE CURTAIN ON POLICE DISCIPLINARY RECORDS

New York lawmakers voted on June 9 to repeal statute 50-a, a law that has kept police disciplinary records secret for decades and has long been a major obstacle for police accountability in the state. For years, activists have pushed for the repeal, only to see legislative efforts stall. But nationwide protests against police brutality have breathed new life into the fight. Another bill that mandates body cameras for officers has also resurfaced in recent days and is expected to pass.

“The silver lining on this incredibly dark cloud is that the sun is finally starting to shine on injustice,” said state Sen. Jamaal Bailey (D-Bronx/Westchester), who sponsored the bill. “Maybe it’s the unmistakable video evidence that we saw a live murder on TV, but it’s done something to the consciousness of America.”

### MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL VOWS TO DISBAND POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd has sparked a national reckoning. In an unprecedented move, the Minneapolis City Council announced its intention on June 7 to dismantle the city’s police department and “end policing as we know it.”

“Our efforts at incremental reform have failed. Period,” said the city council’s president, Lisa Bender. Nine council members, a veto-proof majority, said at a rally that they were committed to replacing the police department with a community-based public safety system. The day before, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said he was opposed to disbanding the police and was subsequently booed by a crowd of demonstrators. If Minneapolis follows through with its promise to dismantle its law enforcement, the move would be historic and could serve as a blueprint for police abolition nationally.

### ACTIVISTS DEMAND ANSWERS & JUSTICE FOR BREONNA TAYLOR

On March 13, Breonna Taylor, a

**BYE-BYE:** A toppled Christopher Columbus statue outside the Minnesota State Capitol is loaded onto a flatbed truck after Native American activists tore it down on June 10.

26-year-old emergency medical technician, was shot eight times by police who forcibly entered her home in Louisville, Kentucky. Months later, with no arrests made in the case, protesters are still calling for justice and there have been some signs of progress. The three officers present at the shooting remain on administrative leave. On May 21, the Louisville FBI said they were opening an investigation into Taylor’s death. And on June 3, Louisville announced it was commissioning an independent review of its police department.

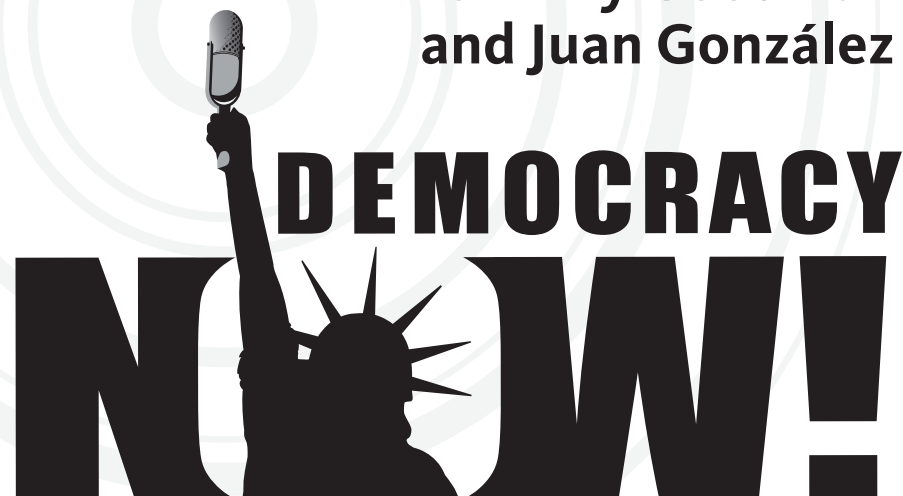
Calls for justice for Taylor have spread from Louisville around the country and continue to echo through the streets. For her family and friends, this gives some solace. “They really supporting you now,” a friend of Taylor’s told NPR, addressing the departed nurse. “Everybody knows your story. You’re going to be heard finally.”

### STATUES OF FAMOUS RACISTS TARGETED

Across the country, demonstrators are toppling and defacing statues of famous racists. In Richmond, Virginia, protesters dragged a statue of Christopher Columbus into a lake. In Boston, demonstrators beheaded Columbus statue. At Texas A&M University, a statue of Lawrence Sullivan Ross, a Confederate general, was spray painted with the words “racist” and “ACAB,” all cops are bastards.

Activists have struggled to rid cities of statues of Confederates, colonialists and slaveowners for years. These statues continue to be targets in protests against racism. As a result, cities are rethinking them entirely. After protesters in Philadelphia targeted a statue of Frank Rizzo, the city’s former mayor who left a legacy of brutal police violence, current mayor Jim Kenney announced it would be taken down. “The statue represented bigotry, hatred and oppression for too many people,” he tweeted.

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

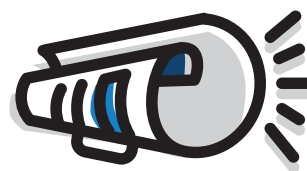


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# POLICE DEFUNDING BATTLE HEATS UP AT CITY COUNCIL

BY PAT ROUGH

**B**udget season is underway at City Hall and a bloody season of discontent rages in the streets.

Months under coronavirus shutdown have drained New York's coffers and the city faces its worst budget shortfall since President Ford told it to go to hell.

With a \$9 billion deficit on their hands, lawmakers are facing grievous decisions over what is and what isn't worth saving. The task is not one of simple arithmetic, but strikes at the heart of what we value as a city and who we are, what is worth preserving and what is worth abandoning.

As it stands now, under Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan, the Police Department will receive the most minor of abrasions, while the areas of education, health and human services, sanitation and parks, are set to be lacerated.

But if the NYPD is making a case for why its \$6 billion annual budget deserves to be spared as the rest of the city government is carved to the bone, it has a strange way of going about it: clubbing peaceful Justice for George Floyd demonstrators, driving SUVs into them, meeting anti-police brutality rallies with unceremonious brutality.

The violence has underscored the failure of years of "community policing" initiatives intended to "restore trust" between city residents and law enforcement. These initiatives were launched by the de Blasio administration in the wake of the stop-and-frisk era, when hundreds of thousands of young blacks and Latinos per year were targeted by the NYPD without probable cause.

"We've been told for five years, 'Don't worry. We're gonna fix policing'" Alex Vitale, author of *The End of Policing*, tells *The Independent*. "'We're gonna give them some implicit bias training. We're gonna give them some police-community encounter sessions. We're gonna get them to wear body cameras. We're gonna create a civilian review board.' And this made absolutely no difference. The problem remains because the problem can't be fixed through those kinds of superficial, procedural reforms. The problem is a massive problem of over-policing."

This NYPD's violent assaults on peaceful protesters, circulated widely on social media, has long-time criminal justice reformers arguing that it's the cops for once who should face austerity, so that New Yorkers hit with illness, job loss, months of isolation, fear and privation, might not see the basic services they rely on vanquished.

City Comptroller Scott Stringer and Council Speaker Cory John-

son, both of whom will be running to replace de Blasio in 2021, have taken up the call to defund the Police Department

As *The Indy* goes to press, the mayor has begun to hedge, saying he supported cuts to the police budget but refused to put a number on the amount. He has previously sought a \$640 million reduction to the Education Department's budget and \$23.8 million from the NYPD's.

"For folks who say 'defund the police,' I would say that is not the way forward," de Blasio said during an early June press briefing.

During de Blasio's six years in office, the NYPD's budget has ballooned by \$1.1 billion. In 2015, the council approved the hiring of an additional 1,297 officers with the expectation that the new hires would reduce overtime costs and help implement the mayor's new community policing initiatives. As a trade-off, additional spending was allotted to the city's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which serves 75,000 young New Yorkers.

Since then, NYPD overtime spending has risen by \$150 million over 2014 levels to nearly three quarters of a billion dollars, while the \$124-million youth jobs program is now on the chopping block.

"You're saying we can't hire no teachers, no counselors. The only thing, however, that we can add more to is hiring a class of police," Public Advocate Jumaane Williams told NY1 this month, addressing the mayor.

As a councilmember, Williams voted in favor of the additional officers on the condition of more funding for SYEP.

The problem, according to Vitale and others, is the presence of police in numerous areas of social life where they do not belong. They're in schools, enforcing subway-fare collection, they're pounding on the doors of the mentally ill and clearing homeless encampments.

The Policing & Social Justice Project, which Vitale heads, wants to see \$1 billion in cuts for the NYPD over the next four years. Such a funding reduction would bring the force's spending levels down to those of 2014.

In a June 4 letter to the mayor, Comptroller Stringer called for cutting the NYPD's budget even further, by \$1.1 billion over the same time period, and redirecting the funds to social service agencies better suited to the tasks the NYPD has been assigned.

Robert Gangi with the Police Reform Organizing Project expressed support for the proposal, urging the removal of the NYPD's 5,000-plus safety officers from public schools, the disbanding of vice and peddler squads and dispatching social workers and mental health professionals rather than police to respond to persons in psychological crisis. He notes that while the police force is considered "sacrosanct" by de Blasio, during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and under Mayor Michael Bloomberg after 9/11, the NYPD's budget was also reduced.

"That's what should happen today in the interest of justice, in the interest of fiscal responsibility," Gangi said.

"We need to reduce the burden of policing instead of imagining that we can make them friendlier and nicer," adds Vitale.

Such a reform would also reduce the likelihood of encounters between law enforcement and communities of color that can prove deadly at the drop of a hat.

For more on the campaign to defund the NYPD, see [policingandjustice.squarespace.com](http://policingandjustice.squarespace.com) and [changethenypd.org](http://changethenypd.org).



# THE NYPD HAS ITS OWN WELFARE STATE

BY JOHN TARLETON

**B**eing a cop is a pretty shitty job. Harassing, bullying and lordling yourself over the people you ostensibly "serve and protect" is no one's idea of fun unless you're a sadist. And Lord knows the NYPD attracts a fair number of those. But what motivates the rest to stick around and make a career out of such a lousy line of work? The pay. The benefits. And a pension that most 21st-century American workers would find inconceivable.

Starting annual pay for an NYPD officer is only \$42,000 but it quickly soars to \$85,000 after five-and-a-half years on the force. With abundant opportunities for overtime, that can boost annual pay to over \$100,000 per year. Higher-ranking members of the force fare even better. Officers also qualify for full medical coverage; full prescription, vision and dental coverage, unlimited sick pay, and 26 days of paid vacation per year.

But it's the pension plan that provides the golden handcuffs that bind any would-be rebel to his or her job. NYPD officers can retire after 22 years on the force and receive half their annual pay ev-





ery year for the rest of their lives. The pension formula is based in part on average pay during the final three or five years on the force when an officer will try to rack up as much overtime as they can get.

Mass protest movements like Occupy and Black Lives Matter annoy the fuck out of cops — the long hours, the disrespect from many demonstrators, their refusal to follow orders or be in awe of authority. But truth be told, mass protest movements are also a windfall for police officers in the final stages of their careers.

As Joe Biden would say, here's the deal. Most NYPD officers retire in their mid-40s. If they live to be 80, they will collect close to \$2 million in pension payments on top of the roughly \$2 million they earn during their active-duty years. That's \$3.5 to \$4 million in lifetime earnings, plus all the non-cash benefits for 22 years of work. For the white-shirted commanders who love to throw protesters around like rag dolls, it's far more.

Would you make the trade-off? Twenty-two of the best years of your life spent as a cop in return for a lifetime of economic security? For many, the terms are irresistible. In 2019, the NYPD had 36,038 active officers on payroll plus another 53,441 retirees and beneficiaries.

Think of it as affirmative action for bullies; a Scandinavian-style welfare state for a warrior caste deeply committed to its mission — suppressing the lower classes to keep the city safe and profitable for market-rate real estate and its occupants.

When we defund the NYPD's bloated budget, we are able to invest more resources in our communities while making life safer for those who don't want to die while living black.

## POLICE UNION BUCKS CHUCKED

BY CARRIE KLEIN

**A**ron Fernando was looking into the campaign finance contributions of some progressive candidates he follows when the country erupted into fury over George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer.

"Is this a good time for me to drop my list of NYC elected officials who've taken cop money this cycle?" he wondered aloud on Twitter.

Soon after, Fernando released a spreadsheet of Democratic senators, City Council members, Assembly members, and district attorneys who have accepted money from police, correction and court officer unions. The list shows that 57 New York City Democrats have accepted \$353,795 from police in the 2020 cycle alone.

Many of these officials have expressed their outrage over George Floyd's death. They tout progressive platforms. And they are funded by cops.

Fernando's research, released at the right time, has sparked a movement across the country to pressure politicians to donate money they've received from police to antiracist causes.

"We now have people doing this same thing in Colorado, Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware and California," Fernando noted. "And we've seen real change already. The president of the Colorado Senate returned money because of pressure that one person on Twitter was putting on him."

Fernando, 19, is a student at CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

In New York, 15 of the politicians on Fernando's list have together donated over \$50,000 to bail funds, mutual aid projects, Black Lives Matter and other organizations fighting police violence.

Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas of Western Queens was one of the first elected leaders Fernando called out, noting on Twitter that she "has taken \$1,500 from police unions this cycle," \$500 apiece from the Police Investigators Association, the Police Benevolent Association and the state troopers union.

Twenty minutes later, Simotas, who is being challenged in June 23 primary by democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani announced she would be donating \$5,350 to bail funds and organizations working to end mass incarceration.

While celebrating Simotas' announcement, Fernando, who like Mamdani is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, also noted, "For the record, she took this money for a decade without any worries."

Four hours later, Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz followed Simotas' lead. Cruz tweeted that she would be donating the \$1,000 her campaign received from law enforcement unions to a bail fund.

"If it wasn't for the pressure, they wouldn't have done this. But it has started a chain reaction," Fernando said.

As the national conversation has moved to what it means to actually support black lives beyond a symbolic post or statement, the power of police unions has come into the spotlight.

"Some politicians say 'My donations don't affect who I am and what I support.' That's not true," Fernando says.

"If you're funded by a union who is out there arguing for oppressive policies, you can't be out there arguing for criminal justice reform. That's why you see that progressive legislation won't pass unless you have this kind of pressure."

Police unions help cops get better pay and benefits, but more than that, they protect them from the repercussions of their actions.

John Matthews of the Justice Collaborative explains, "Police unions offer protections for officers that kill people. They provide lawyers, messaging, help to find them new policing jobs, and political pressure to prevent reforms that would reduce or even eliminate the ongoing crisis of police killings of black people."

"It is impossible to talk about ending police violence and stopping the ongoing killing of black people without talking about police unions and their unique influence on politics," Matthews adds.

Right now, there's a movement to repeal 50-a, a state law that keeps personnel records of police officers confidential and "not subject to inspection or review" without the officer's permission. According to Fernando's research, 16 New York City Democrats in the state legislature are taking money from the Police Benevolent Association — the largest of the five police unions in the city. Fourteen of those Democrats are not sponsoring the repeal of 50-a. They have not yet responded to Fernando's tweets.

This is not the first time someone has called attention to the power of police unions and their funding.

"In the criminal justice space, people have known for a long time that this money from conservative movements is toxic and blocks up progressive legislation," says Fernando.

"We've been talking about this forever. The fact that it's finally come to the forefront is a great thing."

"I wish this moment hadn't happened," he added. "But the fact that it did shows there's some hope for holding officers and law enforcement officials accountable."





# OPEN STREETS FOR ALL

## NYC'S TRANSIT FUTURE IS UP FOR GRABS

BY CARRIE KLEIN

“The bike shop is the new club,” tweeted Danny Harris, executive director of Transportation Alternatives and now a member of Mayor de Blasio’s Surface Transportation Advisory Council.

Harris was referencing a photo of customers in a socially-distanced line waiting to get into Bicycle Habitat in Chelsea. Habitat and bike stores across the city are running out of all but the most expensive bikes, and orders are delayed until July or August.

In many parts of the city, bikers and pedestrians now far outnumber the cars on New York’s normally congested streets. According to the city Department of Transportation, March saw 50 percent more bike traffic on bridges between Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens compared to last year. Citi Bike has reported a 67 percent surge in ridership.

Over Memorial Day weekend, Mayor Bill de Blasio opened 13 new miles of temporary, pedestrian-only streets, bringing the city’s total to 43 miles. The mayor’s Open Streets Plan, announced in late April, also includes nine miles of temporary bike lanes. The plan promises to open 100 miles, or 2 percent, of the city’s 6,000 miles of streets.

After first claiming that the city could not operate safely with open streets, the mayor reversed his position and has since bragged on Twitter that New York now has more car-free streets than any other city in the nation.

But, says Joseph Cutrufo of Transportation Alternatives, “Mayor de Blasio didn’t carry the torch on this. He did it because of overwhelming pressure. We were pushing for open streets in mid-March.”

Many other cities, including Boston, Minneapolis and Oakland, were opening their streets before NYC began to. In early April, Oakland announced it would open 74 miles, or 10 percent of the city’s roads, for pedestrian use.

The Open Streets Plan is now helping New Yorkers get outside and may also provide a boost to restaurants. With more space for outdoor seating, restaurants will be able to increase the amount of customers they can safely serve once the city begins to ease out of its lockdown.

Yet the plan is not serving the city and its boroughs equal-

ly. A map published by the Trust for Public Land shows the city has left out low-income and high-density areas most in need of open streets, where communities do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk from home.

Transportation is “health concern and a human right,” the Queens Bike Initiative said in a statement. “Want to know which neighborhoods were hit the hardest by COVID-19? Hint: look for the neighborhoods with the

fewest transportation alternatives.”

Last week, Transportation Alternatives, Bronx Health REACH and more than 130 local businesses and community groups launched the Open Streets Coalition. They are calling on de Blasio to expand the Open Streets Program.

“We urge you to think bigger,” the coalition wrote in an open letter to the mayor. “New York City needs Open Streets that serve more purposes and more people” and must “provide space for our restaurants and stores to reopen, and introduce cleaner air in neighborhoods plagued by pollution and disproportionately affected by COVID-19.”

Those who can avoid public transit are doing so, but not everyone has that luxury. Citi Bike, a popular alternative to packed subways and buses, currently does not exist in the Bronx or Queens. After seven years in the city, the company this year announced plans to install 100 new stations across northern Manhattan and the south Bronx and has recently added stations outside Lincoln Medical Center and Harlem Hospital.

Its new Workforce Membership Program allows free, year-long membership for healthcare providers, transit employees and first responders. The program, however, cannot benefit the essential workers who live in neighborhoods where Citi Bike stations do not exist.

Transportation Alternatives emphasizes the current crisis is a chance to improve the city’s infrastructure.

“We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild New York as a more just, equitable and resilient city for all residents,” said Danny Harris.

Making New York’s pedestrian infrastructure safer and more accessible is necessary not only for a healthy and just city, but to prepare for future crises. After Superstorm Sandy hit in 2012, the number of bikers in the city spiked. On the East River bridges, ridership rose by more than 130 percent. In the case of future floods, hurricanes and blackouts, New Yorkers will once again turn to their bikes.

“A resilient city is a city with lots of different forms of transportation,” added Cutrufo. “Once this pandemic is over, we’re not out of the woods entirely. It’s not the end of all crises. Climate disaster is coming, and we have a lot more we need to plan for.”

With far fewer cars on the streets, it’s an incredible opportunity to reassess the city’s transportation plans. The opportunity may not last long, however, with the city set to begin reopening June 8. Numbers show traffic is already picking up. As more New Yorkers resume travel, they are choosing cars over public transit and the transit system is suffering.

The MTA has asked for two government bailouts. It was granted \$3.9 billion in the CARES Act in late March, with \$2 billion allotted so far.

“A real concern is we could be looking at a future where people feel like they have no choice but to drive,” Cutrufo worries. “That’s not just city residents, but people commuting from New Jersey, Long Island, coming in from the suburbs. Our streets are packed on a normal day.

“The future could be lots more people on bikes and other micro-mobility devices. Or it could be a future where we see gridlock like we’ve seen before.”





DANIEL FISHEL

# COVID, GEORGE FLOYD & A FAILED STATE

BY SHAY GABRIEL O'REILLY

**T**he failure of our governments — local, state, national — to address COVID-19 with any real rigor is the result of a neoliberal rejection of all state functions, with the exception of policing, in favor of aiding capital accumulation.

We see them imposing bans on opening businesses and penalties for hanging out in large groups. But they have failed, so far, to implement a real test-trace-isolate program, or to meet people's basic needs while they are quarantined or to keep a medical system that relies disproportionately on "elective"

procedures fiscally solvent (or come up with an alternative).

The reopen protests are a reactionary endeavor conducted by a tiny minority. The demonstrators are mostly seeking to force others to get back to work for them — and potentially die — for paltry sums of money. But a larger number of people are feeling, rightly, that they can't be quarantined forever and with the police killing of George Floyd, they can't be silent forever.

We were supposed to flatten the curve. It has been flattened, so now what? We were supposed to help buy time for our governments to build out medical capacity, to stock up on PPE, to put out a plan for how to stop the uncontrollable spread of COVID-19. That has not happened, except maybe some better PPE supply chains have been established.

And it's not just the federal government: New York City and State haven't come up with a real plan either. There aren't ways for people to freely isolate themselves from their family members when they are crowded into too small, too expensive apartments. There are no universal systems in place to feed people (the free meals are spotty in quality, especially compared to other countries). No clear guidelines or assistance for

safe relaxation and respite. No housing for unhoused people packed into shelters or evicted from the subway into rainy streets. Little decarceration under way to free people from crowded prisons, detention centers and jailhouses.

The best this system has managed to muster is a white cop outside my mostly black building with a mask around his chin and his hand on his holster.

No wonder people are angry: The outrage over the continued killings of black people by police takes place against a backdrop of grinding poverty and thousands of preventable deaths concentrated in black and brown communities, while governments continue to invest in policing and prisons.

Meanwhile, we're being encouraged to blame each other. It's a natural human instinct: This is miserable, and we see other people who appear, at the outset, to be responsible for spreading the illness. But when there's a second wave with the same death and destruction (or worse) as the first, it won't be the fault of people hanging out in a park or outside a bar. Just like climate change isn't the fault of someone for driving to work instead of taking the bus.

It's the fault, instead, of political leaders who fear breaking the neoliberal paradigm because it could lead us to demand far more.

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# NO JUSTICE, NO RENT

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

**W**ith their incomes decimated by coronavirus-forced layoffs, tenants from about 15 buildings in Brooklyn and the Bronx have gone on rent strike, demanding that their landlord bargain collectively with them to give them a break on rent during the crisis.

The buildings, mostly in Bushwick and Flatbush, are owned by the same landlord, the Williamsburg-based Carnegie Management. Most of the several dozen tenants involved so far are market-rate renters. Unlike rent-stabilized tenants, they have almost no rights under current law: There are no restrictions on rent increases, and their landlord can refuse to renew their lease without a reason unless it's provably discriminatory. So, they're trying to create a new right—to bargain collectively over rents, much as union workers would over wages.

"Knowing that each individual is negotiating doesn't seem fair. It should be equal across the board, especially for those who've lost jobs," says a tenant at 586 Hart St. in Bushwick who asked to remain anonymous. "If we're negotiating in silos, we don't know if we're being taken advantage of."

"As a building, we said, 'You can speak to us as a collective,'" says a tenant at 15-17 Judge St. in East Williamsburg, where about 15 of the 20 apartments are on rent strike. "We're trying to do this all together so nobody gets screwed."

The tenants' demands, listed in a May 23 email to Carnegie Management from the 345 Eldert St. Tenants Association in Bushwick, include "rent forgiveness for those who cannot pay"; no evictions for the mandated quarantine period and some time afterwards; no rent increases for the next two years; and guarantees that the landlord will renew all tenants' leases and not make negative reports about them to credit agencies.

Their attorney, Jack Lester, is optimistic about their legal prospects. With the city's housing courts closed and a statewide moratorium on evictions in effect until June 19, he says, "the tenant movement has an unprecedented opportunity. The eviction machinery of the city of New York has ground to a halt." Even when the courts reopen, he adds, "the court doesn't have the capacity to handle the volume of cases." Lighter restrictions on evictions will be in effect through Aug. 19.

Therefore, he believes, tenants have the power to force landlords to negotiate in order to collect any rent—if they organize and stay firm.

"It has to start with organizing. No one's going to hand them anything," Lester says. "The only weapon landlords

have is fear and intimidation. If tenants can overcome that, they'll win."

"We will not bargain collectively," Carnegie managing agent Saul Moskowitz responded to the Eldert tenants association in an email May 24. "As we are only going to settle with individual tenants, you will be dragging them into a protracted and costly legal battle, instead of letting them get the help that we can offer them." The message also accused the strikers of being "unfair and irresponsible" because they were organizing in multiple buildings.

Moskowitz did not respond to phone and email messages from *The Independent*.

Tenants in several of the buildings say Carnegie officials have called and emailed them repeatedly to demand rent, as well as sending notices that their "delinquent debt" will be reported to the three major credit agencies.

"They banged on my door like it was the police," says a woman at 345 Eldert St. who asked not to be identified. The two men were demanding to know when she was going back to work, and "threatening to kick me out and remove my belongings."

April was "the first time I did not pay my rent — ever," she says. She lost her job in mid-March and has been unable to get unemployment benefits, but the landlord told her "there's no excuse not to pay your rent just because you're not working." They taped letters to her door, shoved them under her door, and "called me three times in one day."

In late April, she received a notice that Carnegie was buying out her lease and she would have to leave by May 31. Other tenants have received notices that their leases will not be renewed, including some who have been paying their rent but are tenant association members.

The state Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 prohibits landlords from retaliating against renters for being part of a tenant association, notes Lester. However, says longtime tenant attorney Kenny Schaeffer, proving that a lease denial or eviction was retaliatory "is difficult to establish in practice even with legal representation," although "asserting it can slow a case down."

The strike began at 345 Eldert St., a 75-unit loft building in northeast Bushwick near the Queens border. The epidemic was "like a big bomb that dropped on everybody," says tenants association spokesperson Cian O'Day. Most of the tenants there are in their 20s or 30s, working in professional or creative fields, and most lost jobs or income when the quarantine began in mid-March.

## BREADLINES & RENT STRIKES

The most intense rent-strike activity in New York City's history came in the depths of the Great Depression, when thousands of tenants battled police in attempts to thwart evictions.

It began in Allerton, an upper-working-class Bronx neighborhood of mostly Eastern European Jewish immigrants that was home to two socialist cooperative-housing projects. In January 1932, the Upper Bronx Unemployed Council launched rent strikes in three buildings, demanding a 15 percent rent reduction and the right to collective bargaining.

The landlords responded with eviction notices. On Jan. 22, 1932, when city

marshals appeared at 2302 Olinville Ave. to throw out 17 tenants, more than 4,000 people attacked them and police with rocks and sticks. A compromise was reached: The evicted tenants could stay, and rents would be lowered by a significant \$2 to \$3 a month.

Tenants were evicted at the other two buildings, but the movement spread. In February 1932, 3,000 people defended rent-striking tenants in five buildings on Longfellow Avenue and East 174th Street. The winter saw more than 200 buildings on rent strike in the Bronx alone, with more in Brownsville, Williamsburg, and the Lower East Side, all areas with a strong Communist Party presence.

"As soon as the police came to begin the eviction, we roped off the street and people

gathered," Bronx Communist organizer Rose Chernin recalled. If they couldn't stop the marshals from hauling the evicted families' furniture to the sidewalk, they'd wait until the cops were gone, break the lock, and bring it back in.

But with rent strikes illegal, police force and court orders outlawing picketing ground the movement down. It moved toward campaigning for public assistance for tenants facing eviction, which it won.

Still, the Unemployed Councils claimed that of the 186,000 city households that got eviction notices in 1931-32, they returned 77,000 to their homes.

— STEVEN WISHNIA

## GETTING

**ORGANIZED:** Noah Rosner is the TA's liaison officer who kickstarted his building's rent strike by knocking on doors of his neighbors and then in other buildings owned by their landlord.

Jonathon Gaige, vice president of the 345 Eldert Tenants Association and a long time resident of the building.





## DOMINO THEORY CAN MILLENNIAL LEFTISTS TOPPLE MORE MACHINE INCUMBENTS IN JUNE 23RD DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES?

BY JOHN TARLETON

A crowd of purple-clad supporters had gathered around an overhead television set at one end of a bar in a remote corner of north-central Bronx when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez hustled in through a side door.

For almost a year, Ocasio-Cortez had been running a longshot campaign for Congress against a 10-term incumbent who was barely known to his constituents. When the results from that day's Democratic primary flashed on the screen, the candidate screamed and clasped her hands to her mouth: She was up by 15 points and headed to the biggest political upset of the year.

"This changes everything," attorney general candidate Zephyr Teachout told me as the crowd of mostly young radicals celebrated.

Standing nearby, Julia Salazar was beaming from ear-to-ear. And with good reason. AOC's victory would turbocharge her campaign with donations and volunteers. The then 27-year-old democratic socialist would go on to stomp 8-term incumbent Martin Malavé Dilan by 18 points in September in a State Senate primary in north Brooklyn. Six other incumbent Democratic state senators were also knocked off by mostly younger progressive challengers, shifting the balance of power in Albany to the left.

Teachout fell short in her statewide run but her prophecy has proven true.

AOC's rags-to-riches victory marked a seismic shift in the calcified world of New York machine politics in which climbing the political ladder required being a loyal apparatchik who did the bidding of those above, patiently collecting favors for years if not decades until it was "your turn" to run for higher office.

In 2016, there was only one contested down-ballot Democratic primary in the whole city. Deference was the order of the day.

This year New York Democratic state and congressional primaries will be held June 23 and they are overflowing with millennial leftists — almost all of whom are women and/or people of color — taking on entrenched machine incumbents, many of whom have not faced a competitive race in decades. The names of Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and Andrew Yang will appear at the top of the ballot in a presidential primary contest that state officials tried to eliminate before the courts intervened.

The prospects for sending a whole herd of old bulls out to pasture seemed promising at the beginning of the year. Much has changed since then. Biden won the Democratic nomination, sending many supporters of Sanders and Elizabeth Warren into a deep funk. Then the coronavirus hit, throwing people out of work and turning the city into a ghost town.

At just the moment they needed to be building name recognition in their districts, grassroots insurgents had to compete for attention with a once-in-a-century crisis while their most effective campaign tactic — mobilizing hundreds of supporters to knock on doors and have one-to-one conversations with potential voters — was off the table due to the need for social distancing.

"I was terrified," recalled Jabari Brisport, a democratic socialist running for State Senate in Brooklyn who briefly weighed dropping

out of the race and had to pull hundreds of volunteers from the field after a state of emergency was declared in mid-March. But Brisport and others have retooled their volunteer-heavy campaigns, placing more emphasis on phone banking, writing personally addressed postcards and helping distribute groceries and other material aid to families in their districts hard hit by a plummeting economy.

One candidate who has never stopped hustling is Ocasio-Cortez. She faces a well-funded primary challenge from the right by Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, a former CNBC television host. AOC has responded by tapping her vast small-dollar donor network to raise

hundreds of thousands of dollars to frontline community organizations in her congressional district and has been spotted delivering groceries to her constituents' front doors.

The down-ballot candidates whose races will be watched the most closely are middle school principal Jamaal Bowman in New York's 16th congressional district in northern Bronx and Westchester County and a slate of five DSA-backed candidates running in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx.

In NY-16, Bowman is backed by AOC and a slew of progressive groups. His opponent Eliot Engels is a 16-term incumbent and chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee.

Three of the five DSA candidates — Phara Souffrant (Flatbush), Marcela Mitanyes (Sunset Park) and Zohran Mamdani (Astoria) — are running for state Assembly against longtime machine incumbents. Brisport is running for an open state Senate seat that sprawls across central and south Brooklyn. Bronx community organizer Samelys López has consolidated progressive support but faces a steeper climb in a race that features a pair of well-known city council persons — real estate industry darling Ritchie Torres and notorious homophobe Rubén Díaz Sr.

DSA backed Ocasio-Cortez and Salazar in 2018 and narrowly missed electing Tiffany Cabán as Queens District Attorney in 2019. It has 6,000 members in New York City and more than 65,000 nationwide and can mobilize volunteers and small-dollar donors on a scale most candidates can only dream of.

If the the young, diverse and unabashedly working-class DSA slate and other grassroots progressives like Bowman can knock off old guard incumbents on June 23, it will strike another salutary blow to the Democratic Party machine here in New York City and State and will confirm that what AOC and others began two years ago was not a fluke.

More than that, it will send a jolt of hope to left electoral movements across the country that, while the dream of a Sanders presidency has been snuffed out, the torch is being passed to a new generation that looks nothing like the grumpy old Jew from Brooklyn who could never stop talking about poverty amid plenty in the world's wealthiest nation.

"By saying 'Medicare For All' and 'eliminate student debt' and 'Green New Deal' over and over he was teaching the movement what it was fighting for," Brisport says. "And because of Bernie Sanders' repetitiveness, he's empowered thousands of organizers and a whole new crop of politicians to run on that message."

For more information about voting by mail, early voting and day-of voting in New York's June 23 Democratic primaries, see [vote.nyc.gov](http://vote.nyc.gov) or [elections.ny.gov](http://elections.ny.gov).

With rents in the \$3,000-a-month range, most were already "just making it when we were working," says one tenant. O'Day, a 41-year-old freelance photo researcher, has lived in the building for seven years and says he was already spending close to half his income on rent before the quarantine eliminated most of his work.

They began talking about what they could do, and decided collective action was the best path, soon reaching out to other buildings in the Carnegie portfolio.

At 586 Hart St., a tenant who'd been following the Met Council on Housing and Housing Justice for All on social media, had the same idea, just before the 345 Eldert tenants contacted them. Housing Justice for All, a coalition of more than 70 housing, labor and community organizations, has helped organize rent strikes in about 70 buildings with about 2,000 people, demanding that all rent and mortgage payments be cancelled for the duration of the crisis, says campaign coordinator Cea Weaver. That number doesn't include the Carnegie tenants or others on strike independently, she notes.

At 15-17 Judge St., tenants began organizing after several were laid off from their jobs. They tried to figure out how to negotiate with the landlord "in a non-aggressive, non-hostile manner," says one, but Carnegie's "responses were very rude, not even listening to what the collective had to say. That fueled the cause."

At 2211 Ditmas Ave., a 48-apartment building in Flatbush, "a lot of people are getting threatening letters," says one tenant. But he doesn't expect many to join the rent strike, he adds; the older, rent-stabilized tenants seem reluctant.

He was laid off from his job two months ago and says it's the first time he's been unable to pay rent — and also his first experience organizing. "There's a lot of moving parts, I'm learning," he says. "I want to tie in people who know more about this."

The numbers could be a lot more, says O'Day. The coalition is still in the process of helping other buildings set up tenant associations, such as 248 McKibbin St., a 49-apartment building in East Williamsburg.

"There are a lot of people who just haven't been paying rent," he says. "We're trying to organize them."

New York State tenants do not have the legal right to collective bargaining. But American workers did not have it either until the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, and they didn't win it in practice until the great wave of sit-down strikes in 1936-37. In New York City, tenants have organized rent strikes since at least 1904, with their rights to do so over building conditions legally codified in the mid-1960s, after a series of rent strikes in Harlem and the Lower East Side. That right, however, has been eroded over the past 30 years by deregulation and blacklisting.

"I know it's not legal, and we could lose," says O'Day. "But I've been cut down to a quarter of my work. What can I do?"



# OPTION-SHIFT-LEFT

## A VOTER'S GUIDE TO SOME OF THE MOST HOTLY CONTESTED RACES IN NY'S JUNE 23RD DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY.

By JOHN TARLETON

New York is a one-party city where elections are almost always determined in the Democratic primary. Until 2018 these primaries were a yawn. Incumbents rarely faced a serious challenge and served as long as they pleased, often passing their seat on to a carefully groomed successor. Not anymore!

In 2020 incumbents are under siege like never before from the left and also from the right in the case of some of the leftists who won big in 2018. The 12 races chronicled here only scratch the surface of contested primaries taking place up and down the ballot on June 23. If you see a candidate that inspires you, look up their campaign website or Twitter feed and get involved. Coming together with other like-minded folks to replace elected officials who don't share your values with those who do is how we turn the power of mass protest into the power to pass new laws and change institutions. For more on how to cast a ballot, see [vote.nyc](http://vote.nyc).

## BRONX

### CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 15 BRONX

**Samelys López • Ritchie Torres • Ruben Diaz Sr. • Melissa Mark-Viverito • Ydannis Rodriguez**

Despite the AOC effect, congressional seats in New York still rarely turn over. So when longtime incumbent Jose Serrano's announcement that he's retiring has set off a free-for-all for the Bronx congressional seat he has held since 1990.

Samelys López, a former Serrano aide and community organizer, has consolidated the left lane in this race with backing from AOC, Bernie Sanders and the DSA among others and is hoping for a late burst.

The one poll taken so far in the race shows the López lagging behind two well-known City Councilmembers, real estate industry darling Ritchie Torres and Ruben Diaz Sr., a notorious homophobe and all-around cretin who once claimed the City Council he serves on is run by a "homosexual cabal" and who refused to attend a Council-mandated Me Too training because, he explained, he would never "rat out" another man who engaged in sexual harassment. Former City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito (East Harlem) and Councilmember Ydannis Rodriguez (Washington Heights) are also running. Neither lives in the district and their campaigns have failed to gain traction.

### CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 16 NORTHERN BRONX / SOUTHERN WESTCHESTER COUNTY

**Eliot Engel • Jamaal Bowman**

Many candidates are going out of their way during the pandemic to organize and deliver relief supplies to hard-hit residents of their districts and to be seen doing so. Not Eliot Engel. Since March he has mostly holed up in his Potomac, Maryland home while his majority-minority district that encompasses northern Bronx and southern Westchester County was decimated by COVID-19. Shamed into coming back to his district, he was then caught on a hot mic during a coronavirus press conference in the Bronx saying "I wouldn't care except that I have a primary."

While Engel can't seem to get out of his own way, Jamaal Bowman, a Bronx middle school principal who backs Medicare-for-All, a Green New Deal and a sweeping criminal justice overhaul, continues to soar. He has been endorsed by a slew of progressive groups and elected officials who sense he can replicate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 2018 upset victory over 10-term incumbent Joe Crowley. As an educator, Bowman has played a prominent role in opposing standardized testing and would be a powerful voice in Congress for groups that oppose top-down, corporate school reforms that have alienated teachers, parents and students across the country.



sembly where officeholders mostly come up through the ranks of lawyers and political staffers — officeholders like Walter Mosely, who was a legislative staffer before succeeding Hakeem Jeffries in 2012 when the latter moved on to Congress. Souffrant Forrest, a democratic socialist, is leaning on the legions of volunteers DSA can mobilize to turn out younger and more irregular voters on her behalf. To bring out older party regulars, Mosely can count on the support of the Progressive Association for Political Action Democratic Club, which is run by his mother Marilyn Mosely.

### ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 51 SUNSET PARK / RED HOOK

**Félix Ortiz •  
Marcela Mitanyes •  
Genesis Aquino •  
Katherine Walsh**

Félix Ortiz has quietly amassed power during his 25 years in the state Assembly and these days is a member of the inner circle round Speaker Carl Heastie. In 2000, Ortiz passed the first legislation in

the U.S. banning motorists from driving while using hand-held cell phones. Later, to much derision, he tried to push legislation that would have barred restaurants from using salt. This year the consummate insider finds himself challenged by three outsiders, all women running to his left who say they are unimpressed by his bland leadership.

Marcela Mitanyes is a tenant organizer in Sunset Park whose family lost their apartment to a predatory landlord. She's led groups of predominantly working-class immigrant tenants to Albany for many years to plead with their legislators to overhaul the state's rent laws. One of the legislators she would lobby is her own Assemblymember, Félix Ortiz. Now the Peruvian-born immigrant is running for Ortiz's job with the support of the DSA and many of the tenants she has organized with over the past 14 years.

Also running is Genesis Aquino, a community and tenant organizer backed by the New Kings Democrats and the Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats. She emigrated from the Dominican Republic when she was 11 and became a U.S. citizen in 2014. She's calling for the abolition of ICE. Katherine Walsh, a third challenger, is an urban planner, community board member and green energy expert who has spent the past 10 years working with hundreds of city and state governments across the U.S. on climate planning.

**ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 50  
GREENPOINT / WILLIAMSBURG**  
**Joseph Lentol • Emily Gallagher**

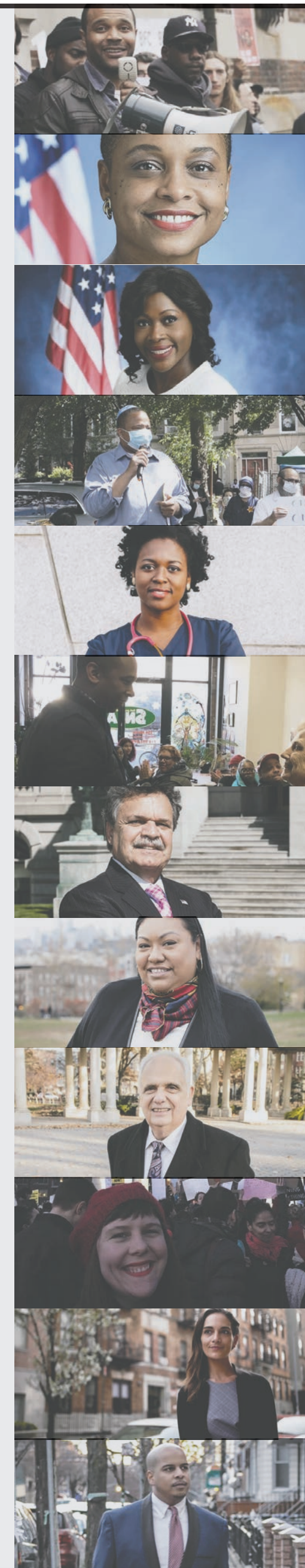
Three generations of Lentols have held the Assembly seat in Greenspoint/Williamsburg almost continuously since 1918, including Joseph Lentol who inherited the family business in 1972. From his perch in the Assembly leadership, Lentol has been a reliable defender of real estate interests and a skill for tech titans such as Airbnb and Lyft. He wrote legislation on Airbnb's behalf to overturn city laws on short-term rentals and has received lavish support from a Lyft-backed astroturf group that opposes collective bargaining rights for exploited gig workers who don't have the same job security as Lentol.

Lentol's first serious primary opponent in decades is Emily Gallagher, 36, a socialist who has used her position on the local community board to fight gentrification and rally opposition to a natural gas pipeline being built in her community. Gallagher was passed over for a DSA endorsement as the group wanted to focus its work in predominantly people of color communities. She is being backed by New York Communities for Change and the New Kings Democrats, a reform group that opposes the Brooklyn party machine. One sign she's making Lentol sweat is that amid the George Floyd protests he forked over some of his recent police union donations to a protester bail fund after taking dirty cop money for decades.

### SENATE DISTRICT 18 GREENPOINT / WILLIAMSBURG / BUSHWICK / CYPRESS HILLS

**Julia Salazar • Andy Marte**

The New York State Senate passed a raft of progressive legislation in 2019 including rent law reforms, groundbreaking climate legislation and laws guaranteeing a woman's right to choose and banning gender conversion therapy. First-term Senator Julia Salazar was right in the thick of all that and more. Her well-funded opponent Andy Marte is a former Trump supporter promising a "return to reason." He's looking to rally older, more conservative Democrats in the district who never supported Salazar, a democratic socialist, and hope that Salazar's legions of young supporters forget to show up.



## NEW YORK PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY

New York's June 23rd presidential primary offers one last chance for Bernie backers to make a statement and vote for their guy before his candidacy flickers out. Ten other candidates will be on the ballot including Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, Mayor Pete and Andrew Yang. Only quick action by Yang's lawyers saved the primary from being cancelled last month by Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his minions at the New York State Board of Elections.



## BROOKLYN

### SENATE DISTRICT 25 BED-STUY / CLINTON HILL / FORT GREENE / BOERUM HILL + PARTS OF PARK SLOPE / GOWANUS / RED HOOK

**Jabari Brisport • Tremaine Wright • Jason Salmon**

It's outsider vs. insider in the race to replace 35-year incumbent Velmanette Montgomery in this Brooklyn Senate district. Jabari Brisport is a public school teacher and a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) who has hundreds of volunteers working on his campaign. He also has out fundraised his opponents while relying on small dollar donations.

Tremaine Wright is an incumbent Assemblywoman in Bed-Stuy backed by Montgomery and the Brooklyn party machine. Former Montgomery staffer Jason Salmon is also running as a "practical progressive." With support from Councilmember Carlos Menchaca he could do well in Sunset Park and Red Hook. Brisport, meanwhile, will benefit from having a pair of DSA candidates running in assembly districts that overlap with his.

### ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 43 CROWN HEIGHTS / PROSPECT LEFFERTS GARDENS

**Diana Richardson • Jesse Hamilton**  
Incumbents can get away with a lot. Sometimes they think they can get away with anything. In early 2017, then-state Sen.

Jesse Hamilton decided to join the Independent Democratic Conference, a rogue group of Democratic senators in Albany who allied with Senate Republicans in return for perks.

This act of treachery came shortly after Trump's inauguration when his Central Brooklyn constituents were burning with resistance fervor. For his turncoat ways, they rose up and threw Hamilton out of office in a 2018 primary. His successor, Zelnor Myrie, has been a progressive stalwart in Albany the past two years. Rather than seek a rematch against Myrie, Hamilton is challenging Diana Richardson, a two-term incumbent who has consistently been one of the most progressive members of the Assembly. Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and former Brooklyn party boss and shameless courthouse grifter Frank Seddio are rumored to be backing Hamilton's comeback run against Richardson who is known for bucking the machine. Myrie has Richardson's back in the race. And hopefully her constituents will as well.

### ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 57 FORT GREENE / CLINTON HILL / PROSPECT HEIGHTS / PARTS OF CROWN HEIGHTS & BEDFORD-STUYVESANT

**Phara Saffrant Forrest •  
Walter Mosely**

Nurses have been on the frontlines of the pandemic. In Phara Souffrant Forrest, voters in Assembly District 57 now have the chance to put a union nurse and tenant activist on the frontlines of the state As-



# QUEENS

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 14 QUEENS-BRONX

**Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez** •

**Maria Caruso-Cabrera**

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has made a lot of enemies in the ruling class so surprise, surprise she's facing a primary challenge from a Wall Street backed opponent. Her name is Maria Caruso-Cabrera, a former Republican and CNBC television host who lived for years in a \$15,000 per year apartment at the Trump International Hotel & Tower before moving to Sunnyside, Queens late last year to run for AOC's seat. Caruso-Cabrera has raised more than \$1 million from her wealthy friends to wage a scorched-earth campaign. With working-class residents of the dis-

trict devastated by COVID-19 and sky-high unemployment, AOC's campaign isn't leaving anything to chance, mounting a large phone banking and mutual aid effort to remind her supporters to cast their ballots.

## ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 36 ASTORIA, ASTORIA HEIGHTS

**Zohran Mamdani** • **Aravella Simotas**

The DSA has rocked Queens Democratic Party politics twice in the past two years, first by backing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in her 2018 primary victory and then in 2019, helping public defender Tiffany Cabán come within 55 votes of being elected Queens District Attorney. In 2020, the DSA is only contesting one race in Queens, a primary in Assembly District 36 between 10-year incumbent Aravella Simotas and DSA-member and home foreclosure counselor

Zohran Mamdani who is running on a platform that includes housing justice, defunding the police and a public takeover of utilities. When he recently tweeted about Simotas taking police union money while also proclaiming support for Black Lives Matter, she announced she was giving the money away to a protester bail fund seven minutes later.

Western Queens delivered large majorities to both Cabán and AOC but only Cabán has endorsed him. Why not AOC? Here's a guess. Simotas's close ally Michael Gianaris is the number two Democrat in the state Senate. Next year when census results are in and the state legislature redraws congressional lines, Gianaris will have an important say in how the legislature reshapes congressional districts, including AOC's.



# MANHATTAN

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 12 MANHATTAN-BROOKLYN-QUEENS

**Carolyn Maloney** • **Suraj Patel** •

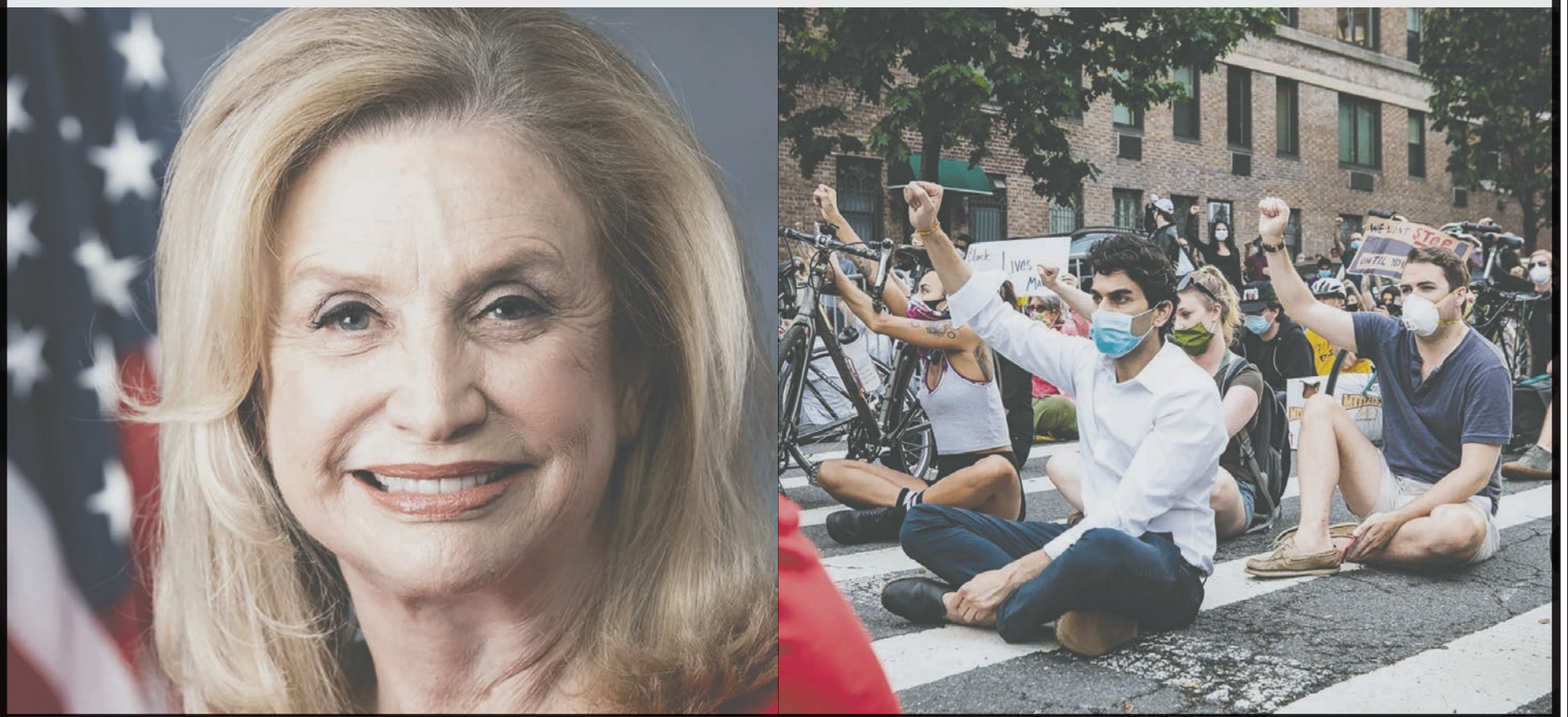
**Peter Harrison** • **Lauren Ashcraft**

Carolyn Maloney is liberal on social issues while taking piles of Wall Street and real estate industry cash. She has also flirted with anti-vaxxer tropes in

the past. This year she faces a trio of challenges running to her left. Her opponents include Suraj Patel, a former Obama administration official and professor of business ethics who supports Medicare for All. Patel is back for a second bite at the apple after cracking 40 percent in a below-the-radar run against Maloney in 2018 that may be best remembered for his campaign directing volunteers to recruit potential voters by catfishing them on dating sites such as Tinder, Grindr and Bumble.

Patel is joined in 2020 by housing activist Peter

Harrison who is currently on rent strike and financial analyst and comedian Lauren Ashcraft who is emphasizing climate action in a district that stretches along the East River from below the Williamsburg Bridge to 96th Street. A divided field will likely benefit Maloney who can win even if she slides below 50 percent.







BY JOHN TARLETON

**E**very weekday from 8 a.m. until mid-afternoon Jabari Brisport is a middle school math teacher, helping his students navigate the strange new world of distance learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the rest of his day and evening, he is a democratic socialist locked in a hard-fought three-way race for an open seat in State Senate District 25 which encompasses Central Brooklyn and parts of Park Slope, Gowanus and Red Hook.

Brisport ran for City Council in 2017. Capitalizing on community anger in Central Brooklyn at a one-sided city deal to hand the Bedford Union Armory to developers, he garnered nearly 30 percent of the vote in the general election running as a third-party candidate against an entrenched incumbent.

His surprise showing was aided by the work of hundreds of youthful volunteers from the Democratic Socialists of America, including a bartender named Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Brisport would go on to be a close ally of Ocasio-Cortez in her successful 2018 run for Congress. Now he's back this year running in the Democratic primary as the most high-profile member of a slate of diverse, young, working-class candidates backed by DSA. If elected, he would be New York's first out LGBTQ state senator of color.

This interview has been edited for length and concision.

**INDYPENDENT:** *Tell us more about yourself and your background and how you came to be politicized and hold the values and positions that you do?*

**JABARI BRISPORT:** I grew up in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. I am the son of an immigrant and the son of two union workers. My father was in a sheet-metal union and my mother was in the Communications Workers of America (CWA). I got politicized in the fight for gay marriage in college, for my right, as a gay man, to marry the person I love. After marriage equality, I got really drawn into the Black Lives Matter movement. As a black man, I was just always thinking, 'At any time I could be the next hashtag. I could just get gunned down by the police.' So I was involved in organizing rallies for that, making policy demands with a group of activists, organizing marches and organizing people at rallies to take further action.

Then I started shifting to electoral politics in 2016 with Bernie. I saw a candidate for the first time that I liked. I ended up canvassing on my own time in six different states for Bernie. It was because of Bernie's campaign that I became a socialist. One day, in the summer of 2016, I was in the shower and it just dawned on me that slavery was an example of capitalism. It was black people commodified and slapped with price tags, treated as objects in an open market. It just made me think of what capitalism is, which is putting price tags on things, or people in that case, which shouldn't have price tags.

**What would you do as a state senator to address the crisis in policing that has become so apparent since the murder of George Floyd?**

We need to begin defunding police departments and redirecting the money into social services, public health, and crisis intervention. We need to legalize marijuana, decriminalize simple drug possession, and decriminalize sex work, in addition to repealing the Walking While Trans Ban. George

Floyd's death has shown that reforms aren't working, because police are a fundamentally violent force. We need to begin getting cops off the street and reducing the number of situations in which a cop is expected to show up.

**What are some of the other main issues and concerns you're hearing from the residents of your district?**

Because of COVID-19, the number one concern I'm hearing from people is they're having problems filing their unemployment claims. We need to hire more people to staff the phones and meet the demand. That speaks to a larger thing: We could tax the rich and drastically expand social services and the things we need in our state.

Aside from the immediate stuff, housing has always been a big issue in the district. This is a district that saw around 2,000 evictions in 2017, and those numbers aren't slowing down. So the fear of evictions or the lack of affordable housing has always been a concern in the district.

**Why would electing a public school teacher like yourself be a good idea?**

Nobody gets as mad the way teachers do. We give over so much of ourselves just to ensure that the future is better. And you really want a politician to plan for the future the way teachers do. You want them to be concerned for the next generation. I'm the only candidate in the race that says anything about the climate. None of these other candidates have a single sentence about the climate. I'm worried that my little sixth and seventh graders won't have a liveable planet when they are older.

**Last year the New York Post ran an article hailing you as a potential AOC of Albany. How do you feel about that?**

That was really funny. I loved that title, but I'm not the AOC of anything. I'm just the Jabari Brisport of this campaign. AOC is a friend of mine. She's inspired so many people. The number of candidates who are running for Congress trying to model what she did is just incredible.

**You all have a shared history in recent years.**

She volunteered for my 2017 campaign. I volunteered a lot for her campaign. I didn't just knock on doors. I worked with fundraisers and helped push DSA to endorse her, which I'm glad they did.

**COVID-19 has had a big impact on your campaign. How has not being able to do door-to-door canvassing or hold public speeches or rallies changed your approach?**

I was terrified when I realized we had to shut down our canvassing operation. The strength of DSA has been knocking on doors and talking to people. But we've successfully transferred to a mass phone-banking operation. My campaign has made over 100,000 calls. We're trying to get to 300,000 by election day. We're doing daily phone banks and just growing our numbers of volunteers.

**The DSA slate you are running on includes a nurse, a tenant organizer and a home foreclosure counselor and yourself a public school teacher. Why does that make a difference?**

We're like the socialist power rangers. We will each bring a little bit of our own slice of the working class into Albany. We want to bring more people into politics and more people into the movement. The current political machines rely on low voter turnout, on not many people knowing what's going on. They want to minimize participation and make sure that power is entrenched in as few hands as possible; therefore, it's easier to control. We believe in bringing more people into the process.

**Let's step back and dream big for a moment. What's your vision of what New York could be like, say, five or 10 years from now, if more socialists like yourself can win office?**

We will have much steeper and higher taxes on the wealthy in our state. We will have single-payer healthcare in the state, if not nationally. We will be well on the way to transitioning towards totally clean energy, and we will have public energy in five or 10 years. We will finally have a fully-funded public education system, and will finally go back to free college, free CUNY and free SUNY.

We will have reduced incarceration rates by a drastic amount, hopefully approaching 75 percent. We will have increased union density by making it easier for union workers to organize, union workers to strike, for workers to join. Also increasing jobs for unions. And we will see the end of homelessness in the state.

It's all about making people understand that we actually have all we need to meet our basic needs and it's about having the political will to make sure resources are distributed fairly to make that happen.

*For more interviews with progressive anti-establishment candidates running in New York's June 23 Democratic primaries, see [independent.org](http://independent.org).*



# ANTI-ASIAN BIAS IS ANOTHER VIRUS TO BE VANQUISHED

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

Chinese Americans are having to bear a double dose of the national anxiety. They are anxious, like the rest of us, about venturing outside and getting it, but they are also increasingly anxious about venturing outside and experiencing hostility from non-Asians of all sorts, in the form of verbal harassment as well as physical threats.

In the space of just one week in March, the *New York Daily News* noted that Asian Americans had reported over 700 incidents across the United States. Even in relatively “safe” cities with large Asian American populations, like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, Asian Americans have been cursed at, spat upon and punched, and find their neighborhoods suddenly festooned with white supremacist stickers. Asian-owned restaurants and businesses were shunned early on, which will mean they will likely be the last to recover.

Clearly, some of this can be laid at the door of Trump and his Republican allies. Trump persistently called our pandemic the “Chinese virus,” and another White House official named it the “Kung Flu,” a joke that went viral. Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas) said that “China is to blame because the culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that ... has been the source of a lot of these viruses.”

Actually, fatal diseases that originate with animals are a global problem, not an Asian problem. *Live Science* reports that 2.2 million people around the world die each year due to ‘zoonotic’ diseases that pass from animals to humans. These include herpes B, E. coli, Lyme disease, “Mad Cow” disease, rabies, salmonella, and many more. The problem may be less cultural than capitalist: food practices that put safety and security last.

Vivian Louie, director of Asian American studies at Hunter College, is concerned that “the current wave of attacks will have long-term effects on Asian Americans’ sense of safety, and inclusion or sense of belonging as Americans,” leading to a demoralized fatalism about social change activism. Tucker Carlson and other conservatives are hammering home the general message that “diversity” is dysfunctional for the country, that it’s a delusion to think that any minority can be a model.

So how should we understand this resurgence of anti-Chinese racism? Is it even a resurgence, or simply a continuation of what has always been around?

Both anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism can be hard to detect. It can seem to be positive (“They’re so smart!”) or complementary (“They value education!”) or appreciative (“They’re so thrifty!”). And according to all we know at this time, COVID-19 did start in China, so how is it racist to point this out?

Clearly, however, Trump, Carlson and others are knowingly playing up the national and ethnic angle, which is actually irrelevant to understanding how to stop the pandemic or prevent the next one. COVID-19 provides a convenient weapon for Trump’s ongoing trade war, and blaming China is a great diversion from his own failed leadership. It’s fair to expect he will ride this all the way through the November election, scapegoating a racialized other for the anger and despair that people feel over the mass death and economic collapse.

It is more important than ever that wider publics raise our awareness about anti-Asian racism. The nature of racism is complex. Some groups have always been “admired” in certain respects, which can make their situation seem quite different from those groups (such as my own) that are just considered inferior, pure and simple. And Asian Americans look to have achieved remarkable economic success, although this requires, for instance, aggregating the Japanese with the Cambodians in ways that skew the averages. In reality, some Asian groups are doing okay while others are very much not, and Chinese Americans are such a large and diverse group that no meaningful economic conclusions can be drawn except that some Chinese Americans have indeed “made it.”

Yet even those who have made it into the middle class report persistent social exclusion from their wider social networks. And Asian cultural representation lags significantly behind other groups: only 1 percent of Hollywood’s leading roles go to Asian Americans, though they are 6 percent of the U.S. population. Having money does not immunize one against racism, and can in fact make one the target of racism, as Jewish Americans know well.

The problem of racism always involves some over-generalization, but the generalizations take crucially different forms. Some groups seem to get a lot of positives while others get almost nothing but negatives. The key is to look at the combinations. To say that Asians are “smart” is to assume that one’s race or ethnicity is a cause of intelligence, an idea that lends support to generalizing other groups as intellectually inferior.

Moreover, if we can classify whole groups as intelligent, we can then classify them as “clannish” or “untrustworthy” or “inscrutable,” thus associating their likely “positives” with unavoidable “negatives.” Their intelligence then becomes a threat, not a benefit to all. And “untrustworthiness” is a bad characteristic to be tagged with in a pandemic.

Throughout January and February, the U.S. corporate media was focused on the Chinese government’s malfeasance. There was real malfeasance, without a doubt: local officials in Wuhan actively distorted information about the spread and danger of the disease and punished a whistle-blower. But China has now become a model for how to slow the spiking numbers.

Nonetheless, the *New York Times* and other mainstream journalism outlets continue to report State Department claims about “Chinese spies” in the United States, the “draconian” measures curbing individual freedom in affected areas, the overly positive spin of the Chinese government’s official statements, and the advantage China would have in new global trade wars caused by the virus. Such stories resonate with the media’s distaste for the Chinese Communist Party.

Anti-communism may look to be unconnected to racism, supported only by the truly sad story of many communist states through the 20th century. Yet we should connect the dots here. The Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Cubans — ready-to-hand images of communist countries benefit from a double billing: a “bad” form of politics in the hands of “inferior” non-European peoples already thought to have a “horde” mentality since their cultures do not value individual life.

This primes U.S. audiences to become hysterical when a two-sided view of communist countries is floated in the most mild-mannered

way, such as when Bernie Sanders praised Cuba’s early literacy campaign.

Today the “draconian” measures of Wuhan are being emulated in the United States with contact tracing. The Chinese government’s comprehensive approach to public health is contrasted with the U.S. refusal to mandate paid sick time. The question of private capital profiteering off critical resources has replaced attention on tariffs. And “communist” doctors traveling from Cuba and China to afflicted countries are lauded around the world for their sense of social responsibility beyond the borders of the nation state.

The refusal of the United States to learn from non-white countries is endangering our collective global health. Racism can be subtle; it can also wreak havoc on the ability of societies to address crises such as COVID-19.

Professor Louie points out that the effects of the resurgence of anti-Asian racism in the United States will hit more than East Asians, since “a substantial portion of our front line workers in the medical field are Asian American.” Yet she resists fatalism: “I see this moment as an opportunity for us all to come together and to acknowledge and address the many racial, ethnic and economic inequalities that our nation’s response to this virus has unearthed.”

**THE PROBLEM OF RACISM ALWAYS INVOLVES SOME OVER-GENERALIZATION.**







# PROTESTING FOR THEIR PRIVILEGE

## A JUMBLE OF IDEOLOGY, RESENTMENT & CONSPIRACY THEORIES FUELS FAR RIGHT OPPOSITION TO CORONA RESTRICTIONS

BY MARESI STARZMAN

**A**mid a sea of yellow vests, Guy Fawkes masks, and German flags, two signs caught the camera's eye at a protest in Stuttgart, Germany, this May. In large hand-written letters on yellow and blue paper, one placard demands the protection of constitutional rights. The other calls for the immediate opening of all summer pools.

Side by side, the two messages express the varied disgruntlement over government social-distancing measures during the corona pandemic. Like their U.S. counterparts with their "Give me liberty or give me COVID-19" signs, the German protesters believe that governments use the corona crisis to do away with the civil rights and liberties of ordinary citizens.

For the past few weeks, people all over Germany have been taking to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the "corona madness" and the government's lockdown orders. Rallies held in major cities like Munich, Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Berlin have been drawing crowds of thousands. What unites them is not a common political ideology but a shared agenda of rejecting government-imposed hygiene regulations, refusing to wear masks and disregarding the required minimum distance of 1.5 meters between demonstration participants.

While protests against corona shutdowns are happening elsewhere in Europe too, most of them are focusing their demands on an easing of the economic lockdown, like opening borders to allow for cross-border commuting and trade. What makes the German protests stand out is that the participants form an odd alliance across the political spectrum, bringing together conspiracy theorists with anti-vaxxers, esoterics and far-right extremists.

Chiming with a global "infodemic," they circulate rumors about forced vaccinations, 5G towers as the source of COVID-19 or the virus as a bioweapon made in China.

When Attila Hildmann, a German social media celebrity, claimed that the government was infusing the tap water with tranquilizers, he gained 30,000 new followers within the span of two weeks.

This ideological mix is so combative, warns Cynthia Miller-Idriss of the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) at American University, because "it can make anti-democratic or xenophobic ideas seem more legitimate in the eyes of groups who might previously have eschewed them."

The number of anti-vaxxers, for example, usually lies at 2 to 4 percent in Germany, but a generalized sense of insecurity and instability due to the global pandemic has given the movement new vigor. Reviving eugenicist views that trace back to Nazi Germany, many protesters condemn immunization as an unnecessary medical intervention into a naturally healthy national body politic.

Even though the vast majority of Germans support the government's social-distancing measures, the corona protesters claim that they are out in the streets fighting on behalf of all German citizens. This sets them apart from the hyper-individualistic and often gun-toting protesters in the United States, who are hoping "to bring down the current system by encouraging riots and race conflict," explains John Feffer of the Institute for Policy Studies.

Germans show up at corona rallies because they consider themselves responsible citizens who belong to "the middle of society," as one protester in Stuttgart put it. They take to the streets not to stand up for individual liberties, but to defend the people against a corrupt elite seeking to curtail their constitutional rights. Many reflexively reference the first article of the Grundgesetz (basic law), Germany's equivalent to the U.S. Constitution, calling for the prioritization of human dignity over human health.

By locating themselves firmly within the boundaries of the law, the protesters purportedly do not seek to destabilize the current political system but merely to exercise their democratic rights. And yet, close observers warn that a radicalization of the protests is imminent. As the case of Attila Hildmann shows, the anxiety brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it easy to tap into existing insecurities and fears to mobilize those who are already questioning the status quo.

But far-right extremists willing to engage in premeditated acts of violence are not the only ones trying to coopt the corona protests. According to John Feffer, democratically elected parties like the right-wing Alternative for Germany also use the demonstrations "to channel discontent with the

system into support for extremist formations."

For many protesters, the anti-shutdown gatherings are an opportunity to voice grievances that they have long harbored against the state. When they take to the streets, they not only reject the government's COVID-19 measures, but also position themselves against globalization and the elites, political correctness and democratic processes, the media and science, foreigners and immigration. By framing the protests as the expression of a disaffected people defending the larger Volksgemeinschaft — the German ethno-national community — the far right is able to move previously fringe ideas into the mainstream.

What makes this particularly dangerous is the extent to which racial disparities underpin the protests. "The privilege of being less personally impacted by the health crisis because of the legacy of generations of inadequate health-care and structural racism," says Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "plays a big part in who is arguing that their 'freedom' is being threatened by a tyrannical government." In the United States, where COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, the corona protesters are predominantly white.

And while the far right engages in protests that narrowly redefine their own personal comfort and convenience as "liberty," the left has poured into the streets in recent weeks to protest the police killing of George Floyd and the systemic racism that makes such attacks on black and brown people commonplace.

There is reason for concern that these protests could spread the coronavirus. However, the overwhelming majority of participants are wearing masks (unlike the police) and observing social distancing when possible. And where the earlier "reopening" protests were organized to restore a "normal" that would put poorly paid essential workers at greater risk, the George Floyd protests' goal is to end white supremacy, a parallel public health epidemic that also endangers the lives of millions of people.

### ARBEIT MACHT FREI?

*An anti-lockdown protest in Huntington Beach, California this May.*



# FOUR ANTI-CAPITALIST FILMS TO WATCH FROM HOME

By Liz Vogt

The pandemic we find ourselves in has made one thing unbearably clear: Our society is structured to lift the rich and powerful and to ignore the needs of the working class. Here are four films currently available to stream that tell stories of people struggling in countries across the world and sometimes in worlds different but not unlike our own.

Many of us are housebound now, but these films take us around the globe. Some are stories of resistance and revolution, some clear-eyed narratives of quiet desperation, but all of them show how the decisions of the wealthy and powerful have repercussions for the most vulnerable among us.

## **SORRY TO BOTHER YOU (2018)**

Available on Hulu

LOOPY, CYNICAL, AND SURREAL, this dark comedy from musician Boots Riley takes place in an alternate-universe Oakland that feels uncannily close to bleak reality. When the film begins, Cassius (Lakeith Stanfield) is broke and disaffected, living in a dingy converted garage and hoping to pay his overdue rent with a new telemarketing gig.

His secret weapon: being able to affect a “White Voice” that he uses to climb the corporate ranks and become a power caller.

Riley doesn’t use this plot twist as a throwaway joke, but as a way to connect race, class and privilege.

Danny Glover, in a brief cameo, explains, “A White Voice isn’t just being nasal. It’s... sounding like you don’t have a care. Got your bills paid. You’re happy about your future.”

The narrative vaults between absurdist gags and the crushing realities of survival in a capitalist society, but with an insouciant touch that never tips into gloom. A late-movie twist into body horror via grotesque corporate bioengineering plays on the capitalist desire to squeeze ever-more labor from the working class.

*Sorry to Bother You* even finds time to cover the basics of salting: a labor tactic where an organizer gets a job in a non-unionized workplace with the intention to form a union. After finding out Squeeze, played by Steven Yeun, is a salter, another character asks, “So you just go from place to place, stirring up trouble?” He replies: “Trouble’s already there... I just help fix it.”

Delightfully strange, defiantly political and unapologetically anti-capitalist, it’s thrilling to see solidarity on screen through the lens of dystopian sci-fi.

## **ATLANTICS (2019)**

Available on Netflix

*Atlantics* TELLS A TALE of loss, grief and class conflict like a melancholy dream or a hypnotic nightmare.

After months of unpaid labor on a construction site, a group of young Senegalese men set out for Spain, where they hope to make a living wage. After weeks without contact, they are presumed lost at sea.

Back home, Ada, a young woman unhappily engaged in an arranged marriage, mourns her lover, Souleiman, one of the young men. But then her friend tells her that she just saw Souleiman, alive — setting fire to Ada’s new marital bed.

*Atlantics* is hard to define: It’s a ghost story, a revenge story, a teenage love story and a coming of age tale. It’s the first feature film from Mati Diop, a French-Senegalese actor-turned-director and now the first black woman to win the Grand Prix at Cannes.

On a visit to Senegal a decade ago, a young man said to her, “When you decide to cross the ocean, it means that you’re already dead.” Those words haunted her enough to lead her to make this film years later.

Ada and her friends are stubborn, sometimes sullen, absorbed with their romances and struggling to define themselves on the cusp of womanhood. In other words, they’re teenagers. When the uncanny is introduced into this recognizable world, it’s with a calm acceptance that has the supernatural existing alongside Ada’s grief and frustration.

The simmering resentments and desperation of families living in poverty is always there, bubbling just below the surface.

Ada, still grieving for Souleiman, is scolded by her family when she refuses to put on a happy face for her older, wealthy fiancé. She resents his expensive gifts and the power he has over her due to his wealth.

Meanwhile, at the hands of angered spirits, the owner of the construction firm, whose laborers were building a strange, eerie luxury tower on the shores of Dakar, must finally reckon with the injustices he inflicted on his workers. Perhaps this, as much as the spirits of the dead seek-



ing revenge, is what sets this film in a world unlike our own: at least here, the perpetrators of economic oppression face consequences.

## **WENDY AND LUCY (2008)**

\$3.99 on YouTube, free Kanopy

RELEASED ON THE CUSP of the 2008 recession, *Wendy and Lucy* feels more relevant than ever today. Director Kelly Reichardt depicts the criminalization of poverty and the pressures of living paycheck to paycheck with an attention to detail and compassion seen in few other films.

Wendy, played in a watchful and internal performance by Michelle Williams, doesn’t ask for our sympathy. She’s given no backstory and little dialogue. We don’t know why she’s alone, living out of her car with her dog Lucy, trying to get to Alaska in time for its lucrative fishing season. But we do know that she has been let down by a capitalist system lacking safety nets.

At one point, Wendy’s arrested for trying to steal dog food for Lucy and as she’s being fingerprinted at the police station, seems resigned rather than agitated. It could be seen as resilience or something worse: the beaten-down calm of a young woman too accustomed to the hardness of life.

*Wendy and Lucy* feels almost documentary-style in its minimalism: the camera is restrained and there is no musical score. It has the focus and gravity of Italian neo-realist films and the same implicit message: that normal people, living normal lives, are worthy of our time and attention.

Untethered to a job or family, Wendy must rely on the unreliable kindness of strangers. And yet there are indeed strangers who show her almost heartbreaking kindness and who bring light into this often-bleak film. A good-natured security guard tells her, with the air of a man who has been there, “Can’t get an address without an address, can’t get a job without a job... it’s all fixed.”

By the end of the film, we have experienced Wendy’s trials, in stifling detail, right alongside her. How many of us are one car breakdown away from a cascading series of small tragedies? Should any person have to live on such a razor’s edge? What is our obligation to each other? Reichardt gives us no easy answers, but she documents Wendy’s quiet struggles and heartbreak with the gravitas they deserve.

## **GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES (1988)**

Available on Hulu

THE GRAND ARENA OF WAR is narrowed down to two children struggling to survive the final months of the Second World War in the bombed-out ruins of Kobe, Japan. Director Isao Takahata co-founded Studio Ghibli with his creative partner Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*) and the “Ghibli touch” is clear in the precise, delicate animation and beautiful *ligne-claire* style of this animated film.

Loosely based on the experiences of novelist Akiyuki Nosaka and his semi-autobiographical short story of the same name, *Grave of the Fireflies* moves slowly and relentlessly to its inevitable end. Takahata has a keen eye for the rhythms of the precarious way of life the siblings

must adjust to in wartime, with new rules and dangers to be aware of.

Characteristic of Ghibli films, there are moments of beauty too.

One day, teenage brother Seita takes his toddler sister Setsuko to the sunny beach where they used to have carefree picnics with their mother. (The ocean seems the only thing unchanged by the relentless air raids of American bombers.) Another morning, they set up house in an empty bomb shelter, squealing and laughing together, playing games of pretend in the verdant

hills just outside town.

Takahata insisted his film was not explicitly anti-war, but in its brutal and finely-observed focus on the violence victims, it’s impossible to see otherwise. From the unsparingly grim opening scenes, which leave no doubt as to the doom the children face, to the gorgeously haunting end, *Grave of the Fireflies* shows how the evils we do to our fellow humans last long after the bombs have stopped dropping.



# 'PACKAGE KING' DELIVERS A MODERN HISTORY OF THE ESSENTIAL WORKER

By Danny Katch

On May 1, workers at Amazon, Instacart, Whole Foods, Walmart, Target and FedEx protested for better health and safety protections as they are forced to work during the coronavirus pandemic. While most of the job actions were small, they nonetheless were further signs on the traditional international workers' holiday that old-fashioned class struggle is beginning to emerge inside some of the most powerful U.S. corporations. In *The Package King*, socialist historian and former UPS worker Joe Allen makes a compelling case that if these initial sparks become a powerful fire, one of the primary colors in that blaze will be the Pullman Brown worn by the 250,000 uniformed employees of UPS.

Long before the coronavirus pandemic gave them the official title, transportation and warehouse workers had become "essential" to the U.S. and global economy — and logistics industry giants like Amazon, Walmart and FedEx had become the engines of 21st-century capitalism the way that manufacturers like Ford and General Electric were in the 20th.

UPS stands out among these modern behemoths as one of the only companies with a largely unionized workforce. In fact, UPS is the largest private-sector union employer in the country. UPS workers also make up the largest section of the Teamsters union, an incredibly polarized organization that has been home to the most-organized and long-term presence of both mobsters and socialists in the American labor movement. *The Package King* is subtitled *A Rank-And-File History of UPS*, and Allen centers his story on the century-long fight of UPS workers to wrest a livable job out of a company that treats them as machinery and to organize within a union that too often has treated them as a dues-paying cash machine.

*Package King* is in part a business history or rather an anti-business one. Throughout the book, Allen uses Greg Niemann's laudatory *Big Brown: the Untold Story of UPS* as a foil, turning Niemann's narrative of a corporate success story on its head as a workers' nightmare of ever-increasing micromanaging and exhaustion. Eschewing celebrity CEOs like Jeff Bezos, UPS promotes a corporate culture as bland as its uniforms, but under the radar, it has long been a leading corporate influencer in Washington, with a relentless focus on weakening the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which received more worker complaints about UPS than any other company.

The other side of the story told by *Package King* is that of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), which began representing UPS workers when company founder Jim Casey went looking for a conservative, compliant union in the aftermath of the militant Seattle General Strike of 1919.

For most of its history, the Teamsters have been led by autocrats like Dave Beck, who is said to have once asked, "Why should truck drivers and bottle washers be allowed to make decisions affecting [Teamster] policy? No corporation would allow it." Current IBT president James Hoffa Jr., who in 2018 rammed through a concessionary contract with UPS even after a majority of voting members

said no, is unfortunately cut from the same cloth.

*Package King* shows how massive concessions by these and other union mis-leaders — especially the one-two punch of allowing a lower pay tier for part-time workers in 1982 and then establishing in 1987 that the growing air delivery business would be handled mostly by part-timers — helped facilitate UPS's growth into a global behemoth.

But the Teamsters are also a union with immense potential power that has been built by class struggle fighters, from the socialists whose 1934 general strike in Minneapolis laid the basis for Hoffa's legendary father to organize the trucking industry, to former Queens UPS driver Ron Carey, who led multiple strikes against UPS — first in New York City's Local 804 and then the historic national strike of 1997.

Carey was subsequently driven out of the union by an unholy alliance of employers like UPS, anti-labor Republicans and old guard Teamster leaders, but the fight for militancy and democracy is still carried on by Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the longest-running union reform movement in the country. Through the narrative lens of one company and one union, *Package King* tells an effective story about the rise, fall and hopeful return of the organized working class in the United States.

In the introduction, Allen explains that the book is written in the tradition of *The Flivver King*, Upton Sinclair's 1937 exposure of Ford Motor Company that the

United Auto Workers sold for a quarter as part of its successful organizing drive at the company. There will be no similar campaign under the current IBT leadership, so get a copy of Allen's book for yourself and then pass it on to a UPS driver the next time you get a delivery. She is part of the most organized section of what is possibly the most important industry in 21st-century capitalism. The outcome of her story will have a lot to do with what our world looks like on the other side of this pandemic.







# FRANCES WAS GOLDEN

## LEGENDARY ACTIVIST & LITERARY AGENT LEAVES AN INSPIRING LEGACY

BY JOHN TARLETON

**F**rances Goldin, a legendary Lower East Side activist, trailblazing leftist literary agent and good friend to *The Independent* died at home on May 16 following years of gradually declining health. She was 95.

Born June 22, 1920 to Michael Axler, a mechanic and toolmaker for the MTA, and Sophie (Saslowsky) Axler, a homemaker and former seamstress who had been fired for union activities, Goldin grew up in Springfield Gardens, Queens. During her childhood, she encountered the sting of both antisemitism and the class prejudice of her more well-to-do neighbors.

She was valedictorian at Andrew Jackson High School. However, her family expected her to become a conventional Jewish wife and mother and insisted she learn secretarial skills instead of going to college. In 1944, she met her husband Morris Goldin at the War Shipping Administration where they both worked. She moved with him to the Lower East Side. He was the head of the New York State branch of the American Labor Party and a communist. She soon became one too. Six years later, Goldin ran for state Senate on an American Labor Party ticket headed by W.E.B. DuBois.

When I interviewed her at her East 11th Street apartment in 2014, she described arriving in her part of the Lower East Side (now known as the East Village) as “nirvana.” It was her first taste of freedom, savored amid a multi-racial, working-class neighborhood with a rebellious history. She never left.

She also fought like hell to defend her community. In 1959, Robert Moses sought to demolish much of the Lower East Side east of Bowery, from East 9th Street to Delancey Street. He wanted to replace the neighborhood’s tenement buildings with middle-class housing. Frances sprang into action and became a founder of the Cooper Square Committee, which led the fight against Moses’ urban renewal juggernaut. Another co-founder was Walter Thabit, a pioneer in community-based urban planning who would become her longtime partner after she separated from her husband. She also helped found the Metropolitan Council on Housing, which today is the oldest and largest tenants rights group in the city.

Goldin had left the Communist Party by then but would later credit her experience in the CP for making her such an effective organizer. If she was a dreamer, she also understood the surest way to move people to action was to address their basic needs, such as keeping a roof over one’s head.

“I learned the basics of organizing,” she said in a 2014 interview with the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. “If you don’t have the troops that are involved in the struggle, you have nothing.”

Frances Goldin was relentless, her enthusiasm infectious. And her life shows the value of being a long-distance runner. The Cooper Square Committee not only stymied Moses’ plan but in the following decades built or preserved more than 850 units of affordable housing and preserved the East 4th Street cultural district between Bowery and 2nd Avenue, a center of off-off Broadway theater.

### MORE COMMUNITY BATTLES

Goldin was also a leader in thwarting another Moses monstrosity — the Lower Manhattan Expressway, or LOMEX, a 10-lane elevated expressway that would have plowed through SoHo, Little Italy and the Lower East Side. It was approved by the city in 1960 but canceled in 1971, following a decade of fierce community

opposition.

In 1967, Moses did succeed in leveling a 20-acre swath of tenement buildings just south of Delancey Street near the Williamsburg Bridge. Eighteen hundred low-income families, mostly Puerto Rican, were displaced. The Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA) remained empty for decades, a collection of desolate parking lots. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and his base of assimilated, middle-class Jewish supporters in the Grand Street co-ops didn’t want low-income housing that would bring in Hispanic and Asian residents who would alter the area’s political balance of power.

In 2011, a compromise was reached to build a mix of affordable and market-rate housing on the site, now known as Essex Crossing. The deal called for 50 percent of the units to be permanently affordable, far more than what normally accompanies affordable housing agreements negotiated between the city and developers, though some neighborhood residents remain concerned that the project will accelerate gentrification.

On Jan. 29, 2018, the Frances Goldin Senior Apartments became the first of 10 buildings to open at Essex Crossing. Located at 175 Delancey Street, it has 99 apartments for low-income seniors, a fourth-floor senior center, a medical center run by NYU Langone, job training services for young adults and a cafe operated by Grand Street Settlement. Goldin, now 93, was joined by friends, neighbors and city officials at the opening ceremony. Silver, meanwhile, was awaiting retrial on federal corruption charges.

“We succeeded and he failed, and that’s good,” she told NY1.

### MEETING FRANCES GOLDIN

I first met Frances in 2009 when I was invited to her 85th birthday party by a mutual friend. A festive crowd of a couple hundred friends and fellow activists turned out to celebrate her life. She reveled in the moment. The event was held at the recently opened Chinatown YMCA on the corner of Bowery and East Houston. This community space was another byproduct of a multi-decade battle between the feisty activists of the Cooper Square Committee and the city — in this case over a parcel of land on the southside of Houston between Chrystie Street and Bowery.

Amid her tireless organizing for affordable housing, Frances founded the Frances Goldin Literary Agency. The former secretary was now her own boss. When she hung her shingle in trade publications, it came with a promise: “I do not market any material that is sexist, racist, homophobic or gratuitously violent.”

Barbara Kingsolver became a client. So too did Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Allison, Mike Wallace, Staceyann Chin and death-row journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, among others.

In February 2013, Frances called *The Indy* to thank us for running an interview with the director of a documentary about Mumia. She said she had read the paper every month for years and mentioned she was working on a new book project. It would explore what a socialist United States might look like. This time she was not only the book’s agent but it’s co-editor along with two close friends of hers, Debby Smith and Michael Steven Smith.

Frances had been a regular presence at Zuccotti Park a couple of years earlier — an old lady in purple garb

### STILL

**WORKING:** Frances Goldin at her desk at home in 2014 awaiting the release of *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA*, a book she shepherded into existence.

### BACK IN THE

**DAY:** Frances Goldin helped lead and win historic battles against Robert Moses, saving much of the East Village and Lower East Side from the wrecking ball.





(worn to honor her two lesbian daughters), a purple streak in her otherwise silver hair, holding aloft a sign that read, "I'm 87 And Mad As Hell." In one memorable scene she pleaded to no avail with the police to arrest her along with the young people who were being hauled away.

She found Occupy Wall Street and its revival of class politics in American life to be deeply inspiring. In Occupy's aftermath, a Pew poll found that people aged 18 to 29 favored socialism over capitalism even though few could say exactly what they meant by the former. Frances wanted to fill in the gaps.

From the moment I spoke with her on the phone, I felt *The Indy* should take the lead in promoting the book in New York City. She agreed and convinced Harper Collins, her publisher, to get out the checkbook.

*The Indy* produced a four-page wrap-around special section when the book came out in January 2014. It included an interview with Frances, a retrospective on famous Americans who were socialists and a cover photo of a young woman blowing a kiss to a crowd of protesters from atop a friend's shoulders. Socialism, it said, does not have to be a long, unhappy slog to the gulag.

The book launch at the Housing Works bookstore in SoHo was packed to the rafters with 250 people present. *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA* was ahead of its time and did not become a bestseller, but it was a harbinger of the socialist revival that arrived with Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential run.

#### SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

Frances, Michael and Debby understood there is no conceivable path to winning a socialist society without a robust left media. After the book launch, they hosted a house

party for *The Indy*, encouraging their friends to turn out.

"I feel like I haven't had a paper since the old (U.S.) *Guardian* died," she told the assembled crowd, referring to the New York City-based left weekly that folded in 1992 after a 44-year run. "But now I do. It's *The Independent!*"

Our paper had been barely scraping by and needed a boost. The windfall from that night helped stabilize it financially and put us on a course that would ultimately see *The Indy*'s circulation triple over the next few years.

Frances continued to read the paper every month for as long as she was able to do so. We were fortunate to have such a good friend who didn't just talk about solidarity but practiced it always and everywhere. Her legacy will endure in the books she shepherded into existence and in the victories she won for her community. It will live on in all who knew and loved her, who were moved by her zest for life and for struggle.

For leftists, Frances demonstrated you can be serious about your work, committed in your principles, but also live joyously and, with enough perseverance, win victories that others thought impossible.

May her dream of a socialist USA — humane, inclusive and deeply democratic — also be won someday.

¡Frances Goldin presente!

“Older women are almost never the ones whose story matters,” Ruth O. Saxton writes in the introduction to *The Book of Old Ladies*. “The mother or grandmother is either absent or important only as she affects the (younger) heroine.”

This maddening realization sent Saxton on a decades-long quest. “I searched for stories that get inside the heads of old women,” she explains. “I wanted to gather examples of good aging, of wise and surprising women over sixty and into their nineties, like beads on a string, a secular rosary to help fend off fear of being elderly in a society whose mainstream vision of aging women is marked by fear, loathing, refusal, or reduction.”

The 30 diverse stories referenced in this work of literary criticism — all of them written during the last century by women, about women — do this and more. Many of the included writers are well-known, including Toni Cade Bambara, Margaret Drabble, Mary Gordon, Doris Lessing, Penelope Lively, Alice Munro, Jean Davies Okimoto, Tillie Olsen, Vita Sackville-West, Muriel Spark, Elizabeth Strout and Helen Yglesias. It's a great mix.

At the same time, the range is geographically narrow, featuring protagonists living within the confines of the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Western Europe. As such, Saxton ignores stories about elders in Asia, Central and South America, North Africa and the Middle East, regions where the aged are often respected and even revered. What's more, despite the advanced age of the women who are referenced, none of them seem to have been touched by activism or any of the pivotal movements of the 20th or 21st centuries. Lastly, while lesbians and gay men hover in the background of some of the included works, none of the selections feature queer protagonists.

These deficits aside, there is much of value in Saxton's thoughtful and thought-provoking assessment. Her careful deconstruction of plot and character reveal more than a few misogynist literary stereotypes and provoke readers to think more generally about where our ideas and assumptions about aging come from.

This can be a powerful jolt.

To her credit, Saxton takes great pains to decry stories in which marriage and childbearing are presented as incompatible with female career success, and she critiques tales in which catching a man is presented as the be-all and end-all. In fact, her gaze falls almost exclusively on feisty, risk-taking, sassy and sexy dames whose independence makes them great role models — in fiction and in life. None are perfect. They have affairs, are negligent moms, say hurtful things and sometimes act in ways that others find bewildering.

“My Man Bovanne” by Toni Cade Bambara is a case in point. Written in 1971, the

story centers around Miss Hazel, whose three adult children are aghast, not only because she is wearing a low-cut dress to a community function, but because she is strutting her stuff on the dance floor. This clearly offends her offspring, all of whom expect her to act her age even though none of them know exactly what this means. Miss Hazel finds their condescension repugnant and ignores their snide comments and disapproving glances, demonstrating, through her actions, that sexuality is not just for the young but is the province of all who are alive.

Similarly, *The Little Old Lady Who Broke All the Rules* by Catharina Ingelman-Sundberg, penned in 2014, is a showcase for elders who defy expectations. In this novel, five residents of a Stockholm retirement home plan and execute a daring museum heist. Even after they confess, the local police refuse to believe them capable of such an ingenious crime. Though a light, humorous tale, the author nonetheless offers readers a perceptive look at the infantilization many elders experience.

Not surprisingly, death is a constant in many of the stories. Nonetheless, one of Saxton's main points is that as long as we're alive, we're capable of changing our

ideas and behaviors. In addition, *The Book of Old Ladies* challenges us to think critically about our youth-obsessed culture and presses readers to look at human life as a continuum. Her conclusion imagines a world in which “change, aging, and death” are acknowledged as normal components of human existence.

“The lack of good fictional role models for aging women appears to be wrapped up in a larger problem of how we think about old age,” Saxton concludes. “Our society is unkind to aging people across the board. However, we allow for the possibility that old men may have richly complex interior lives, imagine them able to create art and have erotic potential, political capacity, business acumen; we do not see their sexuality as a punch line or imagine their personhood to be only in service to others.”

*The Book of Old Ladies* asks us to consider the sexism that treats old women differently, more-often-than-not painting them as doddering, ineffectual crones. Can we imagine — and then create — something less demeaning? Literature, Saxton suggests, can send us in the right direction, but it is ultimately up to us to change the world.



### REMEMBERING DONALD PANETH

Donald Paneth's long, winding odyssey in journalism began in 1944 when he went to work as a clerk on the New York Times' city desk. He was 17-years-old. It ended at *The Independent* when he came out of retirement after the 9/11 attacks to serve as our United Nations correspondent from 2001–2009. Last month, Donald died in a Manhattan nursing home at the age of 93.

Blunt and at times cantankerous, he also enjoyed an easy rapport with the scruffy young radicals in his midst. He always wore a suit and perfectly-knotted tie even on the hottest day of the summer. The young people around him wore cut-offs and t-shirts. It

didn't matter. Word of his passing sparked an outpouring of responses on social media from his former *Indy* colleagues.

“What a gift he was.”

“He was a legend.”

“He was such a high point at the paper, so dapper and so great to talk to.”

“Donald was a wonderful reporter and a true gentleman, in the best sense. If there was a zen of journalism, he practiced it.”

— JOHN TARLETON

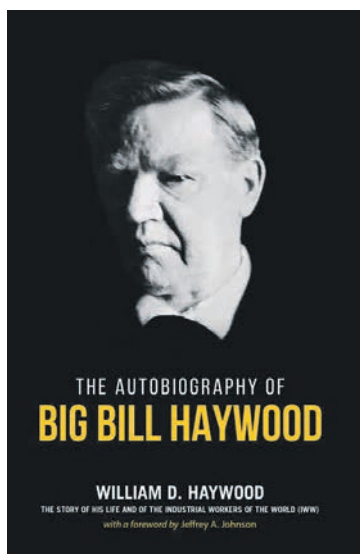
For the full obituary about the life and times of Donald Paneth, visit [Independent.org](http://Independent.org).



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## ANTI-RACIST HOTLINE

*Hi Rev Billy,  
I've been to a few protests in my  
time but I don't think I've ever  
seen anything like the protests  
that have broken out following the  
murder of George Floyd. Do you  
feel the same way?*

LENA  
Lower East Side

• • •

*Dear Rev Billy,  
This country was founded on the  
looting of African bodies and  
indigenous lands and the billion-  
aires are looting this country right  
now while tens of thousands of  
people are dying of COVID-19.  
But what about the smaller-scale  
looting taking place during the  
George Floyd protests? When I see  
opportunists showing up to smash  
and grab some bling, it makes my  
stomach turn because I think it's  
hurting the movement and is so  
disrespectful of George Floyd and  
what we're fighting for.*

TARA  
Jackson Heights

Dear Lena,  
Of all the marches and rallies I've  
been to lately, a recent one featur-  
ing the city's hospital caregivers felt  
like the protest that will be repeat-  
ed in many versions over the com-  
ing years. It was in Times Square,  
starting at 6 p.m.

In their blue scrubs and white  
doctors' coats, they seemed to  
come straight from the emergency  
rooms, from their famous night-  
mare, the underfunded hospitals at  
the hot center of the pandemic.

The chants began, "SAY THE  
NAMES!" "George Floyd!,"  
"Breonna Taylor!," "Ahmaud Ar-  
bery!" In this horror that these  
people shared, they shouted until  
they were hoarse. Their signs said,  
"Stop Killing My Patients".

The police tried to surround the  
big group, thinking that this was  
just another rally to control. Then  
it dawned on the cops who these  
people were. One chant started  
with a question, "How Do You  
Spell Murder?" Others would an-  
swer with four letters: "N-Y-P-D."

There was a pure strain of anger  
from losing two or three or five or  
50 colleagues and patients for lack  
of the necessary equipment to stay  
alive. The police are famously over-  
financed, with brutality built into  
their budgets.

The hospital heroes were very  
close to shouting "DE-FUND THE  
POLICE!"

Tara, c'mon. This is a serious his-  
torical movement with its eyes  
clearly on the prize. Every big up-  
rising has wing-nuts who are re-  
leased from not-dramatic-enough  
lives so they go out and break some  
glass. The chattering class pixela-  
tors who say that the hotheads  
are the fault of black leadership  
are being so unrealistic that you  
have to wonder if they themselves  
are provocateurs. They have been  
pulled outside their comfort zone  
and so they try to change the sub-  
ject. They keep themselves at a safe  
distance from the super storm that  
threatens us all with basic change.  
They don't have the conviction, the  
absolute conviction that change is  
gonna come.

*Reverend Billy Talen is a member  
of the activist group The Church of  
Stop Shopping.*



# WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT TODAY

**We're back!**

**The people are on the streets and so are we.**

In late March, as the city became a ghost town filled with the mournful wail of ambulance sirens, we suspended our print edition in favor of an all-digital publishing.

We return to an altered landscape. More than 20,000 of our fellow New Yorkers have died in this plague. The economy has collapsed. And many corporate and governmental leaders are now touting a "touchless future" of working and consuming at home as our happy hi-tech destiny.

We embrace multiple mediums but publishing a monthly print edition will continue to be a core part of our work. It reaches a mass audience across the city without relying on social media algorithms to determine which articles are seen or not. It's tactile. It's a deeper, qualitatively different reading experience. It fills public space with the ideas and energy of the social movements we cover.

But to continue publishing in print or any other medium, we will need your backing. Many people who have generously supported us in the past are not able to do so at this time. If you have given before and can give a little more, we thank you. If you have not given before but love The Indy and have the means to do so, now is the time to step up.

**Thank you for your support.**

— The staff and volunteers of *The Indy*.

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# THE INDYPENDENT



## PASSING THE TORCH

~~IBUT WE'VE GOT THE RECEIPTS. P2, PH-19~~