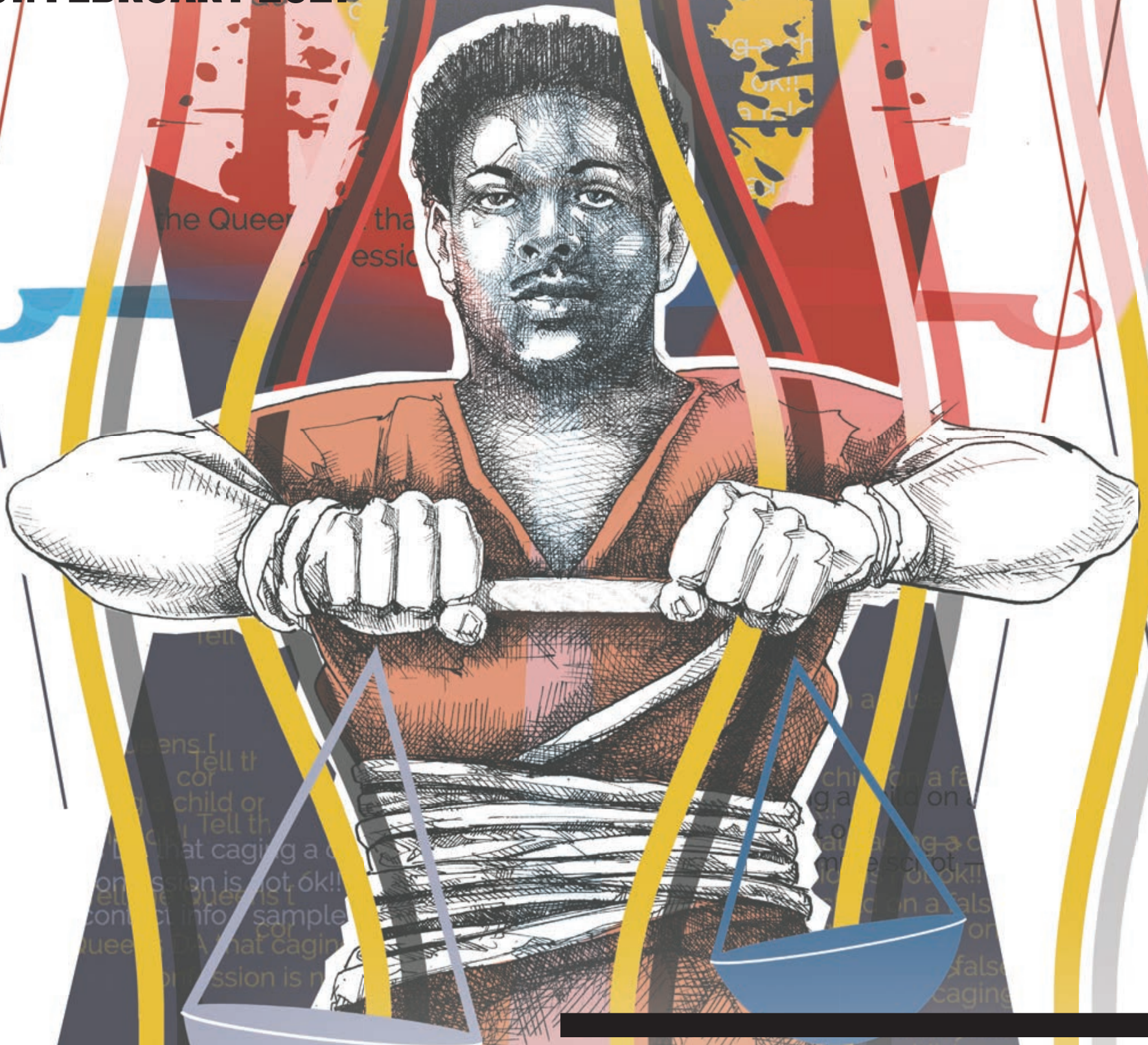


THE

= SEX WORKERS IN THE TIME OF COVID — P10 =

INDYPENDENT

#261: FEBRUARY 2021



FIGHTING FOR HIS FREEDOM

**IN QUEENS, PRAKASH CHURAMAN RISKS IT ALL
TO BEAT A RIGGED JUSTICE SYSTEM**

BY JULIAN GUERRERO & DANNY KATCH, P8

LYNNE FOSTER

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EDITOR'S NOTE

REMEMBERING CHARLIE AGRINSONI

THE INDY'S DISTRIBUTOR DIED UNEXPECTEDLY. HE HELPED MAKE OUR RAPID GROWTH POSSIBLE IN RECENT YEARS. HIS DAUGHTER VOWS TO CARRY ON.

BY JOHN TARLETON

Is the paper going to be ready tomorrow? My guys need to work. If they aren't working, they're not happy."

It was Charlie Agrinoni on the other end of the call — persistent and always straight to the point. The company he founded, Gendis Marketing, has delivered every issue of *The Indy* over the past four years as the paper grew faster than anytime in its history. Sending over last-minute updates to our route sheets and confirming with Charlie that the paper was ready for pickup, has been as much a part of our monthly publishing cycle as writer deadlines and the final night of production.

And then he was gone.

Charlie died unexpectedly of a heart attack on January 24. He was 57. A good man had fallen. He's survived by 7 children and a grandson. His daughter Emily, 33, is now running the company after working with him for the past 10 years.

"My father's favorite thing to say was, "Do good. Be good," she recalled. "Now that I'm the one making the decisions, I think 'Do good. Be good.'"

Born in the Bronx and raised in Bushwick, Charlie built a family-run distribution company over the past 36 years that began with him delivering circulars door-to-door on the Lower East Side for a single C-Town grocery store. He would add many more grocery store clients. After a decade, he would expand into delivering dozens of newspaper and magazine titles. At the time of his death, his business encompassed every borough except Staten Island as well as parts of Long Island, Westchester and Putnam Counties.

When *The Independent* was ready in 2016 to place outdoor

GONE TOO SOON: Charlie Agrinoni with his daughter Emily.

news boxes for the first time and more than double its print circulation to 40,000 copies, Charlie approached us about taking over our distribution. We had experimented once before with an outside distributor, and it had gone badly. Otherwise, we had always done our own distribution knowing that members of our group would always do a good job and would notice fluctuations in how the paper was moving.

We were becoming too big to continue as we had before. But, could we find an outside company to do the job right? Happily the answer turned out to be yes. Charlie's guys — many of whom had worked with him for more than a decade — moved *The Indy* in the blazing heat of summer and amid the cold and slush of winter without cutting corners. They took care of the small details that make a big difference in whether potential readers see the paper and take it.

"In this business, people want to know you are honest, that you have a loyalty to service," Emily Agrinoni says.

Larger corporate competitors had made seven-figure offers to Charlie for his company, but he turned them all down, Emily said.

After burying her father, she held an informal wake at Gendis's Astoria warehouse. Stories were told. Tears and laughter were shared among the workers she describes as "my family." Then, she had to sit down with the company's 32 employees who feared losing their jobs in the middle of the pandemic and chart a course forward.

"I had the option of saying 'he's gone and we're closing,' Emily recalled. "But that's not what he would have wanted."

The work doesn't stop. Emily said she hasn't had time to process her grief. Sleep remains elusive. Before her father's death, she was already responsible for day-to-day logistics, driving routes when needed and handling payroll while her father focused on managing clients and pursuing new ones. She hopes to grow the company further once she becomes comfortable in her new role. For now, the pressure of carrying the full weight of the company on her shoulders is unrelenting. Moreover, she notes, "it's a male-dominated industry and I'm the new kid on the block. I have a lot of eyes on me."

Still, she wouldn't have it any other way. "When I can do the things he loved, it makes me feel a little closer to him."

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Andrew Yang has jolted the NYC mayor's race. But do his big ideas add up?

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GAGE SKIDMORE

MERCURIAL ANDREW YANG JUMPSTARTS SLEEPY MAYORAL RACE

**HIS IDEAS ARE ALL OVER THE MAP,
BUT HE'S FORCING OTHER TOP
MAYORAL CANDIDATES TO COME
FORWARD WITH THEIR OWN PLANS**

BY THEODORE HAMM

Andrew Yang has generated an incessant stream of headlines since entering the race for mayor in mid-January. Some stories have questioned his credentials, focusing on his lack of a voting record in local elections and residency upstate in New Paltz during the pandemic; others have highlighted his dubious definition of a bodega. How much the initial negative coverage will hurt Yang in the June 22 primary is unclear.

At the same time, Yang has already far outpaced the crowded field of candidates in bringing policies and positions into the race. Some of his proposals, such as a scaled-down version of Universal Basic Income or his call for civilian control of the NYPD (meaning that the next commissioner would not come from the current ranks), skew progressive. Others, like his support for a casino on Governors Island or his pandering opposition to BDS, are clearly regressive.

But given the scale of the current crises the city faces, putting ideas front and center in the race for mayor is a good thing, regardless of who wins. After all, the most consequential policy to emerge in the 2013 race was universal pre-K. And the candidate who first made it a campaign issue was a moderate, Christine Quinn, not the progressive, Bill de Blasio.

Yang's splashy entry into the current campaign thus

may force other candidates to compete for attention by putting forth their own signature policies—or, as with de Blasio in 2013, by adopting rivals' positions. The race certainly could use an infusion of animating ideas. As of Jan. 25, the front page of Comptroller Scott Stringer's campaign website offered no link to an agenda or platform, whereas the "Vision" section of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams' site continued to ask visitors to check back "in the coming weeks" for his policing policy.

Nobody who follows city politics would say that Stringer is devoid of plans or that Adams, a retired NYPD officer, lacks ideas regarding policing. But Yang is already forcing at least one of the two perceived front-runners to take a clear stand. Rather than support civilian control of the NYPD, Adams recently vowed to appoint the first female NYPD commissioner (quite possibly the department's current Chief of Patrol, Juanita Holmes).

Asked by *The Independent* to single out the candidate's most distinct policy positions, Stringer's team pointed to his Green New Deal agenda, which is indeed quite comprehensive. According to the environmental group 350.org, "From phasing out fossil fuels and prioritizing environmental justice, to creating tens of thousands of family-sustaining union jobs ... Stringer's platform sets the new bar for climate ambition in the U.S." Stringer's housing plan, which among other things calls for the city to build 100% affordable units on 1,000 city-owned sites, has garnered similarly effusive praise from a wide range of housing activists.

Stringer, however, can't exactly match Yang in terms of showmanship—or its corollary, salesmanship. "I want to manage the hell out of this city," Stringer assured a recent forum of Democratic clubs. "How much excitement such earnest declarations will generate remains to be seen."

Adams' chief consultant Evan Thies, meanwhile, identifies three of the candidate's proposals as most unique: a web portal called MyCity, which is akin to 311, and would cut down on the paper trail for anyone receiving SNAP benefits or dealing with the Department of Buildings; a plan to bring city-run healthcare services to low-income residential sites including NYCHA; and an expansion of earned-income tax credits for frontline workers. The proposals certainly seem worthy, although none are likely to become the new universal pre-K.

There is no shortage of candidates in the race, and no shortage of ideas most voters haven't yet heard much about. Progressive Maya Wiley's team highlights her "New Deal New York" plan that calls for \$10 billion in capital funding to be spent over five years with a focus on NYCHA upgrades, climate resiliency upgrades, and rectifying the digital divide. Leftist Dianne Morales advocates a "social housing" plan that includes turning empty commercial space and hotels into permanent residences for the homeless. And technocrat Shaun Donovan has an extensive transportation agenda that prioritizes improved bus service.

The activist left has good reason to be quite skeptical regarding Yang, whose grab-bag of positions makes him a bit hard to peg. That stands in contrast to his primary campaign advisor, Bradley Tusk, who was Michael Bloomberg's campaign manager in 2009 and then a busi-

nessman who made \$100 million by helping Uber infiltrate New York City. Yang's launch event also featured Congressman Ritchie Torres, a Wall Street-friendly "progressive" and fellow BDS-basher who will serve as Yang's campaign co-chair.

But on MLK Day, Yang announced that his other co-chair is Martin Luther King III, who praised Yang for carrying on his father's goal of establishing universal basic income. Yang also has the enthusiastic backing of Queens Assemblyman Ron Kim, a staunch progressive. Many of Kim's left-wing allies in the legislature—including State Senators Jessica Ramos, Julia Salazar and Alessandra Biaggi, and Assemblymembers Yuh-Line Niou and Bobby Carroll—endorsed Stringer last September.

In explaining his support for Yang to *The Independent*, Kim emphasized Yang's recent pledge to decriminalize sex work, a left-wing stance shared by Morales, Carlos Menchaca, and Stringer. In Kim's view, Yang's position may help destigmatize the issue in his Flushing community. Yang, he says, "understands that the conditions of poverty" imperil many sex workers and that decriminalizing will allow "access to basic rights to healthcare, safety and other government services."

Yang's constant changes in positions—i.e. first he's in left-field, then right-field—nonetheless lead many to wonder where he's coming from. Unlike the other prominent business candidate in the race, longtime Citigroup executive Ray McGuire, Yang's track record outside politics is amorphous. He made a bundle on the growth of his chain of GMAT test prep centers (for aspiring MBA students), but there's nothing particularly innovative about such an enterprise.

Yang's manifest love for the spotlight also may remind many skeptics of an New York City businessman who's now a disgraced former president. But there again, everyone familiar with Trump's long career in NYC and Atlantic City knew that he would use the White House to enrich himself. By contrast, no one really knows what Yang would do—or how he would handle an aggressive city council and the mundane tasks of providing city services.

Yang is a wild card, for sure. But now it's up to the other candidates in the race to play their hands.

**CELEBRITY
CANDIDATE:** 2021
mayoral candidate Andrew
Yang seen campaigning
in Iowa in 2019 during his
presidential run.

WE CAN DEFUND THE POLICE — HERE'S HOW

A FORMER CITY COUNCIL STAFFER-TURNED-DSA CANDIDATE EXPLAINS HOW WE CAN BEGIN REDIRECTING RESOURCES FROM COPS TO COMMUNITIES.

BY BRANDON WEST

Abolitionist Mariame Kaba famously stated, “Let this radicalize you rather than lead you to despair.” Following her words, I can only comprehend what we have endured in 2020 as a calling to radicalize, to rethink ineffective public safety policy and to revitalize our communities by defunding the police.

2020 was a year that felt like a decade, a time of deep stress and distress, challenges beyond measure, and enormous personal tragedy. I saw my home, New York City, fall into a series of crises, I lost friends and relatives to the pandemic, and I, along with millions of Americans, watched Black men murdered on video.

Beginning in June, after months of lockdown, I was in the streets fighting for Black lives and for the end of the carceral state. I organized with the Free Black Radicals and members of VOCAL-NY at the Occupy City Hall encampment to defund the NYPD. Months later, and only days after a white supremacist insurrection in the capitol, the NYPD brutalized peaceful protestors on MLK Day in that exact same location.

But when I feel despair, as I did during almost the entirety of 2020 and already many times since the start of 2021, I know it is time to turn to action. Whenever asked why I'm running for City Council, I speak about my experiences fighting against over-policing and the carceral state. I tell voters that I'm running to defund, and to abolish, the NYPD. Having the experiences of an organizer on the streets and as an analyst in the NYC Office of Management and Budget and City Council Finance means that I know it is possible to do these things and to radically re-envision public safety.

So how do we do it? Defunding the NYPD requires being bold and standing up in the budget process and also, critically, to articulate a vision of community safety that is not carceral. We have to do both, and the latter is harder than most people think. We are so used to treating the police and policing as the solutions that they most clearly are not. Even in conversations with progressives and leftists, it's hard to shake the language and framework around incarceration. But I know we can do it if we are intentional and clear about how we want to do this work.

First, there is a lot we can cut in the next budget. It's pretty easy to make reasonable cuts and hit \$2 billion. There is no reason we couldn't hit at least \$1 billion last year. It's a shame the outgoing council didn't. Communities United for Police Reform put out a well-researched report last summer showing just how easy it is to slash NYPD's budget by over \$1 billion. This includes over \$200 million in a hiring freeze and cutting the cadet class, \$100 million in removing NYPD from schools and social service-related roles, almost \$300 million in

police misconduct settlements/judgments and not firing abusive officers, at least \$219 million by reducing the NYPD uniform headcount to FY2014 level, and almost \$400 million in cutting bloat like surveillance technology and overtime. Not to mention that if you include all the fringe benefits associated with these positions, it adds up considerably. Critically, it doesn't mean we abandon workers like school safety officers or traffic officers, who are often BIPOC folks. We can and will engage in a just transition as we decarcerate jobs that should never have fallen under NYPD's purview. Police do not keep people safe, but community services and economic stability does.

CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE

The other part of this work is creating the vision for the alternative. Many people I talk to cite victims of violence as a rationale for the brutal incarceration of those who engage in forms of violence. But deterrence is just punishment, our basest instinct, and it doesn't work. Incarcerating people—destroying people's lives—results in only devastated communities, not safe communities.

No single person can design a perfect system to eliminate violence in all aspects of life in New York tomorrow. But many have done this work for years and we must empower them to begin to build this alternative. In December 2020, Brownsville engaged in a pilot program where the community removed beat cops and instead had community members present in the streets, including nonprofits and city agencies setting up booths to offer city resources for folks. There wasn't a single 911 call during that stretch of time. This pilot was just that: a pilot; it was a bubble within the world of a carceral state, with the normal over-policed stretch of the city a few blocks away. But it was a start, and seemingly a success,

DEFUNDING THE NYPD REQUIRES BEING BOLD AND ALSO, CRITICALLY, TO ARTICULATE A VISION OF COMMUNITY SAFETY THAT IS NOT CARCERAL.

and we need to engage and fund programs like these and see to it that they are successful.

If we are not laser-focused on Defund and making it the goal of the next class of councilmembers and the next budget, we will not get there. We absolutely can build on the work that was already done to get to this vision. I have often remarked that if 2020 didn't radicalize you, then you cannot be radicalized. It is for my fellow radicals that I run for City Council in District 39 and why I run to defund the police.

Brandon West is running for City Council in District 39 which encompasses Park Slope, Carroll Gardens and parts of Sunset Park. He is a member of the 6-candidate DSA for the City slate.

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MARIJUANA REFORM



DANIEL FISHEL

WEED SURE LIKE TO SEE IT

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Once again, New York State's legislative session has begun with strong support for legalizing marijuana — and two competing bills with different approaches to how to do it.

The two measures, as in 2019, are Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Cannabis Regulation and Taxation Act (CRTA), which takes up more than half of his 415-page budget proposal, and the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA), sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes (D-Buffalo) and state Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan).

Both would license growing cannabis and selling it to people 21 or older. The main differences, once again, are that the Cuomo bill is more restrictive and would give a smaller share of the jobs, tax revenues, and business opportunities created to "social equity" and a community reinvestment fund.

Those are basically reparations for the people and communities worst affected by marijuana prohibition, by heavy-handed policing and violent illicit-business disputes. From 1998 to 2014, an average of more than 100 people a day were arrested for misdemeanor pot possession in New York City, six out of seven of them black or Latino, and at one point Brooklyn's Brownsville and East New York accounted for 10% of those busts. The racial disparities were sometimes even more extreme upstate, says Melissa Moore, state director of the Drug Policy Alliance.

The MRTA would earmark half of the estimated \$350 million a year in tax revenues for the community reinvestment fund, says Moore. The CRTA would establish a \$100 million social-equity fund for "communities which have seen disproportionate and unjust enforcement of cannabis prohibition," State Director of Cannabis Programs Norman E. Birenbaum said in a statement to *The Independent*.

There's "quite a deep difference" between those two amounts, says Moore. According to the CRTA text, that fund would start at \$10 million a year and gradually rise to \$50 million in 2027. However, the bill says other pot-tax revenues can be used to develop and run social and economic-equity programs.

Both bills would regulate adult use under the three-level structure New York uses for alcohol, putting production, distribution, and retailing into separate businesses. "Microbusinesses," however, would be allowed to do all three, much as wineries and craft-beer breweries are allowed to have bars on their premises.

The MRTA, however, would license "on-site consumption,"

cannabis coffeehouses, which would not be allowed to sell alcohol. It would also permit individuals to grow up to six plants. The CRTA would not allow either home-growing or pot-delivery services.

Delivery, notes Moore, has been "one of the few business models viable" during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also often cited as the part of the industry that requires the least capital to enter.

"The proposed CRTA and the MRTA are largely aligned and share the goals of ensuring a safe, equitable, and accessible cannabis industry for consumers and businesses," Birenbaum said. "The CRTA reflects lessons learned and best practices from jurisdictions across North America."

Like the state's medical-cannabis law, both bills list "labor peace" agreements requiring employers to stay neutral in union-organizing campaigns among the criteria for granting licenses. But for applicants that have 25 or more employees, the MRTA would have the state licensing agency give priority to those that have union contracts and had their facilities built by union labor.

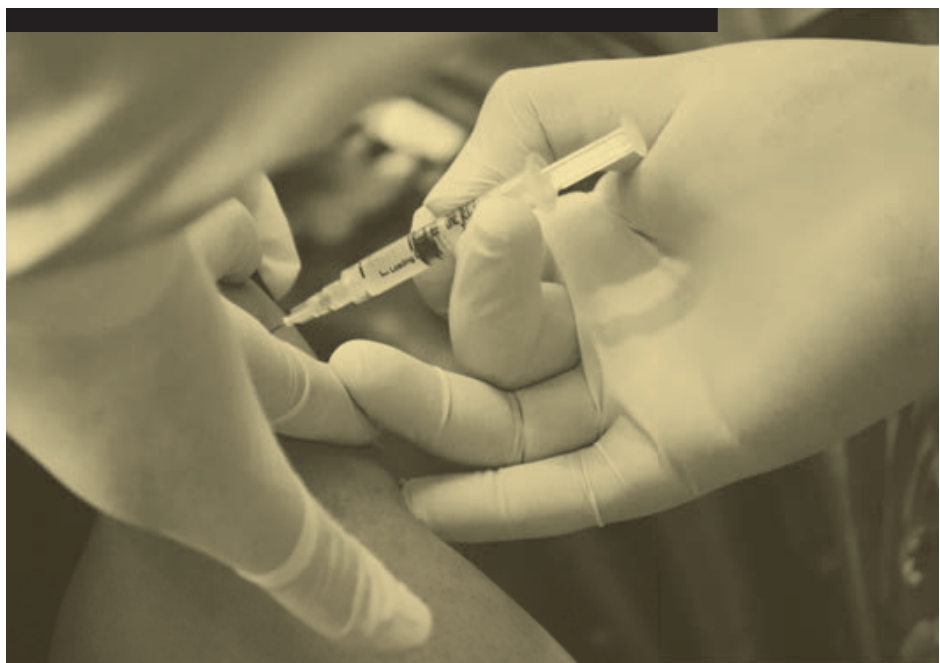
"To make the bigger guys have to have a collective-bargaining agreement," says Brad Usher, Sen. Krueger's chief of staff, is a good way to balance the interests of protecting workers in the industry with expanding opportunities for small businesses.

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which represents about 300 workers in the state's medical-cannabis industry, sees a possible 30,000 new jobs if New York legalizes marijuana sales to adults — and it hopes those jobs are union.

"Our priority is that the jobs have a pathway to unionization," says Nikki Kateman of RWDSU Local 338. The RWDSU has collective-bargaining agreements with four of the 10 companies in the state's medical-cannabis industry, and is negotiating with three others. It represents about 300 workers "across the entire supply chain," from cultivation to processing to dispensaries, she says.

In New York, Kateman says, the union's goal is to have the industry build social equity, racial justice, and careers that pay enough to support a family. One way to bring in people from the neighborhoods hit hardest by prohibition, she adds, would be by doing targeted hiring and recruitment and collaborating with community organizations.

How the differences between the bills will be resolved, says Brad Usher, is far beyond his predictive powers. The Legislature could pass the MRTA before approving the state budget. It could pass the budget with Gov. Cuomo's CRTA included. Or it could work out a compromise between the two measures — or fail to, as happened in 2019.



MUFID MAJUNU

BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

NEW YORK ROLLING OUT VACCINE... SLOWLY

New York City finally began vaccinating people against the COVID-19 virus in earnest in mid-January, administering up to 43,000 doses a day. With health-care workers, essential workers, and people 65 or older now eligible, 767,500 people had received their first dose and 230,000 their second by Feb. 8, according to city Department of Health figures, and 72% of hospital workers in the city had also been vaccinated, according to the state. But there have been significant racial disparities: Black and Latino people 65 or older have received the vaccine at a rate less than half their proportion of the state's elderly population. Making an appointment, such as through the city's vaccinefinder.nyc.gov link or the state's 833-NYS-4-VAX phone line, remains complicated, and supplies for the future are still uncertain. The state warns that it could take 14 weeks to get a shot scheduled, which could prove dangerous as more contagious variants of the virus spread.

BROOKLYN ABOLITIONIST HOME NAMED HISTORIC LANDMARK

After several years of struggle, the city on Feb. 2 designated a former Underground Railroad stop in downtown Brooklyn as a historic landmark. The three-story house at 227 Duffield St. — renamed 227 Abolitionist Place — was once the home of abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Truesdell, who used it to hide escaped enslaved persons who could have been extradited back to bondage in the South under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. In 2007, the city moved to seize it to build a parking garage, but “Mama” Joy Chatel, a Black amateur historian who owned the house, sued to block that. Her family and Brooklyn activists continued the struggle to save it after she died in 2014, but its current owner, developer Samuel Hanasab, applied for permission to demolish it last year. Friends of Abolitionist Place, co-founded by Chatel's daughter, hopes to turn the building into a museum about abolitionist movements in Brooklyn.

VAXX HOW WE DO IT: COVID-19 vaccinations are slowly ramping up in New York City.

STATE REPEALS 'WALKING WHILE TRANS' LAW

Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed a bill Feb. 3 that repeals the state's 1976 law against loitering for the purpose of prostitution, which critics had dubbed the “walking while trans ban.” State Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan), the measure's lead sponsor, said that according to state criminal-justice figures from 2018, 91% of people arrested for violating the law were Black or Latino, and 80% were identified as women.

“The Walking While Trans ban enabled the profiling and arrest of transgender New Yorkers for doing nothing more than standing or walking on the street,” Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David said in a statement. The Legal Aid Society said it had represented women who were arrested because they were wearing a “short dress” or “a skirt and high heels.” Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, who stopped prosecuting loitering-for-prostitution charges in 2019, in January dismissed 262 warrants against people arrested for it.

CITY PENSION FUNDS TO DIVEST FROM FOSSIL FUELS

The two largest pension funds for New York City employees announced Jan. 25 that they will get rid of about \$4 billion in fossil-fuel securities. The boards of the \$91.4 billion New York City Teachers' Retirement System and the \$77.4 billion New York City Employees' Retirement System both voted to approve divestment over the next five years. Comptroller Scott Stringer and Mayor Bill de Blasio had pledged in 2018 to move the funds' investments out of coal, oil and gas used for energy, and into renewable energy and related businesses, for both environmental and financial reasons.

Stringer said in a statement that the move was both “fiscally prudent and environmentally responsible.” A third pension fund, the \$7.8 billion New York City Board of Education Retirement System, is expected to divest soon. The other two funds in the city's \$239.8 billion retirement system, for police and firefighters, are not participating.

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SUE BRISK

GAMBLE OF HIS LIFE

PRAKASH CHURAMAN FIRST MURDER CONVICTION WAS OVERTURNED. NOW, HE'S RISKING EVERYTHING ON A SECOND TRIAL BEFORE THE SAME QUEENS PROSECUTOR-TURNED-JUDGE WHO RAILROADED HIM BEFORE.

BY JULIAN GUERRERO & DANNY KATCH

“Hi, my name is Prakash Churaman. I am currently incarcerated on Rikers Island. I was arrested in December 2014 for a crime I did not commit and I’m still to this day, awaiting a fair trial. It’s been almost six years now. I was arrested at age 15. I’m now 21 years old. I go to Queens Supreme Court and basically, I’ve been voiceless and silenced since the day my freedom was taken from me. Ever since my freedom was taken from me, over the last six years, I’ve been experiencing nothing but injustice and inequality. I need your help, please.”

That was the message we received on the hotline of our WBAI-FM radio show, Working Class Heroes. And that’s how we discovered the case of a 21-year-old Guyanese immigrant who has been locked up in Rikers Island since he was 15 on a murder charge — even though his conviction has been overturned.

“Since his arrest on December 9, 2014, Prakash has been waiting for a fair trial while incarcerated,” says his lawyer, Jose Nieves. “His years of incarceration have in fact rendered his right to a presumption of innocence meaningless and the right to a fair trial merely a mirage.”

Churaman’s case exposes many of the problems with the Queens criminal-justice system — including not only the failure to provide speedy trials, but also coerced confessions and impunity for judicial misconduct — that were brought to public attention in 2019 by public de-

fender Tiffany Caban in her nearly successful underdog campaign to become the borough’s new district attorney.

But as that initial message on our voice mail indicates, Prakash Churaman’s story is also about how a young man has endured the trauma of youth incarceration and built a defense team for himself inside and outside the courts to win a conviction reversal and bail release from a Queens machine that has resisted every move toward justice.

Last year, Churaman was offered a plea deal that would have allowed him to get out of jail soon, but he refused to admit guilt for a crime he says he never committed. He is risking many more years of life in a cage with a new trial that will be presided over by the same judge whose misconduct in the original case led to a wrongful conviction.

He knows that he’s taking a tremendous risk, but he feels he has no choice. “That’s me accepting guilt for a crime I did not commit,” he says. “I can’t do that. I can’t be a victim to the system, another statistic for the system. All they care about is the conviction rate. They don’t care about whether a person is innocent or not.”

A BRUTAL MURDER, A QUESTIONABLE CONFESSION

In 2014, three men staged a home invasion in Jamaica, Queens. During the robbery, 21-year-old Taquane Clark was shot to death, and his uncle, Jonathan Legister, was wounded. One of the assailants was also shot, leaving behind DNA evidence that was traced to 28-year-old Elijah Gough, who was found guilty in 2018 and sentenced to 65 years to life.

Also in the home that night was Olive Legister, Jonathan Legister’s mother, who was held hostage during the robbery. After the incident, she told police that she believed that the voice of one of the assailants belonged to Prakash Churaman, a friend of Taquane Clark.

Taquane and Prakash met playing basketball in the neighborhood, not long after Prakash had moved away from his father in Florida to stay with his mother in New York. “I introduced myself and we got to know each other and our bond just grew naturally,” Churaman says. “[My father] was constantly abusing me and beating on me, so when I turned 11 or 12, maybe, I called Children’s Services down in Florida and I told them, ‘Listen, I don’t want to live with my father anymore. I want my mother to have custody of me.’”

Prakash also found his way into trouble and the Queens criminal-justice system. “I’m not an angel,” he says. “Sometimes I would cut school, hang out with

friends, you know, normal teenager stuff.”

In early 2014, police responded to a call from Prakash’s mother that he was running away from home and found what he says was a little knife in his apartment. He was arrested and sent to a Bronx juvenile facility for seven months. He was released on good behavior that November, not long before the home invasion and murder of his friend Taquane Clark.

Acting on Olive Legister’s tip, police arrived at Prakash’s door early on the morning of December 5, 2014. “They came to my apartment without any warrant and they put me in cuffs,” Prakash says. “They had me in a minivan for about three hours — mind you, from where I live to the 113th Precinct, it’s only about 10 minutes.”

When he finally reached the police station, the 15-year-old was put in a small room, where he says he was handcuffed to a pipe on the wall and interrogated by Detectives Daniel Gallagher and Barry Brown.

“Barry Brown was the one that was doing all the cursing and yelling at me,” Churaman recalls. “He did most of the manipulation. The other one, Gallagher, was mostly quiet, acting like he was my friend, and he really wasn’t. They both tag-teamed, played good cop/bad cop.”

“I really did not know what to do,” Churaman continues. “I was lost. I didn’t know what they were talking about. I don’t even know why I’m here. Eventually, I broke down. At one point in the interrogation tape, I said, ‘I’ll say whatever you want to hear.’”

“Mind you, at the time I was taking psych medication. I was taking Wellbutrin because I suffer from depression and anxiety, so they definitely took advantage of me. They didn’t allow me to take my medication or anything.”

Churaman’s mother was present during the interrogation, but she now says she wasn’t aware of the consequences, given the language barrier. She emigrated from Guyana with Prakash and his father when Prakash was a little boy. Worried that her boss might lay her off if she didn’t get out of the precinct and get to work, and perhaps not understanding the stakes of the situation, she urged her son to cooperate with the police.

“My mother was present, but she’s illiterate,” Churaman says. “She doesn’t have no educational background, nothing. She folded just as well as I did, basically.”

With no physical evidence connecting him to the crime scene, Prakash’s confession would be a crucial element in his conviction for “felony murder” (a uniquely American statute directed at those who commit a serious crime while a homicide takes place) in December 2018.

His conviction came one month after Detective Brown

SAFE AT HOME:

Prakash Churaman relaxes with his mother and grandmother. He was released on bail in January after spending six years at Rikers Island.

made the news during the highly publicized trial for the murder of jogger Karina Vetrano, which resulted in a hung jury over concerns that Brown had improperly coerced a confession out of the defendant, Chanel Lewis. But Prakash Churaman's jury never got the opportunity to learn about Brown's tactics, thanks to the actions of Judge Kenneth Holder.

TRAPPED INSIDE THE QUEENS MACHINE

In his 2018 trial, Churaman was represented by the noted civil-rights lawyers Ron Kuby and Rhiya Trivedi. But Judge Holder refused to allow them to present an expert witness on the subject of juvenile forced confessions — despite the fact that Churaman's confession was the prosecution's primary evidence in a case with no physical proof linking him to the scene of the crime. Denied this crucial information, the jury found Churaman guilty and sentenced him to nine years to life.

"When I went in front of [Holder] to get sentenced," Prakash says, "he told me that had I been 16 years and older, he woulda made sure I'd never see daylight again."

Like many Queens judges, Kenneth Holder is a former prosecutor who worked in the Queens District Attorney's office from 1985 to 2005. For most of those two decades, the office was headed by Richard Brown, infamous in criminal-justice circles for pushing "tough on crime" policies long after crime rates plummeted across the city.

"Historically, the Queens DA's office has shown deference to the NYPD," wrote journalist Ross Barkan in 2019, "failing to aggressively pursue police brutality cases. Queens prosecutors are unusually punitive, employing tactics unseen in other city offices ... Assistant district attorneys will join police to interview defendants before they are even arraigned, hoping to secure incriminating statements that will lead to quick convictions."

Kuby says felony murder statutes lend themselves to improper police interrogations "because what the cops invariably do in felony murder cases is tell the defendant, 'We know you didn't kill anybody, we know that you didn't intend for anybody to get hurt, we know you're not a murderer, but just admit that you were there for the robbery.' And even innocent people, under those circumstances, will say, 'Yeah, I was there, I was down with the robbery,' not knowing that they just confessed to felony murder."

"Some lawyers said the [Queens DA] office's pretrial plea policy was coercive and manipulative," *New York Times* journalist Eli Rosenberg wrote in 2015. "They said that the script used to interrogate suspects before their arraignments, wording that was declared unconstitutional in 2014, was still troublesome, despite revisions."

Issues such as these led to the groundswell of support for Tiffany Caban's 2019 campaign to succeed Brown after he died in office that year. She came within a few votes of pulling off a remarkable upset over Melinda Katz, the preferred candidate of the Queens Democratic Party bosses, who have long handpicked candidates for elected judicial and prosecutorial positions.

But while Caban's campaign and those of other progressive aspiring DAs nationwide have drawn attention to the issue of prosecutorial abuses, the issue of judges' misconduct and impunity deserves just as much scrutiny.

The system is premised on the idea that judges like Kenneth Holder will be unbiased, even though many of them have come almost directly from the same offices as the prosecutors now arguing before them. And when they seem to fall short of that ideal — since 2008, Holder has had 27 cases overturned, almost all of them for pro-prosecution abuses such as excessive sentencing and improper jury instruction — there seem to be no consequences.

Six months after Churaman's conviction, Kuby and Trivedi won a reversal in a state appellate court, on the

grounds that the jury should have been allowed to hear testimony about false confessions. But the overturning of his conviction has had surprisingly little impact on his life. Because judges aren't removed from cases in which their decisions have been reversed, his new trial will be presided over by Kenneth Holder.

Until this January, when his new lawyer, Jose Nieves, finally won his release on bail, Prakash remained in Rikers Island, because Judge Holder continued to deny him the chance to prepare for his second trial from the home he was taken away from when he was 15.

FIGHTING FROM THE INSIDE

Life inside Rikers has taken an enormous toll. Churaman has attempted suicide twice, and at one point was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. A victim of anxiety and depression even before his arrest, he now believes that he is also suffering from PTSD.

Despite his struggles, Churaman became friends with other incarcerated youth on Rikers Island and met people who continue to provide him with support and friendship. One of his most important early allies was Jacob Cohen, who ran a music program in Rikers Island for adolescents and young adults.

"Everyone has horrible situations in there," says Cohen, "but Prakash's was a particularly sad case, because he said he was innocent and locked up for a crime that occurred when he was 15 years old. And he had basically no support."

"Eventually, he asked me to help him organize a Kick-

SINCE 2008, JUDGE KENNETH HOLDER HAS HAD 27 CASES OVERTURNED, ALMOST ALL OF THEM FOR PRO-PROSECUTORIAL ABUSES.

starter to help him raise funds so he could hire a lawyer," says Cohen. "I made a one-minute video for Instagram that included drawings of him that I did, and we recorded a phone call that was basically him saying 'I'm accused of a crime I didn't commit, I'm poor, I need funds because I don't have a lawyer, I don't have legal representation.'"

Jacob's advocacy for Churaman eventually cost him his job, but it brought the case to the attention of Kuby and Trivedi. Churaman was eventually able to pull a small support team together, including members of the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, which started to build publicity around his case.

Day after day, Churaman left the same kind of messages we received at Working Class Heroes for anyone he thought might help. By December 2020, those efforts started to pay off as his support team organized a rally in the snow outside the Queens courthouse.

A new wave of publicity in the aftermath of that rally resulted in a campaign to call on Queens DA Melinda Katz to drop the charges. Jose Nieves got bail granted, and his expanded support team raised the money. On January 19, Churaman, now 21, was able to come home under conditions of house arrest.

THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM OVER

When Prakash Churaman turned down a plea deal that would have drastically reduced his remaining prison sentence, he was taking a massive gamble that it is possible for a poor immigrant of color to win a measure of justice from the Queens criminal-justice system. His lawyers at the time, Kuby and Trivedi, advised him against it.

At the same time, the District Attorney's office's willingness to offer such a seemingly lenient deal for the serious crime of felony murder indicates that it might not have been very confident about its case. Churaman is confident that justice will prevail, and that has inspired supporters to rally to his cause.

"[I'm] someone who grew up in Queens and walked out of this courthouse many days as a young person," said Cory Greene of How Our Lives Link Altogether (HOLLA) at the December 9 rally outside the Queens courthouse. "So when I got that call from a young person who had been in prison since they were 15 and that person still had the audacity to fight to want to be free, that spoke to my spirit personally. It didn't matter if it was raining, sleeting, or snowing, if I had an inch or energy to be here today to speak to the courtrooms, to speak to you all out there—but really to speak to my little self that was 15, that was 16, that was 17 in there, and I didn't have the heart that Prakash had. I didn't know how to fight like he knew how to fight."

But with his case still in the hands of a judge who suffered no consequences for his improper conduct in the first trial, Churaman still faces long odds.

"Prakash faces a second trial," Nieves says, "in a broken criminal-justice system that is dysfunctional because of institutional racism, coercive police interrogation tactics, prosecutors that are more focused on getting a conviction rather than doing justice, and a global pandemic that has brought our system of justice to a grinding halt forcing criminal justice-involved citizens to wait in a perpetual purgatory until they can have their rights as citizens acknowledged."

When Melinda Katz narrowly defeated Tiffany Caban to become the new Queens district attorney, she responded to the cries for reform by creating a conviction integrity unit to investigate wrongful convictions. But Prakash Churaman has already had his conviction overturned, and he still spent much of his adolescence in jail. He would get his case reviewed by the conviction integrity unit only if he's convicted a second time.

Katz's office said its policy is not to comment on ongoing cases.

As the February 10 date for his retrial approaches, Prakash is home with his mother and grandmother, but his transition to civilian life, as brief as it may have been, remains a struggle.

"They robbed me of everything, man, everyone who was in my life," he says. "All that mental anguish and trauma, it took a toll on me, especially in regards to my mental health. I was kidnapped for six years. The wrong that's been done to me is irreparable. No matter how much compensation I receive for getting wrongly convicted, I'll never get back the time I spent behind those barbed wires."

"I'm going to prove my innocence and continue freedom fighting and fight for those who are in my situation," he continues. "There are lots of juveniles in the system, just like me. The system is really cruel and nothing's going to happen and if we sit around and let them continue their cruel and unusual punishment."

SEX WORKERS & COVID

MANY ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO MAKE A LIVING, BUT IT'S NOT EASY

BY OLIVIA RIGGIO

“I definitely know some folks who are still seeing people and are not really being cautious. The threat of starvation is a bit more all-encompassing than the threat of COVID, for many people,” says Fera Lorde, a sex worker for 17 years.

Lorde, who uses the gender-neutral pronoun “they” and works with the Brooklyn chapter of the Sex Workers Outreach Program (SWOP), began offering sex acts as a homeless teenager in Seattle hoping for the odd \$20, but is now a full-time “full service” escort whose rates start at \$1,000 for a 90-minute encounter.

The COVID-19 epidemic has seriously complicated life for sex workers, whose gigs, after all, often involve intimate in-person contact. Some have been able to work remotely, such as by “camming,” doing live performances on webcams or posting pictures and videos on subscription-based fan sites like OnlyFans.

Lorde, who does not do online work, says they lost their income at the beginning of the pandemic, but has been able to stay afloat thanks to a few loyal customers. However, sex workers who do not charge high-end prices, or who fear that demanding that clients take COVID tests and quarantine before encounters will cost them business, take more risks.

“I’m currently in a place where I’m doing OK financially, but if I wasn’t, I would lower my rates, I’d see clients with less precautions,” Lorde says. “There’s just different levels of risk.”

Mia Lee, another full-service escort and organizer with SWOP Brooklyn, came to the U.S. from China as a political refugee and grew up in foster care. She attended college and became successful in the finance world before leaving and using her business smarts to become a high-end escort. But because the majority of her clients are business travelers or rich men now unable to sneak away from their families during lockdown, much of her business has halted.

Lee said her savings have helped her stay afloat. She doesn’t require her clients to have COVID tests, but she gets tested regularly.

For Sinnamon Love, a 26-year sex-work veteran based in New York City, the risk of in-person work is not an option. Now 47, with three children and a 7-year-old grandson, she began as a survival sex worker as a teen, sleeping with people for food or a place to stay. She began working in mainstream porn — which she is best known for — in college, but also does in-person performances, full-service work, dominatrix work, and camming.

Last spring, she formed the BIPOC Adult Industry Collective (BIPOC AIC), which aims to combat racism in the adult entertainment world. The group provides education, wellness resources, and financial microgrants to sex workers of color.

Sinnamon is immunocompromised, as is her grandson, who lives with her. Although she is best known for her porn work, she says she prefers in-person work, but has given it up during the pandemic. Being at home with a family — and experiencing the death of a loved one during the pandemic — were added challenges. At first, she says, she didn’t take advantage of the support groups her own organization was holding, but eventually realized she deserved support too.

“The very work that I was creating, the space I was creating for other people, became a safe space for me as well,” she says. “I think it was almost three months before I attended one of our support groups, because I didn’t want to take up space from other people who needed to access these resources. And then I realized... I also am a marginalized sex worker impacted by COVID.”

CYBERSEX: THE CONTACTLESS ALTERNATIVE?

While some sex workers are still reeling from the loss of in-person work and the pandemic’s economic effects on their clients, others have found an opportunity to enter the industry and make more money by working remotely.

Saint Devera, an online cam model living in Chicago, started his work on the online subscription-based platform FanCentro at the beginning of the pandemic. He was at first veteran cammer

MelRose Michaels’s personal assistant, but decided to go in front of the cameras in March, after he lost his job as a bartender.

He now has 158 followers and offers subscribers solo videos, chatting and personal pay-per-view images.

Michaels, who is based in Tennessee and has been a webcam model for a decade, said she noticed that subscribers began guarding their wallets when COVID started. She lowered prices for individual clips, but was able to keep the subscription costs for her FanCentro content the same.

When she first entered the industry, she says, many other sex workers felt that cammers weren’t really legitimate sex workers. But when COVID hit, already established webcam models like her were more able to adapt to work under the lockdown.

“I feel like webcam models especially were kind of poised for this, because we’ve been selling our own clips, we’ve been producing our own content, we’ve always had control of our own content,” Michaels says. “We were kind of in a power position. From my perspective, a lot of the girls who were in mainstream porn kind of found themselves like, ‘Oh, now I have to learn all this stuff that everyone else was doing, and do it all myself,’ which they weren’t prepared for.”

Most sex workers engage in multiple forms of sex work, both online and in-person, Sinnamon said. Blyre Cpanx, a travelling sex worker, burlesque performer, and professional dominatrix who has been working in the industry for about eight years, did most of her work in-person before the pandemic, but supplemented it by selling photos or videos online or having clients pay to chat with her. When the pandemic hit, all of her in-person work and performances were cancelled, so she started relying solely on her online client base. She has gained more online clients, but they haven’t necessarily been reliable.

“It’s affecting a lot of my clients — what can they afford?” she says. “I’ve had one client that has been my very loyal client for six years and during COVID, he had to cut out all forms of support and patronage.”

Still, she adds, she and her in-person clients agree about not wanting to meet right now.

A RESOURCE GAP

Switching to online camming isn’t an option for everyone. Lorde, for example, suffers from screen-induced seizures.

It’s particularly difficult for the Chinese immigrants, many undocumented, who work in massage parlors in areas like Chinatown in Flushing, Queens. “A lot of them are immigrants who don’t have language capacities, so even if they have access to a working phone and Wi-Fi and microphones — just the plethora of things that you need to make online work feasible and profitable, there’s a language barrier,” says Esther K, the co-director of Red Canary Song, a group formed to help massage-parlor workers.

They don’t necessarily consider themselves sex workers but often perform sex acts for clients, she explains. It’s more lucrative than restaurant or nail-salon work. Many have families at home, she adds, lack the equipment and private space to film themselves, or the time to promote themselves.

That means massage parlor workers are more likely to move into street sex work, which is much riskier. Mia Lee also said she’s learned from her work with SWOP that lower-charging street workers have also been reporting more violence from clients.

“Clients would negotiate or demand for workers to get into a car immediately or wave workers from a lit area into an unlit area,” Esther explains. “They would be forced to work in these more dangerous conditions.”

Police are another danger. Raids on massage parlors are common. Red Canary Song was named in honor of Yang Song, a Flushing massage worker who died jumping out a window to avoid an arrest during a police raid in 2017.

In New York, there has been a push to decriminalize sex work, led by organizations like DecrimNY and politicians like state Senators Julia Salazar and Jessica Ramos. Salazar introduced a bill to decriminalize it during the 2019–2020 legislative session, but it did not make it past committee.

Some self-styled reforms can cause problems for sex workers, however. Lorde said they moved from Seattle to New York



ASHLEY MARINACCO



ASHLEY MARINACCO

in 2018 because Seattle’s “Nordic model” laws on prostitution created too much of a burden. The Nordic model, in theory, punishes only clients who pay for sex acts, not the workers who perform them. But in reality, Lorde says, it defines all sex workers as victims of trafficking, to the point where if sex workers work in a group, they’re considered traffickers of each other, and if they advertise online, they’re considered traffickers of themselves. This type of law also scares off clients, Lorde adds, which gives predatory and abusive clients more leverage.

New York’s 1976 ban on “loitering for the purpose of prostitution” law has been nicknamed the “walking while trans” law because it has led to police profiling of transgender women, especially those of color. On February 2, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation repealing it.

Nationally, the 2018 Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) were packaged as anti-trafficking laws. They made online platforms responsible for sex sold on them, such as a pimp advertising the services of an underage girl. That effectively cut off outlets for online advertising, which many adult, consensual sex workers used to vet clients before meeting them. Craigslist eliminated its entire personal-ads section, where many postings were for sex work.

Some sex workers are also claiming that OnlyFans is beginning to kick adult-content creators, who generate most of its traffic, off its site as a result of FOSTA/SESTA. Legislation seems to paint victims of sex trafficking and sex workers in the industry on their own accord with the same brush.

Even when sex workers aren’t directly sharing explicit content, some sites are censoring them. In December 2020, Instagram tightened its terms of use to shut sex workers out of the app. Sex workers have also been reporting that Instagram’s algorithms censor certain body types more than others. “Thin bodies are censored or flagged far less than larger bodies,” says Cpanx, and white people on OnlyFans have their posts reported far less often than people of color.

CELEBRITY CONTROVERSY AMID A FLOODING MARKET

The influx of already wealthy people to online sex work has created some resentment from those already in the life. In 2020, former Disney star Bella Thorne sparked outrage when she made an OnlyFans account, offering \$200 nudes for her 50,000 subscribers. Already a multimillionaire, she said she’d donate what she made to charity. Except, the “nudes” were just pictures of her in lingerie, which led to OnlyFans having to dole out thousands of refunds and processing costs. The site now limits content creators’ charges for exclusive content to \$50, and caps tips at \$100. It also pays users less frequently.

“Celebrities came over and took over OnlyFans,” says Kiara is Cocky, an Atlanta-based erotic-content creator. “At this point if you don’t break through this thick wall of the most popular top-making OnlyFans creators, you’re at the bottom 94% of creators on OnlyFans.... Even before COVID, probably just one year ago, it was a little bit more spread out, with a middle class, and now it’s a lot less of a middle class.”

With sites like OnlyFans favoring celebrities and already-established porn stars with large social media followings, newcomers setting up accounts in the midst of COVID layoffs are not likely to make enough to survive. It’s not as easy as uploading a nude photo or X-rated video and watching the cash flow in. Sex workers need to market themselves to stand out among thousands.

“There’s a lot of business sense that goes along with being successful at it,” Michaels says.

She used to do her own marketing, filming, production, and social media by herself but has started hiring assistants. The online sex-work world has become so saturated because of the pandemic that Michaels pitched an idea to the OnlyFans competitor FanCentro to create Centro University, a free training series that offers newbies tips for joining the camming world.

Sinnamon’s BIPOC AIC also offers workshops to help sex workers improve their online traffic. Self-promotion — editing, scheduling posts, writing captions, and creating hashtags — is at least half of the job.

“What I would want new sex workers to know is that it’s not easy money at all,” she says. “What happens when you’re sick? What happens when you are not feeling well? What happens when you’re depressed, because we’re living in a pandemic? Like, you still have to be able to churn out content.”

SURVIVAL WORK VERSUS GIG WORK — IS THERE ROOM FOR EVERYONE?

Sinnamon Love

Fera Lorde

Sex workers’ needs for survival are not the same. While some have entered the sex-work gig economy to make extra money during lockdowns, others are struggling to stay afloat in a swelling sea of content.

“There’s definitely a disparity between your girl or guy that just graduated college or just turned 18 and is like, ‘Oh yeah, I can do this! Let me do this!’ and somebody that comes from generational poverty or has pretty much only known ‘the streets’ and who is driven to do it out of the need of survival,” says Devera. He says he’s privileged enough that if he couldn’t do sex work anymore, he would be able to find another job.

Sinnamon says she does not see a disconnect between career sex workers and new entrants to the industry. Michaels’ Centro University is proof that some veteran sex workers want to help novices. Others say that the “you-go-girl” attitude toward online sex work is doing nothing to help people who risk arrest and jail just to survive.

“There are people who enter sex work because it’s their passion and their drive and it’s what they want to do and they’re very excited about it,” Lorde says. “But for a lot of people, it’s a survival trade. Where the institution has failed you, and where you are fetishized and marginalized by society, you create a capital of your own labor, and your body is the means of production.”

That difference particularly affects sex workers of color. One of the reasons Sinnamon created the BIPOC AIC is the wage disparities in the porn industry that lead to pressure to perform more degrading sex acts.

“People often find themselves being co-conspirators to their degradation, because they are in financial straits. People will often do things that they may not necessarily do if they didn’t need the money,” she says.

CAMMING ISN’T AN OPTION FOR EVERYONE INCLUDING IMMIGRANTS WHO LACK THE RESOURCES TO GET STARTED.

Mia Lee says although as a full-time sex worker she feels no animosity toward newcomers just popping into the industry to make some extra money during the pandemic, she’s noticed through her work with SWOP that many sex workers in more dire situations do.

“I think that gig sex workers tend to not really be invested in the community,” she says. “And if you’re basically just a tourist in this marginalized industry, I would imagine it feels pretty unfair to a survival sex worker that, here’s the person who’s just reaping a lot of benefits of this very niche industry without putting anything into the community.”



QANON RECYCLES ANTI-SEMITIC IMAGERY TO SELL HATRED

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

The “Storm” never happened. No round-ups of Satanic pedophile Democrats. No ripping off the masks of alien lizard people. The QAnon conspiracy theory fell flat but for a few days in January, the danger was real.

“Thinking about heading over to Pelosi,” Cleveland Meredith Jr. told police, “And putting a bullet in her noggin on Live TV.” During Biden’s inauguration, he drove to Washington D.C. as rage burned in his brain. A Matrix level stash of weapons was in his truck. He had an assault rifle with telescope tech, an American flag painted Glock, 2,500 rounds of ammo and at least 320 armor piercing bullets.

Three years earlier, in August 2018, Meredith Jr. paid for a QAnon sign to be put up a mile away from his Car Nutz Car Wash in Acworth, Georgia. The local newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, asked him about it. He replied that he was, “a patriot among the millions who love this country.”

Meredith Jr. is one face in a growing rank of incendiaries inspired by the conspiracy theory QAnon to commit acts of violence. The FBI cited it as a source of domestic terrorism. From its start on 4Chan, the conspiracy theory mobilized the right wing, especially after their defeat by neoliberal centrists in the presidential election. It recycles anti-Semitic tropes to drive an eliminationist ideology. The tragic irony is that QAnon also puts its own believers at risk.

THE NEW PUPPET MASTERS

Do you want to know the truth? Here it is. Deep in the deepest parts of the state and elite celebrity circles, a secret society of satanic pedophiles rape, torture and eat children. The evil liberal cabal rules the media and government. They built the 5G wireless towers to spread cancer and Covid-19. UFOs are real. 9/11 was an inside job. John F. Kennedy Jr. is alive and adores Trump. By the way, former President Trump was recruited by top generals to expose the vile ring of satanic pedophiles in a mass crackdown called The Storm.

QAnon is like the classic horror film, *The Blob*; it feasts on anything. It rolls through America like a monstrous sticky ball, growing exponentially by pulling in the detritus of other conspiracy theories. 5G towers here. Election theft there. The adhesive quality of QAnon comes from the psychological hunger for a story that helps one cope with loss or stress, gives a cause to believe and community to belong to. No wonder a majority of Republicans say it’s either “mostly true” or “some parts” are true. The Right is driven by grievance. QAnon, like most conspiracy theories, satisfies the need to reclaim a lost glory by telling a simple story. A hidden evil elite causes global suffering, and your pain in particular, and if you expose or kill them, you will regain your place.

Even though QAnon began in 2017, it borrows heavily

from centuries old anti-Semitism. The bloody line of hatred against Jews can be traced from the ancient world, through the medieval era to the modern epoch, but it’s the 19th Century tropes that resurface powerfully. In the forged anti-Semitic document from 1903, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the core image is of a cabal that controls the media and finance, claims to support workers only to deceive them, spark a class war and build a Jewish “super-state” from the rubble. Alongside those tropes is the “blood libel,” in which Jews are imagined to sacrifice Christian babies during Passover and use their blood to make unleavened bread.

Take a look at QAnon closely and the recycling becomes clear. Secret society that controls government? Check. Does this evil cabal kill children? Check. Do they keep the masses in ignorance through media manipulation? Check. Will there be a war? Check.

The danger is obvious. In a time of explosive political polarization, rising right-wing racism and authoritarianism during a global pandemic; QAnon’s implicit anti-Semitism will activate more violence. The mass shooting at Pittsburgh’s The Tree of Life synagogue in 2018 could be a prelude of a 21st Century pogrom if the implicit anti-Semitism in QAnon connects to the rest of the far right ideology. The reason is because at its core is an eliminationist nightmare. Destroy the hidden evil, and you will be freed. Never mind if none of it is true. Never mind if you kill people over a lie.

BEHOLD THE PALE WHITE LIE

“There’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take this global cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles out,” said Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene during her campaign for Georgia’s 14th Congressional District. She said Muslims in Congress were an “invasion,” Blacks and Latinx were held back by drugs and gangs. She finished with the classical rhetorical flourish of white males being the most “mistreated” group in America.

She is not alone. Alongside her is Rep. Lauren Boebert, who flirted with QAnon, and the nearly 60 former congressional candidates who either slyly promoted it or gave it a very public bear-hug. Behind the politicians are hundreds of thousands online devotees and die-hards who showed up at Trump rallies hoisting giant “Q” signs. By time the election came, the demonization of the Democratic party had been complete.

Politicians rode the wave of hatred into office. At least two made it in. The wave hit a climax at the Capitol Hill insurrection. The toxic ideological brew, Blob-like, goeey and acidic rolled through halls of power, and left dead people in its wake. The Republican party gave a wink-wink tacit approval of QAnon, and with each step closer to respectability, its followers were emboldened to act out on the apocalyptic plot.

The cruel calculation of conspiracy theories is that the powerful use them, while the faithful believers pay the price. In December 2016, Edgar M. Welch charged into a Washington, D.C., pizzeria, armed with an AR-15 and a handgun, fired and demanded to know where the sex-trafficked children were. The alt-right conspiracy theory that high-ranking members of the Democratic Party were running a child sex ring out of the Comet Ping Pong pizza parlor was a precursor to QAnon. Welch is serving a four-year sentence. In 2018, Matthew Wright was peeved that Trump had not started The Storm, and blocked a bridge to the Hoover Dam with an armored truck, two military grade rifles plus 900 bullets. He was arrested and will be in prison for at least 10 years. Other QAnon followers

were found with bomb-making material, one killed a Gabino crime family boss, another derailed a freight train. The list goes on and on.

The dual victims of QAnon are those targeted by it and those who believe in it. The former run in a panic as armed conspiracy theorists show up looking for crimes that don’t exist. The latter grip the bars of a jail, maybe realizing they have been fooled into losing their freedom.

FREEZE THE BLOB

Conspiracy theories are a permanent part of our politics. Before it was *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, with its bogeyman of the “Communist conspiracy,” or the 1964 *A Choice Not an Echo* by Phyllis Schlafly, which called out shadowy kingmakers blocking Sen. Goldwater’s disaster of a presidential campaign, or that the 1969 NASA moon landings were “faked,” or FEMA is building concentration camps, or the Sandy Hook mass murder of kids was staged, or that alien lizards are secretly taking control of government.

The major difference is that QAnon came at the worst time. The U.S. is at a tipping point. The pandemic, the new crushing debt, the loss of cultural status for whites as America becomes more diverse, and the new Trump-led Republican party turn to fascism all add up to a highly explosive moment. QAnon is a lit match. It ignites what Richard Hofstadter called in his 1964 essay “The Paranoid Style of American Politics” that “chronic mental disorder characterized by systemized delusions of persecution and one’s own greatness.”

How does one beat it? One tactic is to deplatform QAnon. Twitter canceled accounts linked to the conspiracy theory. Amazon cut QAnon products. It is an attempt to cut them off and cut them out. The problem is newer platforms, more conservative or at least libertarian-leaning like Gab will scoop them up. What is the solution?

Let’s take a cue from Hollywood. In *The Blob*, the relentless acid goo monster is killed by the cold. The small-town hero lures it to eat a snow truck of liquid nitrogen, it blows up and freezes the Blob. It couldn’t eat any more.

Starve QAnon by taking away what it feeds on; the psychological hunger for a way to cope with loss, and a need for community. The Left can do that. Use media against media. Show us as we are not who are imagined to be. A promising example is Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s use of Instagram while drinking beer and building Ikea furniture. She led a social media workshop and more progressive politicians are demystifying politics.

Link the personal to the political. Take the scenes of everyday life, and build upon them to make the case for progressive policy. Visit food pantries. Visit homeless shelters. Visit families losing a home to foreclosure. Visit people without healthcare. Show the seemingly endless horizon of faces watching that this is who we are.

Make fun of the conspiracy theory. It would be hilarious to see a democratic socialist tug on their face and say, “I was trying to show you my real alien lizard body but this human mask is too tight. Oh well, let’s go check out this tent city and ask what they need.”

Democracy needs an informed electorate. Right now that means more than facts and statistics about policy. It means the millions of Americans who don’t vote or look askance at politics, need to know we are regular everyday people, trying the best they can to put the pieces of our world back together.

ZETZEN
MIKE BENJAMIN

IN TRUMP'S WAKE

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT BATTLE OVER THE FUTURE OF AMERICA

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

Donald Trump is no longer President, but the political crisis in this country will not subside. It will get worse before it gets better, and the Democratic Party will not save us.

January 6 was quite the event for leftists to watch from the safety of warm living rooms. Tens of thousands of protesters strategically organized enough to crack the halls of power. Chanting, “Whose house? OUR house!” Whaaat?

Pundits continue to fuss over the proper terminology to describe the events of the day, but none I’ve seen want to call it what it truly was: a social movement.

2020 made it more apparent than ever that the United States is riven by two major social movements engaged in a war with each other. Each movement represents a large and diversified coalition that strenuously rejects status quo politics and wants significant structural, systemic and lasting change. And each movement has inspired thousands to set personal interests aside and engage in the struggle in the streets to advance their side in the fight.

These movements are in no way morally or politically equivalent, though there are complexities in each side’s position. We can give them the shorthand of “left” and “right.” The left movement is about the expansion of social justice, including, most important, in the economic life of the nation; it is about ending both racial oppression at home and imperialism abroad. The right movement is about protecting exclusionary privileges, maintaining socially conservative gender conventions, and keeping out by any means necessary non-white immigrants and refugees from poor countries.

Each coalition is fragile. The left coalition includes reformists and revolutionaries, nationalists and integrationists, liberals and anarchists. In electoral politics, it is most com-

monly identified with Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, and the other members of The Squad. The right coalition is dominated by white nationalists hell-bent on a restoration of a fully articulated white privilege, but also includes (slightly) multiracial groups motivated by a broader vision of aggressive and exclusionary nationalism, usually Christian, always conservative. Each side has a massive apparatus that has been growing over the years to recruit, consolidate, plan and theoretically develop its social analysis and rhetoric. There are youth organizations, research institutes, funding foundations, summer retreats and a whole symbology of recognizable images for those in the know. The right has definitely adopted and adapted methods from the other side; in truth, we have learned some things from them as well.

The Democratic Party mainstream would like to equate these movements even while they endeavor to co-opt the analysis and recruit from the left. In public, they focus on the right wing’s movement tactics as a way to generate wide support for what must be done: militarized control of public space, carceral threats, replace protests with an electoral focus.

The left needs to maneuver around this by returning the focus onto the competing agendas of these warring movements. The question of violence can never be approached as a stand-alone issue: violence against the Nazis in Germany was entirely justifiable. The question of violence is moral, yes,

to fight, against both the right-wing movement that has been allowed to flourish and grow over the last several decades into a force of 74 million voters, but also against the weak-kneed and ineffective policies and rhetoric of the right’s only serious, viable opposition, the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party does not want fundamental, structural change in the economy, and because of this, it cannot address racial injustice either in the wage structure for low-wage workers or in the carceral system that manages injustice.

Our first task must be to develop an updated understanding of what we are fighting against. The storm troopers of the right are not all patsies: they used the “Stop the Steal” slogan for their own purposes: to stop the demographic takeover, and protect their political and economic resources from further erosion. And they are not all white or white nationalists. What united many Trump voters was that they do not want to live in the third world country they see on the horizon. They want to live in an imperial nation with global power it can exert to protect and enrich its citizens. And this includes some people of color.

Our second task must be developing the sort of fusion politics of the Poor People’s Campaign, with race and class united in every proposal. Without attending to class, we risk

NOT THE LAST TIME: Charlottesville, Virginia, August 12, 2017, seconds after a Trump supporter drove his vehicle into a crowd of antifascist demonstrators.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY MAINSTREAM WOULD LIKE TO EQUATE THESE TWO MOVEMENTS EVEN WHILE THEY ENDEAVOR TO CO-OPT THE ANALYSIS AND THE PERSONNEL OF THE LEFT.

but it is also always strategic: Will it advance our aims or hurt them? This is the question now being debated on the right, given the way that their January 6 events weakened their coalition.

Trump has been a galvanizing force, a useful tool, a mouthpiece, and a visible example of the angry, assertive, racist, and unapologetically selfish emotions that have been generated in reaction to social movements especially from people of color. But his leadership has been strategically weak: The coalition is in trouble because Trump’s strategic direction is too self-interested. He may well be replaced in his position as figurehead by someone more dangerous.

But the left needs to be clear: We have a two-front war

a neoliberal multiracialism, but without attending to race, we may continue the white left’s tendency to downplay the white nationalist danger.

There is reason for hope, as long as we continue to center our own social movements.

For a review of the early days of the Biden administration, see “Joe Biden’s First Report Card” on Page 20.



SOPHIE NEIMAN

'OUR PEOPLE ARE UNITED BY PAIN'

UGANDA'S BOBI WINE MULLS NEXT STEP AMID GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE, VOTE-RIGGING

BY SOPHIE NEIMAN

Craving to a catchy Afrobeat melody, Ugandan musician-turned-lawmaker Bobi Wine used his hit song “Dembe” or Peace, released just before the country’s 2016 elections, to call for a smooth transfer of power. “We have been at war since independence,” he sang, “governments change through war, and every government wants to go through war.”

Wine, who was born Robert Kyagulanyi, implored his countrymen to do things differently; to cast their ballots and to refrain from violence.

This message fell on deaf ears. A month after “Dembe” first blared from radios across this East African nation of 44 million, incumbent President Yoweri Museveni claimed a landslide victory. While opposition challenger Kizza Besigye languished under house arrest for some 40 days, two people died in protests over a vote marred by allegations of rigging.

Nonetheless, Wine continued to believe in the messages of his “Dembe” anthem and the possibility of change brought about through the ballot box. In 2017, he won a seat in parliament. Two years later, he announced he would run for president and put an end to Museveni’s more than three-decade-long rule, promising to be Uganda’s first democratically elected President.

“On behalf of the people of Uganda, I am challenging [Museveni] to a free and fair election,” Wine said in an address to supporters at the time. “Our people are united by pain. Our people are united by the challenges they go through every day. I am personally ready and willing to lead you in the struggle.”

Despite these high hopes, Wine’s presidential ambitions ended in January with the candidate and his wife under de facto house arrest, scores of people dead and the Internet shut off across the country, as Museveni clinched his sixth term in power.

Now Wine is challenging that election result in court.

THE GHETTO PRESIDENT

Born to a struggling nurse, Wine, 38, was just four-years-old when Museveni overthrew President Tito Okello a guerrilla

war. Wine came of age on the hard-scrabble streets of Kamwokya, a slum in Kampala, the capital.

In a country where the average age is 17 and more than 75 percent of the people are under the age of 30, Wine rocketed to fame as a dreadlocked rapper, calling himself the “Ghetto President.” His songs soon turned political. In a style dubbed “edutainment,” he decried ills ranging from poor sanitation in Kampala to government corruption.

It was these songs that helped carry him to the legislature in 2017. Declaring he would “bring the ghetto to parliament,” Wine won a seat in the Kyadondo East constituency on the outskirts of Kampala.

A fresh leader with an inspiring background, he posed a threat to the ruling party.

“He’d risen from the ghetto and gone through all the hardships of a typical youth here in Kampala; the slum life, the poverty, the unemployment [and] somehow he had made it on his own,” Michael Mutyaba, a political commentator and writer in Uganda told *The Independent*, adding that Wine had “electrified the population.”

A FORMIDABLE NEW CHALLENGE

Wine cemented his status as a rising star by stumping for other opposition candidates. It was while both Museveni and Wine were in the northwestern town of Arua for one such by-election that opposition supporters were accused of throwing rocks at the Presidential motorcade. In the ensuing chaos Wine’s driver Yasin Kuwuma was killed with a bullet that Wine says was meant for him.

Wine was subsequently arrested, charged with treason and allegedly tortured. Museveni dismissed these claims, but the young lawmaker was so badly injured that he struggled to walk without support and fled briefly to the United States for treatment.

The clampdown on Wine in Arua was perhaps a miscalculation by Museveni, a shrewd political operator who has long carried favors with western governments and receives some \$970 million from the U.S. annually, a substantial portion of which supports the military.

While recovering in Washington, Wine met with politicians and gave lengthy interviews. He returned to Kampala a hero. When Wine announced he would run for president, analysts declared he presented the most formidable challenge to Museveni yet.

A BLOOD-SOAKED CAMPAIGN

Attacks on Wine, who fronts the National Unity Platform (NUP) renewed as soon as the campaign period started, and Wine was dragged from his car by security forces and pepper sprayed while delivering his nomination papers to Uganda’s Electoral Commission in early November.

Later that month at least 54 people were killed demanding Wine’s release after he was jailed for allegedly defying COVID-19 protocols at a rally in eastern Uganda.

Weeks afterwards, police fired bullets directly at the windshield of Wine’s car, in what he described as another assassination attempt. Journalists covering the opposition were also attacked, and Wine’s 24-year-old bodyguard Francis Sentenza was killed after reportedly being run over by a police vehicle, a charge that security forces deny.

By late December, some 100 members of Wine’s campaign team had been arrested. Wine himself took to wearing a flak vest and ballistic helmet on the campaign trail, and sent his children out of the country for protection.

Meanwhile, an internet blackout, beginning the day before elections, cut the country off from the outside world. Ugandans went to the polls on Jan. 14, as armed security forces surrounded Wine’s home, trapping him inside with his wife Barbie Itungo Kyagulanyi.

Museveni declared victory with some 58% of the vote, to a nation that had been stunned into silence. The opposition cried foul.

THE FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN

Wine was freed from house arrest late last month following an 11 day detention. On February 1, his lawyers officially delivered a petition to overturn the election results to Uganda’s Supreme Court. Petitioners have alleged various forms of voter fraud, and accused the ruling NRM of repeatedly using violence to block Wine’s campaign.

As Uganda’s opposition prepares for this legal challenge, Wine’s message has reverberated beyond the country’s borders.

“When young people look at Bobi Wine and Uganda they are not necessarily seeing Bobi Wine or Uganda. They are seeing their own local heroes,” said Chris Mukasa, a Nairobi based poet, who runs the community organization and youth forum Fatuma’s Voice.

Many of the problems Wine sings about are shared, on a continent that has the world’s youngest population, presided over by some of its oldest leaders. “Young people are frustrated. Not only in Uganda, not only in Kenya but across the African Continent,” said Sam Soko, director of *Softie*, which charts the political journey of Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi.

“We are tired of unemployment, we are tired of poverty, we are tired of dreams that have not been fulfilled,” Soko, who made his documentary free to view in Uganda ahead of election day, added.

These frustrations are not going away, but Wine’s chances of success in court are dubious. Museveni’s NRM have stated that they are prepared to defend their candidate’s victory. And Museveni has denounced fraud accusations, calling this year’s elections “the most cheating free” in Uganda’s history.

Opposition candidates also went to court to challenge the election verdict in 2016, 2006 and 2001, respectively. Each time, judges found irregularities, but failed to nullify the results.

Another term will hand Museveni a total of 40 years in office.

ASPIRATIONAL:
Raised in the slums of Kampala, Uganda, Bobi Wine has become a symbol of hope in Africa which has the world’s youngest population and many of its oldest leaders.



MONISHARMA

AGAINST THE GRAIN

INDIA'S FARMERS CONFRONT CORPORATE MONOPOLIES

BY MANVI JALAN,

“No farmers, no food.” The chant pulses across the globe from New York to Berlin in support of the hundreds of thousands of farmers who have been protesting across India since November against the new agricultural laws proposed by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It's the largest, most organized protest India has ever seen. Along the highway from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in the north to New Delhi, runs kilometers of encampments and tractors, the farmers refusing to leave till their demands are met.

On January 26, tensions escalated, with protestors storming the barricades of the historic Red Fort in Delhi, at the annual Republic Day parade. The protesters were met with tear gas, batons and water hoses. Disputed reports of violence blistered across news platforms, surrounding the death of one farmer and many injured.

In September, three agriculture-related laws were approved, skewing the agricultural sector towards privatization, threatening the erosion of the 'mandi' system, which provides a safety net for farmers under state law. The laws, hurriedly passed by a majority voice vote, led the opposition to criticize the process as fundamentally unconstitutional.

A REGULATED MARKET

The Mandi system consists of regulated trade markets where farmers sell to licensed distributors who in turn sell to private distributors and facilitate the movement of food from farm to table. This longstanding system also provides a security net for farmers producing certain major produce like wheat and rice, who can sell their unsold produce to government officials at a Minimum Selling Price (MSP) so they aren't left with losses. This system has been navigated best by farmers in Punjab and

Uttar Pradesh who own larger farms, more sophisticated equipment and produce major crops like wheat. They seem to have personal relationships with distributors who've formulated an unofficial credit system.

In all fairness, the Mandi system hasn't been perfect. With most small farmers owning less than five acres of land, and outdated or absent storage facilities, the farming community is barely scraping by. Small farmers have all the odds stacked against them and about 10,000 per year commit suicide. The call for reform, some economists say, has been long overdue. They argue the enactment of these new laws will give the farmers more freedom—the freedom to sell out of state, to sell directly to private buyers and benefit from a free-market economy in the midst of a flawed system where the middlemen take advantage of small farmers.

The protesters clearly disagree. They fear that greater privatization will lead to an eventual dissolution of the 'mandis', leaving thousands of distributors out of jobs as private corporations undercut their prices, and then over time, lead the farmers with no one else to sell to. Their fears are not unfounded. P. Sainath, a prominent advocate for farmers, points out that in the event of a legal dispute between a farmer and a private corporation, the farmers, NGO's, unions or anyone else for that matter won't have the legal right to go to court. The farmer gets the shorter end of the stick. In the absence of state regulation, chances grow that vast private monopolies will take root

hemoth will use vast resources and stealthy strategy to smother all competition as they did with the telecom industry. The group inadvertently became the symbol for the resistance against privatization, with protestors boycotting their products and services by the thousands.

THE SIKH CULTURE OF SERVICE

At the root of the protest lies the Sikh culture of service. Every passerby, protester and farmer passing through the encampments has been fed full-course meals or langad (meals blessed after prayer), given free medicine, and welcomed into the community. The Sikhs are a religious community mostly residing in Punjab. Right-wing propaganda paints the Sikhs as separatists and serves up reports of violence and lurid conspiracy theories.

As it stands today, it seems unlikely that the government will permanently repeal these laws while the protesters are prepared to continue until their demands are met. One thing is clear—the distrust between the government and its people runs deep.

India's government thought it could sneak the new agricultural laws through amid chaos and disruption caused by the

TRACTORS FOR JUSTICE: Indian farmers are not ready to be plowed under by neoliberal reforms to their nation's agricultural laws.

EVERYONE PASSING THROUGH THE ENCAMPMENTS HAS BEEN FED FULL-COURSE MEALS, GIVEN FREE MEDICINE AND WELCOMED INTO THE COMMUNITY.

and the small farmer will be subject to much larger forces than the middlemen he presently contends with.

This law has already been enacted in the state of Bihar. Reports show that while it helped some farmers, it also led to more disorganization and a crumbling of regulated markets. While farmers were able to travel shorter distances to sell, new problems arose with small farmers having to sell at half their profit margin. The logistical problems faced by the farmers today, some argue, could've potentially been solved by adapting the current system, instead of reforming it.

In the shadows loom the Ambani-Adani group, two of India's richest and most powerful corporations who stand to double their wealth in the next five years, by breaking into the prized agricultural market. The farmers' fear this corporate be-

Covid-19 pandemic and could not foresee the farmers' unrelenting protests. The protesters are fighting to keep democracy alive not just for farmers, but for us all, for at the heart of these laws, is a clause taking away the right of farmers and anyone else to sue the government or corporations so long as they have acted in "good faith."

Our government seems to be consistently choosing profit over its people, and even if the profit eventually cycles back into our economy, it'll be at the cost of our democracy.

Manvi Jalan is an India-based independent journalist.

FEMINIST ICONS REVISITED

Andrea Dworkin: The Feminist as Revolutionary
MARTIN DUBERMAN
NEW PRESS, 2019

The Power of Adrienne Rich: A Biography
HILARY HOLLADAY
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, 2020

By Jessica Max Stein

Two recent biographies of prominent writer-activists Adrienne Rich and Andrea Dworkin are a study in contrast in how to tell the story of a life. However, both books do a good job in reminding readers that though their respective subjects may be simplistically perceived as mere polemicists, as well as posited at opposite ends of second-wave feminism, both women are in fact far more complex and allied than that.

Interestingly, both prominent feminists initially hewed closely to convention. Born in Baltimore in 1929, Rich quickly achieved mainstream literary success. She was just 22, a senior at Radcliffe College, when W. H. Auden chose her first book for the Yale Younger Poets prize. At 24 she married Alfred Haskell Conrad, a Harvard economist, bearing three sons by age 30.

Similarly, Dworkin, born in Camden NJ in 1946, was only 22 when she entered into a physically abusive marriage to Dutch anarchist Cornelius Dirk de Bruin. What's more, both women were very close to their fathers, who fostered their intellectual development, and estranged from their mothers.

Of the two books, Martin Duberman's biography is far more sympathetic to its subject. Readers can understand Dworkin's motivations and feelings even while not necessarily agreeing with her views or methods. Simply put, Dworkin became such a strong foe of "woman-hating" — the title of her first and arguably most well-known book, with which she sprang onto the political scene in 1974 — because misogyny devastated her life. She was repeatedly traumatized at the hands of men, barely recovered from one incident before the next. Besides the abusive husband, she was subjected to a brutally invasive vaginal exam at 18 in New York's Women's House of Detention after being arrested protesting the Vietnam War, and sexually assaulted on multiple occasions throughout her life, from childhood molestations to being slipped a date-rape drug at 53. She never really healed from the trauma; her life partner John Stoltenberg said that if he woke her unexpectedly, her immediate instinct was to perceive even him as a threat.

Yet despite Dworkin having plenty of good reason to be a "man-hater," as she was stereotyped by everyone from her fellow feminists to *Playboy* magazine, Duberman emphasizes that Dworkin saw not just the worst but the best of men, and that her opposition to sexism contained an understanding of how it kept both men and women from achieving their full human potential. Indeed, besides being close to her father, Dworkin was partnered with Stoltenberg (a fellow queer) for three decades until her death.

Despite their fame as lesbian separatists, both women actually had great affection and attraction for the men

in their lives, and their lesbianism was in part a political choice. Rich left her husband shortly before his 1970 suicide, having affairs with a juicy roster of characters including June Jordan, Susan Sontag, and her therapist, Lilly Engler, for whom she wrote the famous sequence *Twenty-One Love Poems*, one of the book's most unexpected revelations. Rich did rebuff the advances of poet-activist Audre Lorde; sadly Hilary Holladay only glances upon their close friendship, along with Rich's involvement in the women's community. A similar veil is drawn over Rich's 36-year relationship with fellow writer Michelle Cliff, which lasted until her death. (Cliff died just four years after Rich, despite being 18 years her junior, of liver failure related to her longtime drinking.)

Dworkin and Rich's lives intersected in the anti-pornography movement of the early 1980s. While Rich was a vocal member of Women Against Pornography, alongside such feminist luminaries as Susan Brownmiller, Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem, Dworkin arguably remains the movement's most prominent face. After her 1981 book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, in which she implicates porn as a major factor in violence against women, Dworkin and attorney Catharine MacKinnon drafted a municipal ordinance that passed in some cities and was rejected by others that would allow women to

more easily accessible as well as more private, opposing it seemed like energy better spent elsewhere. What's more, Rich was increasingly taking an intersectional view of feminism, and FACT was an explicitly multiracial coalition while the anti-porn movement was merely single-issue.

Despite this "split," Rich and Dworkin continued to have much in common. Late in life, both explored their relationships with Judaism, coming to terms with it as the first "Other" identity that undergirded much of their activism. What's more, both women were prodigious writers despite struggling with crippling forms of arthritis (osteo for Dworkin, rheumatoid for Rich). Dworkin's health and weight struggles contributed to her early death from myocarditis at 58. Fortunately Duberman does justice to Dworkin's legacy, honoring her as a surprisingly sympathetic figure, not only as an intellectual who wrote 10 books of political theory, but a literary artist who also wrote three novels and a book of poems.

If only Rich were so honored. Hillary Holladay respects Rich's sterling reputation as a literary giant, whose body of work (a dozen books of poems and six of essays) won everything from the National Book Award to her famously rejected National Medal of Arts from the Clinton administration. However, Holladay's startlingly mean-spirited biography is studded with odd barbs and inappropriate judgments. This may relate to Holladay's egregious overreliance on Rich's sister Cynthia, from whom Rich was estranged, as a source. For instance, Holladay accuses Rich of being "ungrateful" for resigning from a teaching position in order to write; calls her "cold" for discussing her sons' privilege; and when Rich writes a detailed letter to friends helping her after spinal surgery, characterizes her as a "martyr and boss" demanding "maid service." Holladay even has Rich's neighbors report on what they saw and heard from their adjoining yards, like a tabloid journalist picking through Rich's garbage. Rich died at home at 82, at the end of a long and illustrious life that deserves a more respectful biography than this.

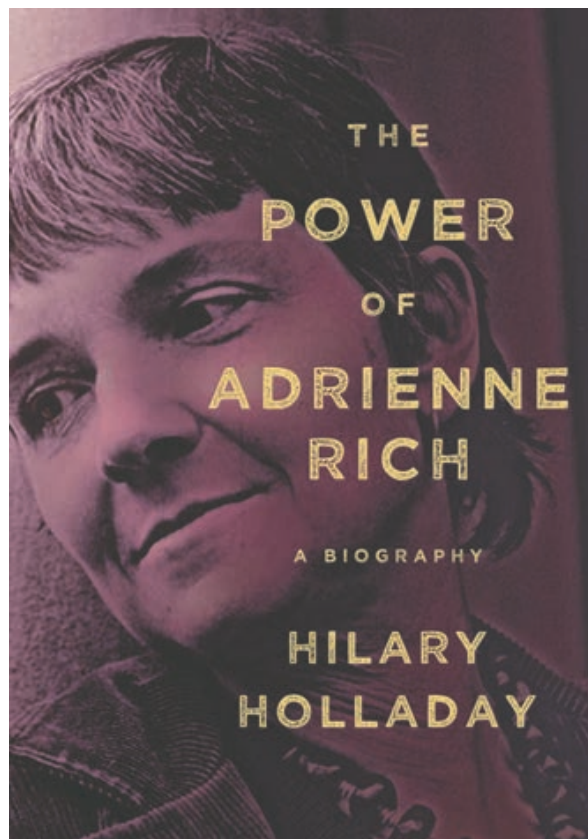
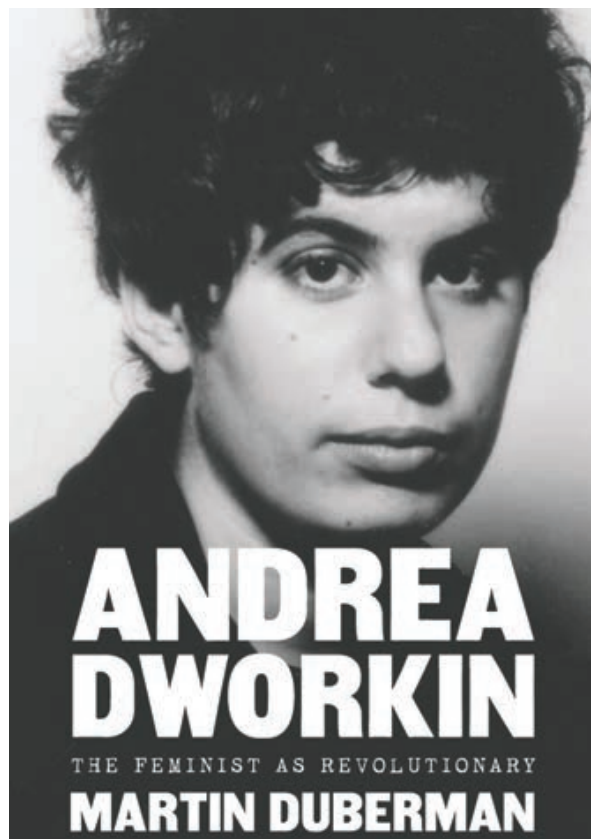


PHOTO: ©ESTATE OF BETTY JANE. BOOK DESIGN BY MICHAEL J. WINDSOR.

sue for the harm porn had caused them — receiving serious backlash from other segments of the feminist movement, who were concerned that the ordinance could all too easily be used by the religious right against women and queers. Duberman stresses that censorship was never Dworkin's intent, but what came to be called the feminist "sex wars" were on. (The measure was ultimately overturned by an appeals court as unconstitutional.)

In 1985, a new group, the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (FACT), submitted a "friend of the court" brief objecting to the ordinance, signed by a who's who of lesbian writers that included Barbara Smith, Rita Mae Brown, Kate Millett, Joan Nestle — and Rich. Dworkin and others in the anti-porn movement saw this as a huge betrayal on Rich's part, as if she were "switching sides."

In hindsight, this sense of betrayal seems like hairsplitting infighting between women who had much more grounds for allegiance against a common enemy than actual opposition with each other. More realistically, Rich was reading the room. The anti-porn movement was receding; as technology (particularly the VCR) made pornography

DESPITE HAVING PLENTY OF GOOD REASON TO BE A "MAN HATER," ANDREA DWORKIN SAW NOT JUST THE WORST BUT THE BEST IN MEN.

WAR NO MORE

I Ain't Marching Anymore: Dissenters, Deserters, and Objectors to America's Wars

CHRIS LOMBARDI
THE NEW PRESS, 2019

By Eleanor Bader

Almost 250 years ago, in 1777, Jacob Ritter, a member of the Pennsylvania militia, assessed the carnage surrounding him on the battlefield and decided, right then and there, that he would never take up arms again. “The rest of Jacob Ritter’s life was shaped by that moment of conscientious objection, a term invented a century before,” reports Chris Lombardi, author of *I Ain't Marching Anymore: Dissenters, Deserters, and Objectors to America's Wars*.

an otherwise sweeping look at an important piece of under-reported history.

Among the most interesting nuggets in the book is Lombardi’s deep dive into the role that social class—poverty—has always played in determining who enters military service. Prior to and during the Civil War, for example, Lombardi writes that virtually every recruit had been “wooled in advance by promised signing bonuses of three months’ pay...Many enlisted for the sake of their families, having no employment, and were promised that they could leave part of their pay for their families to draw in their absence.”

Sadly, then, as now, promises made were not promises kept and thousands of men deserted, walking away in fury and despair when the money did not materialize. This, Lombardi notes, was particularly glaring for soldiers of color. “The Army’s refusal to give Black soldiers equal wages caused some to desert rather than work

and Oliver Stone; and cartoonist Bill Mauldin used their military experience to create art with an explicitly antiwar message, finding in creative expression a way to affirm that war is hell.

Not surprisingly, this message is repeatedly hammered in *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, but Lombardi also tackles voluntary enlistment and interviews dozens of soldiers who signed up only to later discover that they’d made a huge mistake. The many organizations that assist them—from Veterans For Peace to the War Resisters League to the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors—are showcased and Lombardi paints an ardent portrait of their day-to-day efforts. In addition, our era’s most prominent resisters — Daniel K. Choi, Stephen Funk, Chelsea Manning, and Reality Winner — are introduced as exemplars of bravery and integrity, committed veterans-

HELL NO: Vietnam vets march in Philadelphia on July 4, 1976.



What’s more, Lombardi notes that while Ritter’s position was not particularly popular, it was also not unique, and in the centuries since, scores of people have not only opposed war, but have resisted other aspects of militarism, from paltry wages paid to servicemembers, to opposition to the racism, sexism, homophobia and imperialism that have long been endemic to U.S. policy.

This big-picture overview makes Lombardi’s meticulously researched text essential reading. Beginning with Ritter’s revolutionary act of conscience, she covers every armed conflict the United States has engaged in and zeroes in on the many principled acts of courage that have turned flag-waving patriots into anti-war activists. The result is both harrowing and inspiring.

That said, there are some odd omissions, among them the sidestepping of Vietnam-era resisters who fled to Canada, choosing to uproot themselves from their friends, families and communities rather than face imprisonment or ascend into harm’s way. But this is a small criticism in

without pay. A few even chose execution rather than return to duty,” she writes.

As engaging as this was, Lombardi adds that not every desertion was motivated by principle, with some warriors going AWOL because they were too psychologically damaged to continue fighting, suffering from what was then called nostalgia or soldier’s heart. We now know this condition as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. In fact, between 1861 and 1866, she writes, government reports acknowledged “5,213 cases and 58 deaths attributed to nostalgia among white troops, with 334 and 16 deaths among colored troops.”

“The Civil War is where the emotional damage of war became an area of medicine,” Lombardi explains. The war also created “the first generation of writers for whom that damage yielded dissent,” including Marine veteran Herman Melville and Army nurse Walt Whitman.

In subsequent generations, writers Kurt Vonnegut, Howard Zinn and Ron Kovic; filmmakers John Houston

turned-activists who are willing to speak truth to power and assert that peace is possible.

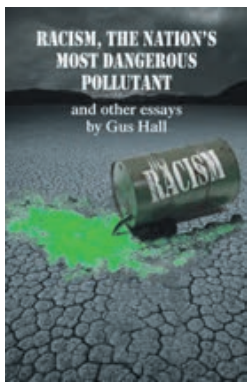
International Publishers

New items in stock and now available

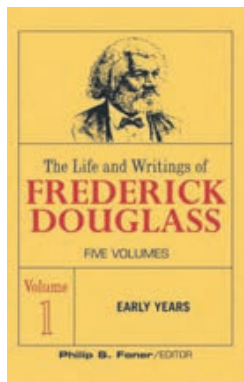
International Publishers is happy to re-release two books of immediate importance. One is a collection of essays by former CPUSA leader Gus Hall on the dangers posed by the poison of racism, both to the unity working people and to the Nation in general.

The other is the first of a five volume set which spans the life of the great African American abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, "The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass", edited by the renowned historian Philip Foner.

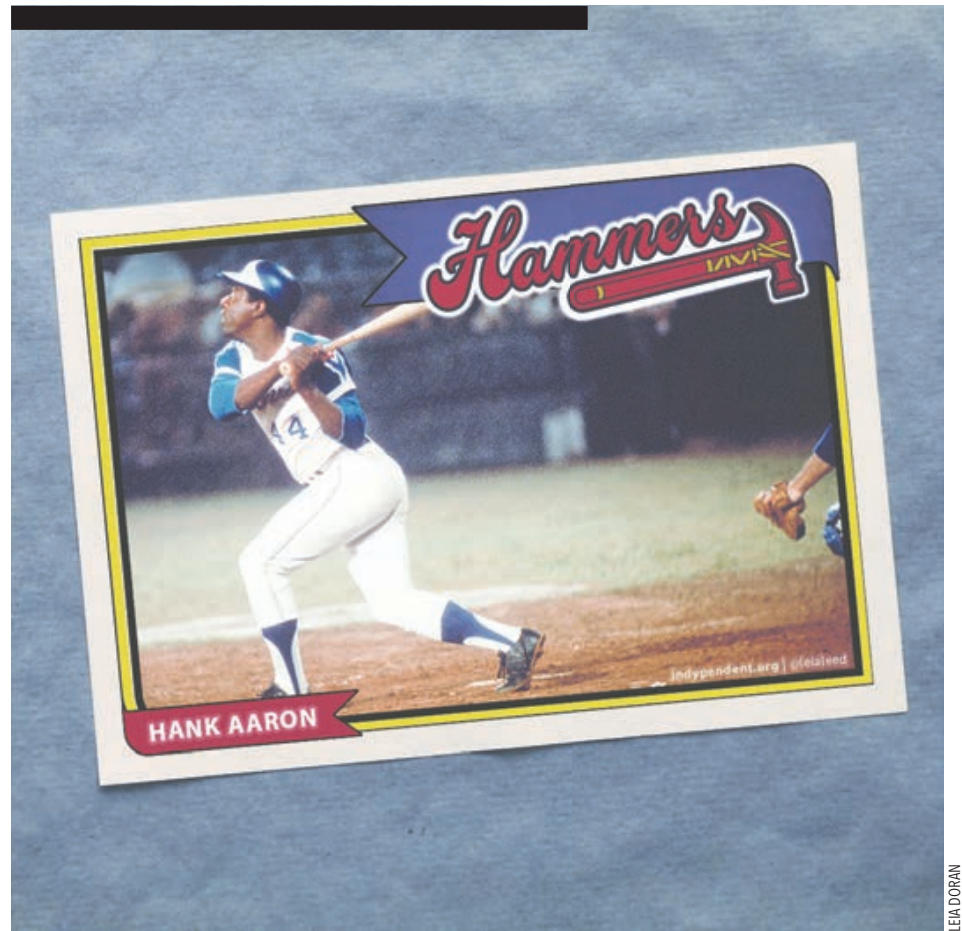
Each of the volumes covers a different period in the life of Douglass, this first volume is entitled "The Early Years" and covers the period from 1817 to 1849.



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SPORTS



LEIA DORAN

IF I HAD A HAMMER

BY JOHN TARLETON

Sports teams with Native American-themed names and images have come under intense pressure in recent years to cut out the cultural appropriation that many Native Americans find racist and demeaning.

In July, the Washington Redskins dropped their longtime team name in the aftermath of demonstrations around the murder of George Floyd. The move followed years of protest. In December, the Cleveland Indians announced they would adopt a new team name in time for the 2022 season.

The Atlanta Braves, Kansas City Chiefs, Golden State Warriors and the Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League can all expect more scrutiny in the coming years.

As for the Braves, they could skip the predictable cycle of protest, intransigence and, finally, capitulation by simply honoring a legendary ballplayer with a catchy new team name.

It's time for the Atlanta Hammers.

Henry Aaron's death on January 22 at the age of 86 was met with an outpouring of love and reverence for the Home Run King. "Hammerin' Hank," as he was known, played 21 of his 23 seasons with the Braves, first in Milwaukee and then in Atlanta, where the team moved in 1966. Late in his career, he faced down a deluge of death threats and racist hate mail and broke Babe Ruth's all-time home run record of 714 in 1974. He finished his career two years later with 755 dingers. He was one of baseball's all-time greats, as well as a great human being.

"His swing, his smile, his spirit, they were all beautiful," former Brave Chipper Jones said at a memorial service for Aaron.

Forward-looking Braves fans have

started a petition on change.org to change the team's name to the Hammers. Dale Murphy, who starred on the Braves teams of the 1980s, has heartily endorsed the change. So far team officials have demurred.

To help visualize the change we want to see, the Indy's Leia Doran has created a new Atlanta

Hammers logo that maintains the same color scheme as the current team logo and deftly replaces the tomahawk with a hammer. She also created an Atlanta Hammers baseball card featuring an image of Aaron and his home-run swing.

Pro sports teams are loathe to alter their brands, which are worth millions of dollars and build fan loyalty across generations. Baseball can be especially change resistant. But in this case, the team name is a no-brainer. Leave behind the racially insensitive imagery and embrace an enlightened, snappy-sounding new name that will put a smile on the faces of baseball fans everywhere. Expect those "Atlanta Hammers" caps and jerseys to fly off the shelves.

To the front office of the Atlanta baseball team, you're welcome. And please cut us a check when you reap the windfall.

DEATH SQUADS WITH IMPUNITY

THE PUBLIC EXECUTIONS OF
JUDI BARI, MARY JO FRUG
AND LINDA ANN RAYNER

ROBERT BRUCE MCLAUGHLIN



BRANDON O'NEILL

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Billy,
My grandfather started watching lots of Fox News about five years ago and became noticeably angrier. Since the election, he's fallen down the rabbit hole with QAnon and there's no counterpoint I can make that he doesn't call "fake news." Is there anything I can do to bring him back to reality?

ELIZA
Crown Heights

Rev Billy,
Winter always bums me out — the cold, the short days and lack of sunshine, having to get all bundled up to go on the simplest errand. I look forward to moving someplace warmer and sunnier in a few more years when I retire. In the meantime, do you have any tips for how to get through winter when warmer days seem such a long way away?

PAUL
Jamaica, Queens

Dear Eliza,
Just walk up to the TV, turn off Tucker Carlson, and before Gramps says "What?" read some Octavia Butler right point blank.

*God is Power / Infinite / Irresistible
/ Inexorable, / Indifferent,
And yes, God is Pliable —
Trickster / Teacher / Chaos / Clay,
God exists to be shaped. God is Change.*

And then turn his show back on and leave. Don't try to persuade. Conspiracy theorists make alternative realities. Don't try to get in there with logic or even love. Your grandpa is imitating the White Male God that Doesn't Change.

Give him 24 hours to absorb the *Parable of the Sower*. Then next day *Song of Myself*, then *Revolution for the Hell of It* and keep this up every day, then Wangari Maathi, Yoko One, James Baldwin, Lorca, AOC. ... and then on the seventh day turn off Murdoch and stand there and ask him, "What do you want to hear?" If he's ready, he'll say, "Well alright honey, go ahead, read something." Or it might take him many seventh days. But if he gives you some daylight, then go back to Octavia:

Change is inevitable. Like Ecclesiastes says, "to everything there is a season ..." Change is a part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. But I don't believe we're dealing with all that that means. We haven't even begun to deal with it.

— Billy

Paul,
The old consumer-is-king days when the main thing was individual comfort, those days are long gone, Paul. We're in a suicidal slide towards a permanent heat wave. Hundreds of species are disappearing weekly. We are in too much of an emergency for you to get depressed from cold weather, Paul. That's not this present moment in history. Right now, you cancel your retirement and get to work for the survival of the next generations.

Maybe I'm the advice columnist from Hell, which is a warm place, but I'm concerned that your personal comfort, especially your own personal warming, would be pleaded for without irony. Paul, the thousands of as-yet unreleased viruses are surging inside hot bats in Wuhan So the bat scientists say. So Paul! Stay cool while you can The heating planet has a very large natural disaster called the Sixth Extinction, coming to Jamaica, Queens, and coming to your retirement village outside Phoenix too.

When your own comfort isn't the first consideration, and the survival of life itself is the new ultimate intersectional justice, then you'll won't be bummed with some cold weather, Paul, you'll be glad it still exists.

Very brisk day outside, think I'll bundle up, don my mask, and take a walk in Prospect Park.

— Rev

REVEREND BILLY IS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? JUST EMAIL REVBILLY@INDYPENDENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.



Haymarket
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THE ANTI-RACIST WRITING WORKSHOP

HOW TO DECOLONIZE THE CREATIVE CLASSROOM

FELICIA ROSE CHAVEZ

How Come?

We can we afford trillions of dollars on endless wars and new nuclear weapons and hundreds of foreign bases all over the world...

But we can't afford to fix our subways, provide universal free health care or college educations for our nation's youth?

It's Time!

For our city to demand that Congress
Move The Money
From War To Our Communities!











City Council RES 747-A would put our city on record demanding that Congress cut funding of bloated Pentagon war budgets and start taking care of our cities and people!

**Call your Council Member today
and urge them to pass 747A**

Find your Council
Member - bit.ly/my-cm

MOVE THE MONEY - NYC
facebook • twitter • instagram

JOE BIDEN'S FIRST REPORT CARD

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	TERM	VERY GOOD	SATISFACTORY	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
Biden	Joseph R.	Jan-Feb 2021		✓	
The Biden administration has begun with a flurry of action including dozens of executive orders. Keeping up with what Biden is doing (and not doing) can be overwhelming. So here's an early report card for the 46th president.					
	Ignores deficit hawks and go big on a stimulus package.				✓
	Disregards bad advice about "targeting" stimulus checks.				✓
	Supports scrapping the filibuster.				✓
	Reverses the U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organization.		✓		
	Requires mask wearing in airports & on certain modes of transportation.		✓		
	Directs FEMA to create federally supported community vaccination centers.		✓		
	Establishes Pandemic Testing Board to expand U.S. coronavirus testing capacity		✓		✓
	Shows commitment to Medicare For All.		✓		
	Rejoins the Paris Climate Accord		✓		
	Cancels the Keystone XL Pipeline		✓		
	Shows commitment to restoring scientific integrity across federal agencies.		✓		✓
	Embraces Green New Deal		✓		
	Reverses Muslim travel ban		✓		
	Halts construction on border wall		✓		
	Fortifies DACA protections for undocumented people brought into the country as children		✓		
	Requires non-citizens to be included in the Census count		✓		✓
	Shows commitment to abolishing ICE		✓		✓
	Extends pause on student loan payments and interest				✓
	Shows willingness to use power he already has to abolish \$1.7 trillion in student loan debt				✓
	Extends the existing nationwide moratorium on evictions and foreclosures				✓
	Cancels rent for tenants + mortgage payments for small landlords		✓		✓
	Prevents workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation				✓
	Directs OSHA to enforce worker health and safety requirements.				✓
	Restores collective bargaining power and worker protections for federal workers				✓
	Shows willingness to follow through on his stated commitment to a \$15 / hour minimum wage.				✓
	Vocalizes his support for labor unions by publicly backing Amazon workers trying to unionize.		✓		✓
	Reverses ban on transgender Americans joining the military.				✓
	Ends U.S. support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen.				✓
	Is willing to reduce U.S. support for Israel.				✓
	Shows interest in returning U.S. to the Iran nuclear deal.				✓
	Is willing to reduce \$740 billion annual military budget by at least 10%.				✓
	Directs attorney general not to renew federal contracts with private prisons.		✓		✓
	Revokes Trump's policy justifying family separation at the border.		✓		✓
	Is willing to end system of mass incarceration of immigrant detainees in private prisons.		✓		✓
	Rescinds Trump policies that limit refugee admissions including for LGBTAI+ refugees		✓		✓
	Rescinds ban on government funding for foreign nonprofits that perform or promote abortions.		✓		✓
	Appoints competent technocrats to his Cabinet & other senior positions				✓
	Appoints visionary progressives with deep ties to social movements to his Cabinet & other senior positions				✓

TEACHER NOTES: Joey has gotten off to a faster start than many of us expected. He tries very hard to make friends with the kids who clearly don't like him. At the same time, he can still be very stubborn about accepting help with some of his most challenging assignments from the bright kids in the class like Bernard, Elizabeth and Alexandria.

