

THE

NYC VACCINATION INFO, P15

INDYPENDENT

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THE FALL OF ANDREW CUOMO

SEX SCANDALS, COVID COVER-UPS, HIS LIKELY SUCCESSOR & MORE

BY JOHN TARLETON, P8

LEA DORAN

**THE INDEPENDENT, INC.**

388 Atlantic Avenue,
2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
212-904-1282
www.indydependent.org
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Leia Doran, Anna Gold,
Evan Sult

OFFICE MANAGER

Amba Guerguerian

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

contact@indydependent.org

SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:

submissions@indydependent.org

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:

ads@indydependent.org

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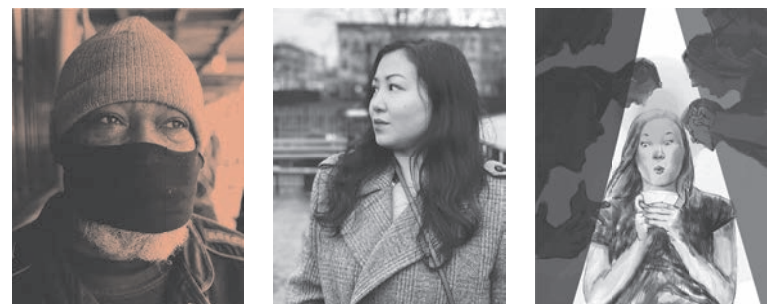
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THE INDY



SUE BRISK

PRESERVING BLACK HISTORY

BROOKLYN ACTIVISTS SAVE FORMER UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STOP FROM WRECKING BALL, PLAN NEXT STEPS

BY OLIVIA RIGGIO

Beneath the imposing, angular structures of the luxury high-rise apartments and hotels of downtown Brooklyn sits an unassuming brick rowhouse, 227 Duffield St, on a block co-named Abolitionist Place in 2007. In February, the home, which was owned by abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Truesdell in the 1850s and 1860s, was recognized as a historic site by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission for its likely connection to the Underground Railroad, saving it from being demolished.

The movement to save the home began in 2005, when “Mama” Joy Chatel, who lived in the home and operated a salon out of the bottom floor, found an eviction notice taped to her door. Over the years, she had learned the history of the home and its connection to the Truesdells and the Underground Railroad. Her late husband's ancestors had bought the home directly from the Truesdells.

In 2007, Chatel sued to challenge the city's eminent-domain eviction, with the help of Families United for Racial and Economic Equality. Later that year, a report commissioned by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) concluded there was no strong evidence of her home having been part of the Underground Railroad, despite the boards' local historians reporting that it likely had been.

The lawsuit was settled, and Chatel was permitted to stay in her home. She turned the ground floor into a cultural center: a performing-arts and rehearsal space that taught community members about the home's history and celebrated Black culture. Before she died in 2014, she made the home's preservation her life's work, but attempts to get it designat-

ed a landmark were unsuccessful.

“I really don't know where she got the strength, or the courage,” says her daughter, Shawné Lee, who recalls that her mother once had a gun pulled on her because of her work. You know, I think she was so strong in her conviction that it gave her the fortitude to just keep going.”

The most recent push to save the house began in 2019, when the building's owner, developer Samuel Hanasab, filed an application with the NYC Department of Buildings to demolish it. Lee formed the Friends of Abolitionist Place with the help of others, including Aleah Bacquie Vaughn, executive director of the CJI Fund; Imani Henry of Equality for Flatbush; activist Justin Cohen; and city expert and amateur historian Raul Rothblatt.

“For better or worse, the threat of demolition is a very concrete and coherent organizing call,” Cohen told the *Independent*.

The idea that the City was about to allow a stop on the Underground Railroad to be demolished seemed almost inconceivable to many community members, especially children.

“It really resonated with the children and young people,” says Henry, “because it's just like, ‘You don't even care about me having this space. I now know what it is. And you don't want us to have it. Very simple. Why would you take this away from me?’”

In a 2020 article for *Bklyner*, Cohen outlined Hanasab's history of persuading elderly and disabled homeowners to sell their properties to him for outrageously low-balled prices. In 2012, Hanasab tried to purchase a \$600,000 home from an 84-year-old wheelchair-bound woman and her son for \$6,000. A judge later nullified the sale, saying it “reeked of fraud.”

Typically, buildings are designated landmarks for their architectural significance, but 227 Abolitionist Place's design was nothing special. Instead, advocates had to make the case for the home's historical significance. The 13 historian peer reviewers who contributed to the EDC's 2007 report had recommended that it be preserved, but according to Rothblatt, the agency buried that information in the report.

Proving a site was part of the Underground Railroad relies largely on circumstantial evidence, as aiding escaped slaves was illegal under the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Truesdells would have faced jail if they spoke openly about their work — and the people they were helping would have been returned to slavery — but there are a few things we can deduce from what they could speak openly about, says historian Jim Driscoll. The area had many Black churches and access to transportation. The Truesdells were involved with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and other radical social movements such as women's rights. And, of course, there was the passed down oral history.

“You have to show that they were into many other very similar causes for which they cannot be imprisoned,” Driscoll explained. “They could never admit they were involved in the Underground Railroad. ... It means that the evidence about them being Underground Railroad conductors may be spoken evidence, but it may be true.”

The basement of 227 also has architectural abnormalities, such as what appear to be sealed-up tunnels. Driscoll said many Underground Railroad historians have debunked the existence of actual underground tunnels connecting Underground Railroad stops, but there were rumored to be other stops on the block, so it's more plausible that there were tunnels connecting them. The basement spaces could have also been hiding places.

The Friends of Abolitionist Place now plan to turn the building into a heritage site that will teach visitors about Brooklyn's abolitionist history and celebrate Black culture — much like the space Chatel created in her home. There are also reportedly artifacts in the house, which the group can learn more about once they're able to get inside. Friends of Abolitionist Place appealed to the city to help them resolve mold and structural problems in the house, caused by the nearby hotel which pierced the water table and caused flooding. Friends of Abolitionist Place just received 501(c)(3) status and is hoping to form a public-public partnership with the city. The city will be purchasing the home from Hanasab this month. Friends of Abolitionist Place will also be reaching out to arts and historical organizations in the county and state for help restoring it.

“I think that this offers them a really wonderful opportunity — and also challenging their own institutions — to be part of maintaining a role in history and a positive part of our history,” Bacquie Vaughn said.

Advocates are still trying to get nearby Willoughby Square Park designated as a space honoring New York's abolitionist movement, but that project is stalling.

“There's still a want and a need to preserve our history,” Lee said. “And I have to say ‘ours’ because it involves everyone. It involves white people, it involves Black people... it involves women, children. It involves everything. And my mom put a human face and story and feelings to that, because people can relate to just being a homeowner and struggling, or single parent or grandparent, or a business owner and the possibility of it being taken away.”

CELEBRATION:

Brooklyn activists gather outside of 227 Abolitionist Place, formerly known as 227 Duffield St. (From left to right) Justin Cohen, Charlene Allen, Shawné Lee and Aleah Bacquie Vaughn.



SUE BRISK

AISLE BE DARNED

CROWN HEIGHTS RESIDENTS FIGHT TO SAVE NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY STORE FROM LUXURY REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS.

BY JULIA THOMAS

On an early March Saturday afternoon, Destiny Ciliberti walked three blocks from the Crown Heights apartment building where her family lives to the Associated Supermarket at 975 Nostrand Avenue to meet her mother to go grocery shopping. Outside the market, Ciliberti's mother, Joy McGeary, lingered in the cold air with her two younger daughters, ages seven and 11, while waiting for Ciliberti to arrive, exchanging "hellos" with a market employee and fellow shopper near the store's automatic doors in the meantime. The family had gathered to pick up a few items — snacks, spaghetti sauce, juice, chocolate chip Häagen-Dazs ice cream, and during this particular trip, bread for turkey burgers — as they have done every few days for as long as Ciliberti, who's 22, can remember.

Now, as the Associated Supermarket faces an eviction notice from the site's owner, many residents — including Ciliberti, McGeary and their family — who have long depended on the store are advocating that it remain, as an essential community business that sells affordable groceries in the historically Black American, Black West Indian and Caribbean neighborhood.

"I think that this neighborhood is going to see the same type of development that over by Franklin Avenue has seen where we see a lot of small shops kind of get shut down and bought out and then gentrified so that it appeals to the mass mainstream," said Ciliberti, who grew up in Crown Heights and is currently serving as an AmeriCorps member. "It just feels like a losing battle in the gentrification of Brooklyn."

The supermarket is a staple for many in the community, particularly elderly residents who live nearby and can easily access the store or get their groceries delivered by Associated employees. Local residents also say it's the only grocery store sourcing fresh produce for half a mile within the area, meaning that if the store is forced to close, the cost for transportation to travel to another supermarket would become a barrier or significant hassle for many.

The Associated Supermarket, housed in a one-story building with a red metal roof bearing a glowing "Associated" sign with two burnt out bulbs, has been open at its current site, adjacent to a parking lot, since 1991. The market was predated by an A&P grocery store, which opened in 1970 when Midwood Investment and Development acquired the property. In 2015, Associated owner Pablo Espinal signed a 5-year lease when his original 25-year lease expired, and has been on a month-to-month lease since June 2020.

On March 8, Associated received a 30-day notice from Midwood to vacate the premises. Negotiations between Espinal and Midwood about terms of the site's development and payments for vacating the site have been ongoing since early this year. In January, activists and other news outlets reported that Midwood had previously presented a 90-day eviction notice, but Midwood said in a statement to the *Independent* that no such notice was issued. Midwood says that it will seek out court intervention and pursue damages under the lease if the property is not vacated by April 7.

Neighborhood residents have been mobilizing to prevent such a day. Though the local Brooklyn Community Board 9 will not be officially involved in

FRESH FOOD: A longtime customer inspects an aloe plant at the Associated Supermarket at 975 Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn.

LIGHTS OUT?: Older neighborhood residents will have a harder time grocery shopping if the store they have used for decades closes.

dealings over the property unless rezoning or construction permits are filed under the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), a majority of the Brooklyn Community Board 9 members recently voted to support the fight to save Associated.

"If the Associated disappears, what comes back, if anything comes back? Will the community have affordable food options?" says Fred Baptiste, the Community Board 9 Chair. "There's definitely concern on our part."

On January 30, dozens of people gathered to distribute flyers and share information with local residents about the possible closure. One week later, more than 100 people convened for a rally in support of Associated and spoke about their longtime connections to the store and its importance in the community.

Michael Hollingsworth is a longtime housing advocate, lead organizer with the Crown Heights Tenant Union and candidate for City Council District 35, where the Associated is located. He grew up shopping at the former A&P with his mother and brother. Looking at recent instances of gentrification and the impact of luxury grocery stores and housing developments in Black neighborhoods, Hollingsworth fears that a new supermarket may not adequately serve the community or allow people "to get the same things that they've been accustomed to, to be able to afford the price points in this market," he says. "When these new developments come in, the supermarkets that usually come with them don't serve these folks well."

Vivia Morgan, a candidate for City Council in nearby District 40, community board member, and licensed real estate agent, questions the accessibility of housing rentals for working class people in the area, some of whom she says are making less than \$20,000 per year. Morgan started a petition on Change.org to "Save The Associated Supermarket," which currently has over 4,600 signatures.

"If you really want to come to my community and say you're going to build affordable housing, let's think about the people that's working in McDonald's, in those fast food restaurants, and the home health aides taking care of the elderly," Morgan told the *Independent*. "When ... they said, 'this is affordable,' it's not really affordable. You have to ask the question, who is it affordable for?"


Ciliberti recalls frequenting the Associated as a kid and feeling a sense of familiarity with the store's employees, as well as comfort and fondness in knowing that the market was a place she could consistently count on to buy necessities. "In case I ever need anything, I can come here, get something last minute," she says. "The supermarket has always been the place to go. This is it for us, basically."

Juan Contreras, 45, who works in maintenance and lives with his mother two blocks away from the store, has frequented the store for 20 years. As the person responsible for cooking in his household, he shops there every day and appreciates the store because several of the employees are also native Spanish speakers. "I don't see why they want to make it disappear," he told the *Independent*. "We're going to fight because this is the only one. We need it."



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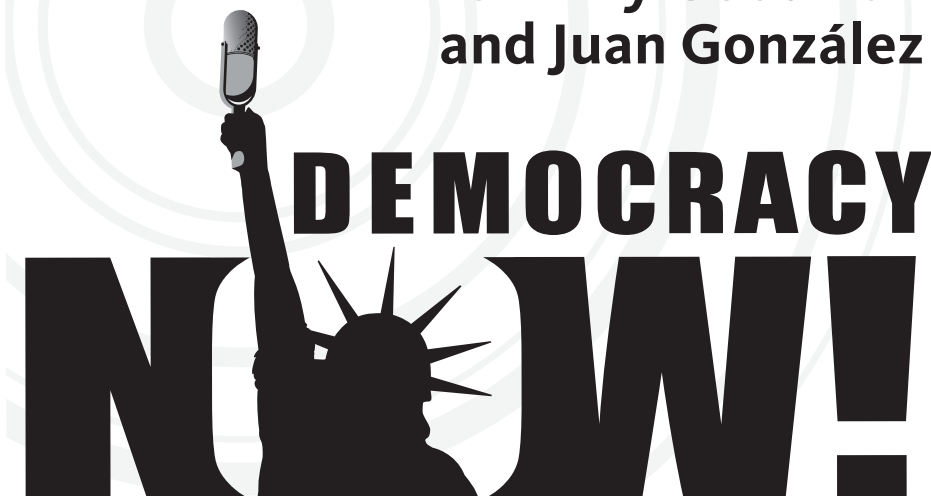
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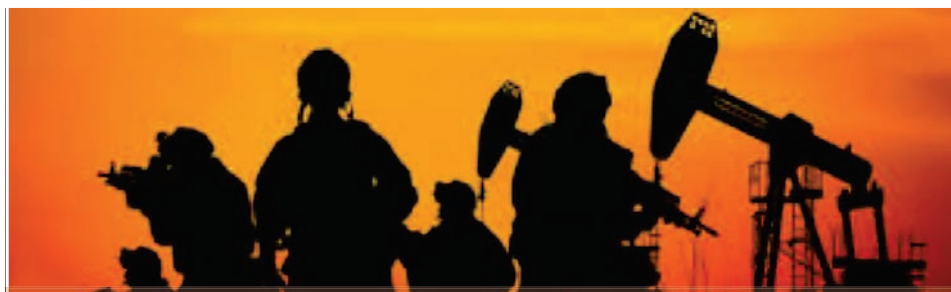


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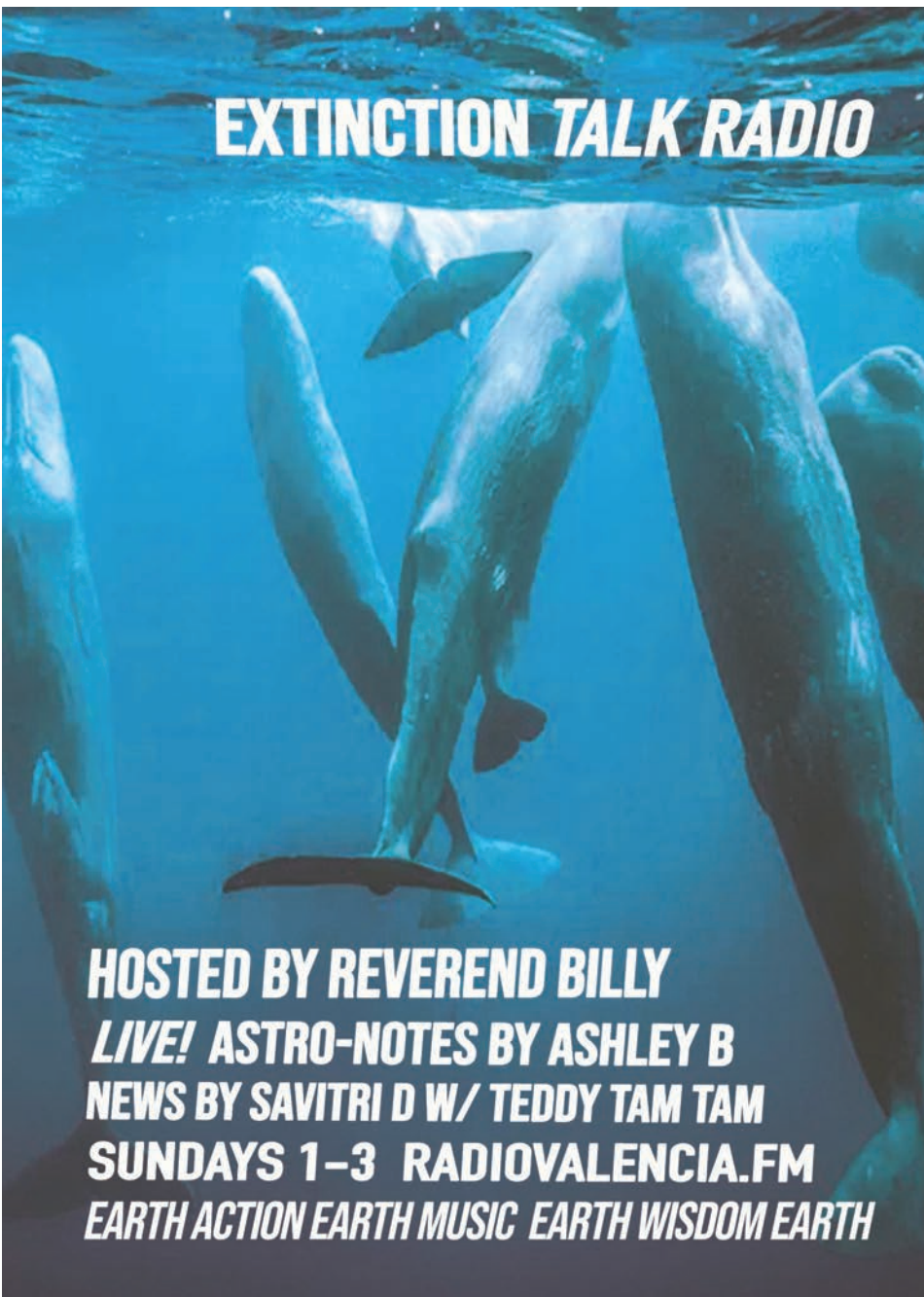
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March 2021 THE INDYPENDENT

WHEN PROSECUTORS HIDE THE EVIDENCE

DID THE BROOKLYN DA'S OFFICE GET RONNIE WRIGHT'S CASE REALLY WRONG?

BY THEODORE HAMM

I'm a murderer," Demetrius Morris told a Brooklyn federal jury in the winter of 2019. "I took innocent people's lives." In order to help prosecutors build their successful case against "G'z Up" gang leader Nicholas Washington, Morris confessed to committing two murders (ordered by Washington) in Bed-Stuy in 2005-6. One of the two people killed was Andrell Napper, an innocent bystander who Morris gunned down in a botched retaliation shooting outside the Tompkins Houses in August 2006.

Shortly thereafter, the Brooklyn district attorney's office brought murder charges against two men for killing Napper, Stephon Williams and Ronnie Wright. During the preliminary hearings prior to trial, Williams changed his plea from innocent to guilty, but continued to implicate Wright. Williams, however, never took the witness stand at Wright's trial.

In February 2008, a Brooklyn state supreme court jury convicted Wright of killing Napper. But amid the run-up to the 2019 federal trial, Wright learned that Morris had made statements to law enforcement officials shortly after the murder that were never turned over to his trial defense.

In the two statements, Morris denied he was a gunman and provided divergent accounts of Wright's alleged role. The prosecution's failure to turn over such potentially exculpatory material is a clear *Brady* violation, which may yield an overturned conviction.

All of these points raise a simple question: Why is Ronnie Wright still in prison, where he is not eligible for parole until 2044?

...

By 2005, New York City's crime rate seemed to be in steady decline. That year's total number of murders, 539, was the lowest the city had seen since the early 1960s. "People will be shocked to see how safe it is to live [here]," a John Jay College professor told the *New York Times*.

But as that same article noted, several areas of Brooklyn still experienced high rates of violence, including the 79th Precinct in northwest Bed-Stuy, home to the Marcy, Tompkins and Sumner NYCHA houses.

In early August 2006, a memorial service was held for a man known as "Popcorn," brother of G'z Up leader Nicholas Washington. Ronnie Wright attended the event and wore a T-shirt that day honoring Popcorn, his cousin.

Around 10 p.m. that same summer night, a large throng of people were hanging out on Throop Avenue outside the Tompkins Houses. Suddenly, at least two gunmen showed up targeting a man nicknamed "Chizz," whom they believed to be Popcorn's killer. Their bullets missed Chizz and instead hit two other men, with Andrell Napper dying at the scene and the other man surviving.

The next day the cops arrested Stephon Williams, then 15, who told detectives that he had arrived at the scene with three accomplices, namely Washington, Wright, and a "light-skinned guy" (later revealed to be Demetrius Morris). Williams' statements against Wright, however, did not surface in the trial.

Wright, moreover, was the only one of the four people named by Williams who was not directly linked to G'z Up. Wright's legal team, led by Dennis Kelly, sees this as a key factor explaining why Wright was prosecuted. At the time the feds were investigating G'z Up and in the view of Kelly and company, they wanted to keep that fact under wraps.

...

THE DAY AFTER NAPPER'S MURDER, a woman with the surname Smith went with her cousin to the 79th Precinct. Smith had a close relationship with Chizz but also had known Wright for over twenty years, albeit not as a friend. She told detectives that Ronnie approached the scene wearing his "RIP Popcorn" shirt and identified Wright, Williams, and Morris as the shooters.

No physical evidence linked Wright to the scene. As Morris later told the federal jury, Wright, an aspiring rapper, was a well-known figure in the neighborhood and on parole (for a 1995 felony conviction as a juvenile), making it especially risky for him to

show up to a large gathering with a gun. Detectives found no other witnesses placing him at the murder scene.

Two months after Wright's arrest, Det. Christopher Hennigan of the 79th Precinct traveled to Altoona, PA, where Morris had fled. Morris, who had been arrested on drug trafficking charges, gave two divergent statements about Napper's murder.

Morris first told Hennigan that he arrived at the scene with five other gunmen, including Wright. He then stated that Wright pointed out Chizz to the other gunmen. But Morris claimed that two others—neither himself nor Wright—did the shooting. According to the transcription of a second statement to the FBI later that day, Morris now explained that the shooters were Wright, Williams, and one of the two others.

Prior to Wright's trial, Brooklyn prosecutor Howard Jackson did not provide either of Morris' statements to Wright's defense counsel. In his summation, Jackson brought up Smith's identification of Morris as illustration that she could also see Wright. But the jury never got to assess Morris' conflicting accounts of Wright's purported role in the murder.

Wright's legal team is now seeking to overturn the conviction based on the *Brady* violations. Brooklyn State Supreme Court Judge Ruth Shillingford granted a full hearing last April to determine whether a retrial will be ordered.

In response to questions from the *Independent* regarding why the office refuses to overturn Wright's conviction, the DA's spokesman emailed the following statement: "The defendant was implicated by an eyewitness, by a codefendant who pleaded guilty to the murder and by another accomplice. That man, Demetrius Morris, pointed to the defendant's involvement and contradicted his alibi defense in his 2006 statements and 2019 testimony. We intend to continue to litigate this case in court."

As his legal team emphasizes, Wright was convicted as a gunman, not an accomplice. In his federal trial, Morris offered a third account of Wright's role, this time repeating a version of his initial 2006 account, in which Wright was a shot-caller (allegedly urging Morris and Williams to "go, go, go"), not an actual shooter. The DA's statement that Morris "pointed to the defendant's involvement" does not match its trial theory that Wright shot Napper.

Last fall, in a ruling on another case in which the Brooklyn DA's team fought to preserve a faulty conviction, Judge Shillingford expressed serious concerns about the office's ability to investigate its own work. "There has got to be an evaluation of what happened in every case," she wrote. "And that cannot be done by the District Attorney's office." Shillingford called for an outside review commission.

It was also Judge Shillingford who originally responded to Wright's handwritten motion seeking to reopen his case based on revelations during the federal trial. Her final ruling in the case came in January, when she ordered the DA's office to turn over all files from the NYPD's collaboration with federal law enforcement during the G'z Up investigation. Shillingford is retiring this year, and Wright and his team are hoping that Judge Sharon Hudson shows a similar degree of diligence when she takes over the case when Shillingford retires later this year.





GARY MARTIN

HOW THE MTA USES THE PANDEMIC TO FREEZE OUT THE HOMELESS

BY JORDAN G. TEICHER

At one of his daily press briefings last April, Governor Andrew Cuomo held up the front page of the *Daily News*, which featured a photo of homeless New Yorkers camped out in a subway car.

“That is disgusting, what is happening on those subway cars,” he said. He called those conditions “disrespectful” to essential workers, who need public transportation to get to their jobs.

The moment might have seemed like just another one of the governor’s “New York tough” poses. But the day after Cuomo’s press briefing, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which the governor effectively controls, updated its Code of Conduct with new emergency rules ostensibly meant to “maintain social distancing” and “safeguard public health and safety.” One rule forbids the use of wheeled carts greater than 30 inches long or wide. Another forbids passengers from remaining in a station for more than an hour.

Since the one-hour rule makes exceptions for a litany of activities—including political campaigning, public speaking, and artistic performances—advocates argue that its real intention was to keep homeless New Yorkers out of the subway system.

The MTA made the emergency rules permanent last September.

“Folks who are unsheltered and take refuge on the subways have seen a huge reduction in the number of resources throughout the city to meet their basic needs. People’s lives have changed for the worse,” says Giselle Routhier, policy director at the Coalition for the Homeless. “These kinds of policies from the MTA really only exacerbate that trauma and compound the difficulties of trying to survive on the streets.”

In February, Barry Simon, a disabled 55-year-old man who’s experienced homelessness since the 1980s, filed a lawsuit against the MTA charging that the policies are

discriminatory, backed by two homeless-advocacy groups, Picture the Homeless and the Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project.

He says he was forced to leave the subway dozens of times, and was often threatened with arrest or the seizure of his belongings. “They’d actually start writing up the ticket, and once I kind of envisioned all I’d have to do to get my stuff back, I’d just be like ‘OK, officer, I’m gonna get off the train now, and you won’t see me anymore,’” he told the *Independent* from the Queens hotel where he’s been staying since February.

The MTA has said that the rules were designed only to “protect the health and safety of customers and employees in the midst of a global pandemic.” In a statement to the *Independent*, MTA spokesman Andrei Berman said that “sheltering in the transit system is not a solution to a severe housing, mental-health and substance-abuse crisis that needs an effective and holistic response from the city.” Any suggestion otherwise, Berman said, is “a gross misunderstanding of the problem.”

• • •

Danny Pearlstein, policy and communications director of the Riders Alliance, said he agrees with the MTA—to an extent. He doesn’t believe that public transit is the answer to the housing crisis. But, he says, the solution is “to make it so that no one has to live there—not to complicate the lives of the people who do.” And he says that power lies squarely with Cuomo.

“The governor is the governor of the housing crisis, as well as the transit crisis,” he said.

Cuomo once led a commission that recommended overhauling the city’s shelter system and expanding services for homeless New Yorkers, during David Dinkins’ mayoral administration in the early 1990s. But as governor, Pearlstein says, he has favored an approach based on law enforcement.

“The governor’s wealthy backers who object to taxes also object to the fact that there is a physical homelessness problem in the subway system. Whether it’s their own policy choice or his, the governor has resorted to a policing model rather than a housing or health-care model probably because it’s nominally cheaper,” he said. “But of course, it doesn’t resolve the problem.”

In recent years, according to the Coalition for the Homeless, homelessness in New York City reached the highest levels since the Great Depression. Last year, nearly 123,000 different people slept in the city’s shelter system. On an average night there were nearly 59,000 people in the system.

During the pandemic, however, many people experiencing homelessness have avoided the crowded congregate shelters, where COVID spreads easily. By June of last year, according to Gothamist, 120 homeless people in the city had died from COVID. The vast majority had been living in shelters.

With many other indoor public spaces closed, more homeless New Yorkers descended into the subway system. The day after the MTA announced its Code of Conduct updates, the governor declared that it would suspend all-night subway service for the first time ever, to clean trains

more intensively. Homeless advocates say the shutdown provided another excuse to remove homeless people.

“The solution they’ve always had is ‘Let’s bring more cops to this. Let’s arrest people. Let’s try to force people off the trains,’” said Joe Loonam, housing campaign coordinator at VOCAL-NY. “The shutdown is a really dramatic version of a policy that has been carried out for decades in the city.”

On February 5, an MTA operative on Twitter responded to a passenger’s post about benches disappearing from some subway stations by explaining that the benches were removed “to prevent the homeless from sleeping on them.”

The MTA quickly deleted the tweet and claimed that the benches had been removed for cleaning. Authority officials told the *Independent* that it has never tailored a policy to a passenger’s housing status. They did not respond to a question about how many benches had been removed from the system in the past year.

• • •

Giselle Routhier says there are things the city and state could do that would help homeless people and address the root causes of homelessness. She’s been calling on the city to offer all homeless New Yorkers a single-occupancy hotel room instead of a bed in a congregate shelter. (A lawsuit filed in October by the Legal Aid Society and the law firm Jenner & Block makes the same demand.) She also supports a bill pending in the state Assembly that would create a housing voucher program, which would help homeless New Yorkers acquire stable housing.

“We need to see a care-centric model,” said Loonam. “As soon as you have a new voucher program and you have more beds opening up in supportive housing units, then [Department of Homeless Services] outreach workers can go into the subway and offer people a permanent place to live. That’s going to be a lot more attractive to people. And you’re going to see a reduction in the number of people who are sleeping on the trains.”

Ideally, Barry Simon said, “peoples’ humanity, peoples’ situation, peoples’ stories should have some sort of weight” when MTA leadership decides how to treat homeless people in the subway system. But realistically, he said, he just hopes to be able to sit in the subway in peace and “get out of the cold for a little while.”



VOCALNY

WHY CUOMO HAS TO GO

HE'S TOXIC, AND HE'S BEEN A DRAG ON NY FOR YEARS

By JOHN TARLETON

What a difference a year makes. This time a year ago Andrew Cuomo was holding daily press conferences that captivated millions. His PowerPoint presentations and a calm, empathetic father figure persona that were oddly reassuring. It wasn't exactly The West Wing, but for liberals sweating out the plague at home and still rueing their 2016 defeat, it was good enough.

Cuomo had mastered the aesthetics of authority and millions applauded a man who seemed to be the opposite of Donald Trump in every way. Some of his most ardent fans proclaimed themselves "Cuomosexuals" and cried out on social media — "Govern me big daddy!"

Only Cuomo's staunchest critics noted that New York was enduring one of the highest per capita COVID-19 death rates of any country or state in the world and that dead bodies were stacking up like firewood in its nursing homes. For his 111 consecutive daily press conferences, Cuomo received an Emmy Award.

You wouldn't have guessed Cuomo was an Emmy winner when he showed up for his March 3 press conference. He had vanished from public view for a week after being hit with a string of sexual harassment allegations from young women who had worked for him or had the misfortune to cross his path at social events. Now, he had reemerged to issue a non-apology apology to any woman who had misunderstood his light-hearted banter and his affectionate gestures. He stumbled over his words, became emotional. And he insisted he had never touched any woman inappropriately even though there were published photos from days before of him holding a woman's face in his hands just before he tried to force a kiss on her.

Was Cuomo's cringe-worthy performance an attempt to make us feel sorry for him? Or, was this what happens to a lifelong bully who suddenly finds himself at the mercy of events? Mass death in the nursing homes and a subsequent coverup had merged with a steady drip of sexual harassment charges to become one big mega-scandal that was mutating too quickly for him to vaccinate himself against. For

once, America's most autocratic governor was not in charge.

• • •

HOW DID WE GET HERE? And what will be the end game?

For starters, Cuomo is an overhyped product of New York City's civic and media culture — just like Donald Trump and Rudy Giuliani before him. It's a culture that elevates style over substance; that substitutes the ability to posture and strike an attitude for real achievement; that turns a failed businessman-turned-grifter into a once-in-a-generation tycoon, a petty tyrant into "America's Mayor" and the son of a former governor into a model of rational, super-competent leadership even when the evidence suggests otherwise.

New York is a city of strivers who pride themselves on shrugging off adversity and pushing forward. The likes of Cuomo, Giuliani and Trump seek to flatter us when they adopt a "New York Tough" persona. But we pay a high price for welcoming such flattery.

Like Trump, Cuomo is damaged goods. They are both heirs to family dynasties, one in business and the other in politics. Their fathers were workaholics — powerful, emotionally distant men from mid-20th-century America whose approval they are forever seeking and whom they are forever seeking to surpass. Like Trump, Cuomo must control everything and everyone in his world. Like Trump, Cuomo always knows best and drives away experts who tell him what he doesn't want to hear. Like Trump, Cuomo's mistakes are always someone else's fault. Like Trump, Cuomo revels in being a vindictive bully no one wants to cross. And like Trump, he appears to have a penchant for sexually harassing women.

Unlike Trump, Cuomo is hard-working and highly intelligent. But his inability to listen to others often leads to bad outcomes. We saw this with the nursing homes, which he ordered to accept COVID-infected patients at the height of the pandemic with predictably devastating consequences.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of New Yorkers who voted for Cuomo because of his "experience" and ability to "get things done" who are now dead due to his negligence. Think about that.

• • •

CUOMO, 63, HAS SPENT THE MAJORITY of his adult life at the pinnacle of state power in New York. Three terms at the side of his father Mario Cuomo, a term as attorney general and three more terms as governor on his own. Ultimately, the biggest problem with Cuomo isn't psychological. It's his allegiance to

the ruling class and to the economics of austerity for everyone else, even during a once-in-a-century pandemic.

If he hasn't been so great at actually preserving the lives of his constituents, Cuomo has perfected the art of his own political self-preservation. Albany has been corrupt forever, but this governor has gone to the next level with creating a pay-to-play paradise for the wealthy and the well-connected. Cuomo has kept spending and taxes down for his well-heeled patrons while the choicest governmental favors always seem to go to large campaign donors. For example, before sending COVID-19 patients back to nursing homes to ignite a mass die-off of the old, Cuomo gave full legal immunity to hospitals and nursing home companies and executives. The Greater New York Hospital Association and the nursing home industry have donated millions of dollars to Cuomo over the course of his career.

These kinds of arrangements allowed Cuomo to raise \$36 million when he ran for re-election in 2018. Imagine a man barricaded in his office behind a wall of cash, determined to never leave.

Cuomo's good fortune appears to have run out. His chances of winning a fourth term now seem remote. And his chances of completing his third term are shaky at best, with his fate now in the hands of Attorney General Letitia James. She is investigating sexual harassment charges leveled at him by six women as the Independent goes to press. If he's forced out, little-known Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would serve out the remainder of his term.

The younger, more progressive state Senate led by Andrea Stewart-Cousins would make quick work of Cuomo if they could. But in New York impeachment has to be initiated by the State Assembly, a bastion of old-guard machine Democrats that so far has stuck with Cuomo pending James' report. A best-case scenario: In the three-people-in-a-room budget negotiations later this month, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie plays the good cop to Stewart-Cousins' bad cop and extorts a king's ransom of concessions from a desperate Cuomo on taxing and spending and other progressive legislation — and then casts him aside.

If you would like to see Cuomo removed from office, this would be a good time to give your local Assembly member a call or an email. Many of them are wavering. However the end game works out with Cuomo, let's keep one thing in mind. He was never indispensable to start with. We never needed his toxic masculinity, his neoliberal ideology, his systematic corruption or his blundering incompetence. We can do better. We deserve better. If we act on that insight in 2022, a new and better day is possible in New York State.

WORD ON THE STREET: A protester makes their views known at a March 10 demonstration outside Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Midtown office.

WHO'S READY TO MOVE UP?

BY JOHN TARLETON

Whether Gov. Andrew Cuomo limps to the end of his third term or is impeached or forced to resign in the coming weeks or months, his chances of winning a fourth term in office seem vanishingly small at this point. So who is likely to lead a post-Cuomo New York and if necessary finish him off in a 2022 Democratic primary if he refuses to exit the stage?

LETITIA JAMES

The New York attorney general is the clear front-runner to replace Cuomo. She has won statewide office once (2018), citywide office twice as public advocate (2017 & 2013) and was a Working Families Party-backed Brooklyn City Councilmember for 10 years before that.

For resistance liberals, she can tout the scorched-earth legal war she has waged against Donald Trump and his scofflaw family since becoming New York AG. She's also well-liked by the state's powerful labor unions and could unlock the Black vote in New York City, which has been Cuomo's bulwark when facing previous primary challenges from progressives Zephyr Teachout and Cynthia Nixon.

James was recruited by Cuomo to run for AG in 2018 as the official Democratic Party candidate. Many in the party's left wing have wondered since then where her real allegiances lie. However, it was James' January report on the undercount of nursing home deaths that brought the issue up to the front burner. And it's James who is overseeing the investigation into Cuomo's sexual harassment scandal. If she issues a damning report, Cuomo will quickly find himself in a Nixonian resign-or-be-impeached territory with his former ally poised to pick up the pieces.

JUMAANE WILLIAMS

Jumaane Williams has followed a similar track as Letitia James — WFP-backed City Councilmember from Brooklyn and NYC public advocate. He would also match James in being able to build a coalition of Black voters and white progressives. Unlike James, he hasn't held statewide office though he did make a strong showing in 2018 when he carried New York City and fell short by only six points in his outsider run for lieutenant governor.

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI

This progressive firebrand laid waste to Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) kingpin Jeff Klein in 2018 to win her state senate seat representing parts of northern Bronx and Westchester County. Since then, she hasn't been afraid to mix it up with Cuomo. But she's only 34 years old — so if Letitia James runs for governor, making a bid for attorney general could be her next move.

JESSICA RAMOS

Jessica Ramos is another dynamic, young state senator who rode into office on the 2018 blue wave and seems destined to run for higher office. And like Biaggi, 2022 may be too soon to take aim at the governor's mansion, especially if James or Williams is in the race. A former aide to Bill de Blasio, she could run for mayor or public advocate in a future

cycle (without risking her Queens senate seat) or snag a seat in Congress if AOC runs for higher office.

BILL DE BLASIO

Speaking of de Blasio, he's now said to be interested in getting into the governor's race. Ugh, please no. Not that. He still has a strong base of support in the Black community and his 2014 rollout of universal pre-K for four-year-olds was brilliant. But after spending much of his eight years as mayor pursuing a quixotic bid for the presidency, the last thing we need is more of his checked-out, lackluster leadership.

RON KIM

No one in Albany has been more consistent and fearless in holding Andrew Cuomo accountable for the Covid nightmare that unfolded in New York's nursing homes than this fifth-term Assemblymember from Flushing, Queens. He would be a powerful foil to the corrupt, amoral Cuomo. When he ran in the 2019 special election for public advocate won by Jumaane Williams, he only got 3% of the vote. That won't be the case if he runs for that office again. He's already shown what one elected can do when they're serious about advocating for the public.

JAMAAL BOWMAN

Okay, he's been in Congress for less than three months, so running for higher office in 2022 would probably be premature. But let's hope he does so before too long. The former middle school principal is unabashedly Black and left, yet has a disarming happy-warrior persona that makes him a natural to lead a broad multi-racial coalition like the one he mobilized last year to handily defeat the 16-term incumbent, conservative Eliot Engel.

AOC

For as long as this political supernova holds her Queens/Bronx congressional seat, there will be chatter about which higher office she will run for next. However, she's shown little interest in state politics. Her destiny seems to be to run for higher office at the federal level. In case you were wondering, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez turns 35 on October 13, 2024.



TAKE THE CUOMO POP QUIZ

AND CHECK THE ANSWER KEY ON PAGE 13 TO SEE HOW MANY QUESTIONS YOU ANSWERED CORRECTLY

BY JOHN TARLETON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEIA DORAN

1 EARLY SIGNS

Andrew Cuomo has long been suspected of having been responsible for the anonymous poster titled "Vote For Cuomo, Not The Homo" that appeared on the city streets during the final weeks of the hotly contested 1977 mayoral race between his father Mario Cuomo and Ed Koch, a lifelong bachelor.

TRUE
 FALSE

2 NICKNAME

While serving as an advisor to his father Gov. Mario Cuomo, young Andrew Cuomo was dubbed "The Prince of Darkness" for his ruthless ways.

TRUE
 FALSE

3 HUD SECRETARY

As the secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the late '90s, Andrew Cuomo helped prevent the subprime mortgage crisis.

TRUE
 FALSE

4 PUBLIC SECTOR

Upon becoming governor in 2011, Andrew Cuomo blamed Wall Street for the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent Great Recession, vowing to protect the public sector by making the financial industry pay for the crisis.

TRUE
 FALSE

5 DRAWING A LINE

When he ran for governor in 2010, Andrew Cuomo promised to put a nonpartisan commission in charge of legislative redistricting in place of the partisan leaders of the State Assembly and State Senate who traditionally gerrymandered districts to their own advantage.

TRUE
 FALSE

6 BYE PARTISAN

When Republicans lost their State Senate majority in 2012, Gov. Cuomo engineered the creation of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), a group of four Democratic state senators who caucused with the GOP and kept it in power.

TRUE
 FALSE

7 COMMISSION IMPOSSIBLE

In 2013, Gov. Cuomo appointed the Moreland Commission to investigate corruption in the New York State government.

TRUE
 FALSE

8 UNOPPOSED?

Since winning the governorship in 2010, Andrew Cuomo

has been essentially unchallenged by progressives during his reign as the state's highest elected official.

TRUE
 FALSE

9 LADIES MAN

During his 2014 re-election run, Andrew Cuomo was endorsed by the newly formed Women's Equality Party (WEP).

TRUE
 FALSE

10 HE'S GOT A TICKET TO RIDE

In the summer of 2017, as the news broadcast photos of absurdly overpacked subway platforms, Andrew Cuomo apologized for the MTA's poor performance and pledged to expand funding and invest in a 21st-century subway fleet.

TRUE
 FALSE

11

READY TO FEAST

Andrew Cuomo's closest aide, Joseph Percoco, was convicted on federal corruption charges and sentenced to six years in prison for taking \$300,000 in bribes — money he called "gabagool," in reference to HBO mob drama "The Sopranos."

TRUE
 FALSE

12 BUFFALO BULLION

In July 2018, Alain Kaloyeros, the principal architect of the Buffalo Billion, Gov. Cuomo's economic revitalization plan for Western New York, was found guilty of steering hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts to a bid-rigging scheme. Executives from the two firms that benefited from Kaloyeros' largesse were significant campaign donors to Gov. Cuomo.

TRUE
 FALSE

13 NAMING RIGHTS

While wooing Amazon in 2018, the governor vowed he would rename himself "Amazon Cuomo" if the company opened its second headquarters in Queens.

TRUE
 FALSE

14 THE DINNER PARTY

At the height of 2019 budget negotiations, Andrew Cuomo brought his Budget Director Robert Mujica to a \$25,000-per-people dinner with donors.

TRUE
 FALSE

15 CUOMO, DE BLASIO & COVID

As concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic grew in February and March of 2020, Gov. Cuomo deferred to Mayor Bill de Blasio on how New York City should respond to the looming threat.

TRUE
 FALSE

16 HOSPITALS ON LIFE SUPPORT

New York State has lost 20,000 hospital beds over the past 20 years. During Andrew Cuomo's decade in power, he has presided over numerous hospital closures and consolidations.

TRUE
 FALSE

17 OUT WITH THE OLD

As the COVID-19 death count soared in March 2020, Andrew Cuomo slipped an item into the state budget granting full legal immunity to nursing home companies and executives for the duration of the pandemic.

TRUE
 FALSE

18 CELEBRITY GOV

Last fall, Andrew Cuomo published a *New York Times* best-selling book on the



pandemic that included a full apology for his role in the nursing home scandal.

TRUE
 FALSE

19 WHOOPS!

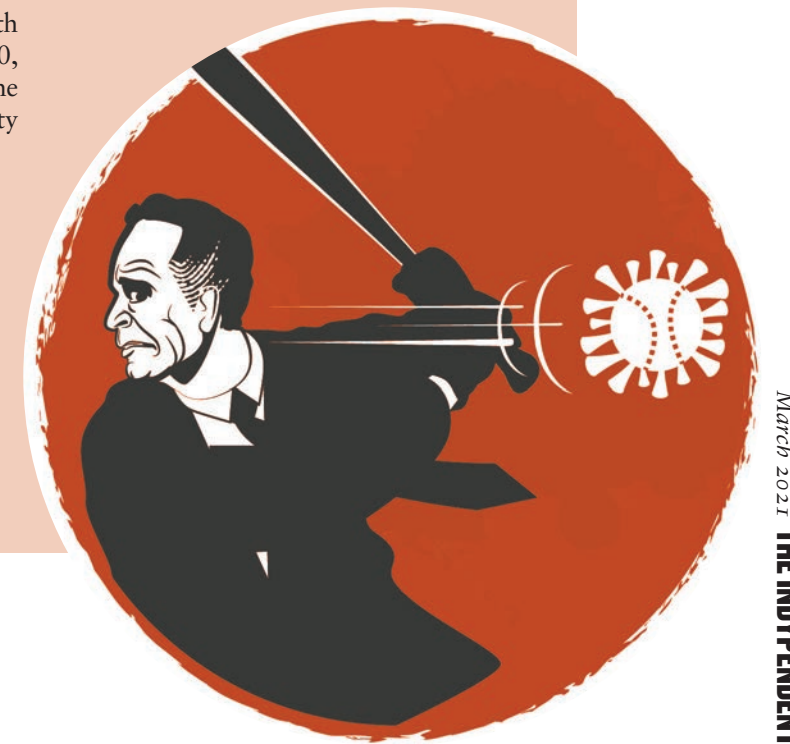
Senior Cuomo aide Melissa DeRosa ignited a furor when she divulged to Democratic lawmakers that the Cuomo administration altered a July report to minimize the number of nursing home patients who died from COVID-19.

TRUE
 FALSE

20 SEXUAL HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS

In February and March, four women who previously worked for Gov. Cuomo claimed that he sexually harassed them.

TRUE
 FALSE





KEN LOPEZ

FROM BROOKLYN TO BUFFALO, SOCIALISTS ARE ORGANIZING TO TAX THE RICH

BY ROB M. KATZ

Even before the looming COVID-19 pandemic tore open a \$60 billion hole in New York State's finances for the next four years, Sen. Liz Krueger, the chair of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, was hearing calls to raise taxes on New York's wealthiest.

When a coalition of 40 organizations wrote to Krueger in February 2020 to propose a package of income taxes on wealthy individuals and large corporations, she told the *New York Daily News* that she supports a "robust progressive tax system" but insisted that only the governor, who has spent his decade-long tenure slashing taxes and social spending, could grow total spending for new or expanded programs. In the pre-pandemic world, Krueger made clear that while she supported the sentiment, she believed her hands were tied.

One year later, Krueger was hearing those demands louder than ever — this time from right outside her apartment in the Upper West Side.

For the second week in a row, advocates from the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (of which this writer is a member) were joined by members of other organizations such as New York Communities for Change and Met Council on Housing for a rally outside of Krueger's home apartment complex. A couple of NYPD officers watched from across the road and masked passersby hurried through the small crowd.

"We're here to make a simple reminder to Liz that you are in office because of us," speaker Robert Cuffy, a member of DSA's Afrosocialist Caucus, announced. "You serve the people, we don't serve you. And there's a very clear message we want to send to you. Six bills are in the legislature targeting the rich. If you don't sign them, you won't be in the legislature. Because we're going to primary you, and we're going to mobilize against you."

Cuffy's promise to evict the chair of the Senate Finance Committee from Albany was rooted in a very tangible existential threat to the Democratic old guard. Left organizations like the DSA have orchestrated a dizzying succession of electoral upsets, from the ousting of seven incumbent Democratic state senators in 2018 to the socialist sweep of six state legislative districts last year. Even the most entrenched veteran legislator could be felled.

In a statement to *The Independent*, Krueger repeated her desire for "a robust progressive tax system."

"Our conference is engaged in a thorough evaluation of many potential revenue-raising proposals, and we will continue to push to ensure that everyone pitches in their fair share, and no one is made to bear a disproportionate burden," Krueger said.

One year since the Feb. 20 open letter, her public stance was one of the few elements of this political struggle that remained the same.

FIGHTING FOR A BIGGER PIE

NYC-DSA's Tax the Rich Campaign joins a wider statewide project, the Invest in Our NY (IONY) Coalition. A report released by the coalition in January 2021 outlines six bills that would raise a combined \$50 billion in annual revenue "to invest in our towns and our cities, our housing and healthcare, our schools and teachers, accessible transit and our people with disabilities, our workers and our youth." The bills, if passed, would open up new revenue sources in the upcoming state budget, which is set to be signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo by April 1.

"Our coalition decided that we're not going to go the route of the earmark," Michael Whitesides, a campaign organizer, said. "Instead of all fighting for different pieces of the same pie, we're all gonna get together and fight for a bigger pie. That way we're not going to be easily divided. We're all united in this fundamental belief that the wealthy need to pay more in New York to fund a better future for the working class."

But the DSA's Tax the Rich Campaign, which began in December and later merged with the sprawling IONY Coalition, attracted at-



KEN LOPEZ

TO LISTS TO

attention for the scope of its field operation. During the campaign's "Week of Action," volunteers dialed more than 105,000 numbers and placed flyers on 60,000 doors, according to field organizers Ben Silver and Nadia Tykulska. That wave of calls boiled down to 2,500 conversations,

2,000 newly identified supporters, and at least 900 respondents who agreed to be transferred to their state representative's office line right away.

Since then, socialist organizers have discovered more than 1,200 additional supporters in the city, transferring nearly half of them to their state representative's offices, and left literature at 50,000 more doors encouraging New Yorkers to make calls.

UPSTATE & DOWNSTATE, STRONGER TOGETHER

At the DSA and coalition levels, the joining of political forces on the side of taxing the rich runs from the Big Apple to Rochester, where four assemblymembers have co-sponsored the IONY Act and working-class organizations like the Rochester Organization of Rank and File Educators have hosted phone banks with Rochester DSA. The strategy reflects lessons learned from the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance that won sweeping tenant protection legislation in 2019.

In Central New York, reductions totaling \$84 million have forced Onondaga County to downsize its public workforce. The county seat, Syracuse, already struggles with one of the nation's highest poverty rates and has had its own budget slashed by \$18 million.

Capitalizing on the need for a sustainable revenue stream, Syracuse DSA has mobilized in partnership with NYC-DSA and local groups, according to Keller Shelton, a member of the chapter. For example, they've collaborated with the progressive organization CNY Solidarity Coalition to clog representatives' phone lines with messages.

While two senators preside over Syracuse, freshman John Mannion and sophomore Rachel May, the Salt City socialists have chosen to focus their might on their more entrenched, conservative Democratic representatives, Assemblymembers William Magnarelli and Al Stirpe.

Further west, Buffalo DSA is knocking doors and calling neighbors in Sens. Timothy Kennedy and Sean Ryan's backyards. Their push to tax the rich has been their second major effort following the Buffalo DSA Healthcare Work Group's success in pressuring Democratic Congressman Brian Higgins to cosponsor the Health Emergency Guarantee Act, which would provide single-payer coverage through the duration of the pandemic.

"I think that people recognize that the interests of capital and the private sector — health insurers, banks, corporations — have been placed above their own," Mo Madden, Buffalo DSA secretary and a caseworker who works with expectant mothers, said. "We've lost health insur-

JUST DO IT: *The net worth of NY's billionaires has soared during the pandemic.*

PRESSURE CAMPAIGN: *Members of the Democratic Socialists of America and New York Communities for Change march through the Upper East Side to the home of State Senator Liz Krueger.*

ance and some services we rely on are in jeopardy. Public school class sizes are growing. Here in Lockport, which is just north of Buffalo, there was a maternity floor closure, so people have to drive to a hospital in Amherst [a Buffalo suburb] to have their baby."

Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, along with Kennedy, Ryan, and Assemblymember Monica Wallace have found themselves in the crosshairs of Buffalo DSA, which hopes to build connections with their electeds through sustained pressure and advocacy. According to Madden, the chapter has knocked on about 640 doors and identified about 200 supporters over the phones.

Outside of New York City, DSA's statewide operation has discovered over 1,200 supporters and directly transferred about 500 to their representative's office lines at presstime.

HIGHER EXPECTATIONS FOR ELECTEDS

To pass, the IONY Act will require 76 out of 150 votes in the State Assembly and 32 of 63 votes in the State Senate. As *The Independent* goes to press, 22 of 43 Democratic senators and 55 of 105 Democratic assemblymembers, plus one independent assemblymember who caucuses with the Democrats, publicly sponsor or co-sponsor at least one of the bills. No Republican is supporting the measure.

That leaves several unmoved and high-profile Democrats like Krueger in NYC-DSA's sights, which have narrowed over the course of the campaign. One big fish, Senator Brian Benjamin — chair of the Committee on Revenue and Budget — announced his support for the package in mid-February.

To ramp up the pressure on more obdurate targets, DSA members across the state have recontacted New Yorkers supportive of the campaign and invited them to constituent meetings, where electeds' staffers are briefed on the IONY legislation and constituents can make their case face-to-face.

On March 4, a group of teachers and students had met with staffers for Sen. Michael Gianaris, the deputy majority leader of the Senate who touted the support of progressive icons like Sen. Bernie Sanders in his re-election campaign. The meeting was organized by Michael Corsillo, a teacher at I.S. 145 in Jackson Heights and a member of the progressive United Federation of Teachers caucus Movement of Rank and File Educators.

On the Zoom call, students shared personal stories about how funding cuts to public schools had directly affected their and their friends' lives. The staffers were

Continued on page 18

POP QUIZ ANSWERS

FOR YOUR FINAL GRADE, MULTIPLY THE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS YOU ANSWERED CORRECTLY BY 5.

1. TRUE: Koch won despite the smear, but lost to Papa Cuomo five years later when they both ran for governor.

2. TRUE: Andrew's shadowy deeds to punish his father's enemies and keep his supporters in line were so devilish that Albany insiders came up with "The Prince of Darkness" as his moniker. Andrew is reputed to be proud of his unofficial title.

3. FALSE: As HUD secretary, Cuomo helped sow the seeds of the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007–08 by pushing government-sponsored entities Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to get into the subprime housing market while capitulating to mortgage-industry players who didn't want to disclose the terms of the mortgages they were making.

4. FALSE: Cuomo relentlessly scapegoated public sector workers for the state's post-meltdown fiscal crisis. Rather than levy penalties or taxes on Wall Street, he overcame union opposition and convinced legislators to cut pension benefits for future state employees instead.

5. TRUE: However, when Cuomo actually became governor, he scrapped that promise to win legislative support for cutting public sector pensions.

6. TRUE: Cuomo liked this arrangement because it meant bills passed by the Democratic-controlled Assembly would die in the Senate without Cuomo being blamed by progressive voters. The IDC grew to include eight Democratic senators. It was swept away in the 2018 midterms when enraged Democratic voters got wind of the scheme, and threw the turncoats out of office.

7. TRUE: The Moreland Commission was always meant to focus on the corruption of Cuomo's rivals, though, not his own administration. When the commission turned its attention to Cuomo's cronies, he promptly killed it.

8. FALSE: In 2014, anti-corruption author and attorney Zephyr Teachout ran against Cuomo in the Democratic primary and won 34% of the vote and half the counties in the state, despite being massively outspent. Cynthia Nixon garnered 35% of the vote when she primaryed Cuomo in 2018.

9. TRUE: Cuomo created the WEP as a sham third party to sow confusion among supporters of the left-leaning Working Families Party (WFP).

10. FALSE: Gov. Cuomo denied he was responsible for the MTA's poor performance even though he appoints the majority of its board, including its chair. In fact, it was the governor's repeated raids on MTA funding sources that led to the subway system's unraveling.

11. FALSE: Although Percoco did

take those bribes from two companies with state business in return for taking official actions to benefit the firms, and he was convicted and sent to prison, he called the money "ziti," just like Tony Soprano would.

12. TRUE: And sadly the \$959 million solar panel factory that was central to the project has been a dud.

13. TRUE: He also generously offered enticements including \$3 billion in public subsidies and a private helipad for CEO Jeff Bezos paid for with taxpayer dollars.

14. TRUE: When three young female legislators — Alessandra Biaggi, Jessica Ramos and Yuh-Line Niou — criticized this action, a top Cuomo aide denounced them as "fucking idiots."

15. FALSE: Cuomo initially downplayed COVID-19 as no more dangerous than the flu. By late February, the State Department of Health ceased communicating with the NYC Department of Health. When de Blasio tried to shut down the city on March 17, Cuomo overrode him but then reversed course and locked down the city on March 22, after thousands more people were infected.

16. TRUE: The shortage of hospital beds would come back to haunt Cuomo at the peak of the pandemic when ailing New Yorkers flooded safety-net hospitals that didn't have beds for them.

17. TRUE: Cuomo required nursing homes to accept COVID-infected patients from hospitals, leading to thousands of preventable deaths. The nursing home industry and the Greater Hospital Association of New York are both major Cuomo campaign donors.

18. FALSE: After presiding over the highest COVID-19 death rate in the country, Cuomo did publish a best-seller (*American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic*). Apologies, however, were in short supply. Cuomo has also received an Emmy Award for the daily press conferences he held last spring.

19. TRUE: The New York nursing home death toll has now surpassed 15,000.

20. TRUE: Cuomo has denied he engaged in any inappropriate touching despite a published photo of him placing his hands on the face of a woman who said that he tried to kiss her against her will.

MY GRADE IS _____.



COMMUNITY VS COVID

GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES SEEN AS THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME RACIAL DISPARITIES IN WHO GETS VACCINATED

BY EMLYN CAMERON

A prominent figure in the South Bronx through his ministry and food pantry, Rev. John Udo-Onon sees the impact of COVID-19 on his community firsthand. He experienced the physical toll early last year, when he had to close his food pantry for a few weeks after he and family members contracted the virus. Nearly a year later, he still sees its effects when he welcomes people to the pantry, where he says that the foodline has grown during the crisis. And he has seen it as part of his religious vocation.

“We deal with a community which has been traumatized. As a pastor, I’ve conducted so many funerals,” he told *The Independent*. Reverend Udo-Onon estimated that, in a normal year, he conducts only two or three, but during the pandemic he has presided over 10 to 15.

But, new, life-saving vaccines became available in December. As *The Independent* goes to press, 18% of Americans have received at least one vaccine dose according to the Centers for Disease Control. However, there continue to be large racial disparities in who receives the vaccines nationally, as well as here in New York City.

Sixty-nine percent more Black New Yorkers and 88% more Latinx New Yorkers have died from COVID-19 than white New Yorkers, according to the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s data portal. According to the city, however, as of early March, the percentage of white New Yorkers who have been fully vaccinated is more than twice that of either Black or Latinx New Yorkers.

The reasons for these disparities are varied and include skepticism about the medical establishment among historically marginalized communities, pre-existing structural issues in U.S. healthcare, the high proportion of people of color working low-wage jobs with long hours, difficulties with making appointments online and traveling to vaccination sites, and the overrepresentation of whites in the ranks of the elderly that were among the first to be vaccinated.

To counteract this imbalance, community leaders like Rev. Udo-Onon are using their influence to encourage local residents to get vaccinated. Based near the Longwood stop on the 6 train in the South Bronx, Rev. Udo-Onon and his volunteer staff at Word of Life International’s food pantry spend their Saturdays preparing crates of food to hand out to those lined up outside. Sometimes they also offer other services, such as pop-up HIV testing, according to Reverend Udo-Onon. And recently, the pantry has been working as a community partner with Dr. Zainab Toteh Osakwe, an assistant professor at Adelphi University’s school of Nursing and Public Health.

Dr. Osakwe is part of a team studying coronavirus vaccine hesitancy. She recruits people with concerns about the vaccine from the food line, and brings them to a desk in Word of Life’s main hall to speak about their worries.

The pantry’s commitment to being a location for discussing the vaccine has made it a central site for her research. She says that the pantry has started to forward questions to her from people who come to the site when she is not around.

“There’s a huge potential here,” she said of the impact Word of Life could have in providing information to the community as a trusted resource. “There’s a very strong trust factor here and sites like this are a great opportunity.”

Efforts by community members and local advocates like Rev. Udo-Onon to publicize the safety of the vaccine are already having an impact. For instance, Christine Culpepper De Ruiz, a Latina who lives in the Bronx, said that seeing other people talk about and post photos of getting the vaccine helped her feel more comfortable going to Yankee Stadium for her first dose, and she hopes to provide similar reassurance to others now that she has received it.

Cheikhou Oumar Ann, a community health advocate for Bronx Health Reach/The Institute for Family Health, is working to address the concerns of Muslim New Yorkers in the South Bronx, just a mile southeast of Yankee Stadium. He said that a local imam announcing his own vaccination after Friday prayer and in a Whatsapp group drove interest in one community from 10 New Yorkers reaching out



to him about the vaccine in a day to 50 or 60 over the course of a weekend.

BUILDING TRUST

The infamous 1932–1072 Tuskegee Study of 399 Black men whose syphilis cases were left untreated is frequently cited as a reason for distrust of the government and the medical profession. However, no empirical evidence has been presented to back up that claim.

Dr. Betty Kolod, who practices medicine at an East Harlem hospital, says she has patients who are hesitant to take the vaccine, but they don't cite Tuskegee to explain their wariness if they are even aware of it. Instead, she believes it's their interactions with today's medical professionals that have given them reason to be skeptical. She says many have gone uninsured or underinsured; they have been left waiting for hours for treatment and given second-rate care when they are treated. When they try to talk to physicians about their experience, they have been ignored.

"I've noticed that, at the tiniest signal for patients that I'm listening to them, they will often become emotional," Kolod said. "It's so unusual to them that a medical provider would listen to them or want to hear what they have to say."

This accords with the experience of Sandra Rivas. While she recently waited in line at the Word of Life pantry, she described how she caught COVID-19 in April but chose not to go to the hospital. She said she stayed home and medicated herself.

But, when vaccines became available, she says she decided to get it and obtained an upcoming appointment at Yankee Stadium. Her family members are scared to take the vaccine, she says, but say they will do so if they see she is unharmed by her vaccination.

When asked who she trusts most regarding the vaccine, she said "In my own experience, anything is better than suffering. I trust myself."

Others standing in line at the food pantry felt similarly.

The seven people the *Indy* spoke to said they had been vaccinated, were awaiting an appointment, or were trying to get an appointment.

Shari Cornish said she received the vaccine after searching for hours for an online appointment with her 15-year-old daughter. But, now she is concerned that her daughter will not be vaccinated before she has to go back to school, and will bring the virus home.

Lizbeth Rochez said via a translator that she wanted an appointment but didn't understand how to use the internet to get one. And, Max Daniel said, "If you could get me one tomorrow, I'll take it," but when he and his wife were able to schedule appointments in February, they were not available for months.

So what will it take to get more Black and Latinx New Yorkers vaccinated?

With its Vaccine Command Center set up at 253 Broadway across the street from City Hall, the de Blasio administration has initiated a number of community engagement initiatives. This includes setting up vaccination sites at New York City Housing Authority buildings and at safety net hospitals and providing local groups with fliers and palm cards and videos produced by the City's Department of Health in 14 different languages.

But, multiple people working with locals or living in areas hard hit by the virus thought that city government should improve its outreach to maximize the number of people who can be helped in accessing the vaccine.

Going to where people already are is crucial, says Dr. Kolod — be it on social media sites or at physical spaces like churches and barber shops.

"It has to be through conversation and in settings that people are already gathering at," she said.

NEW STRATEGIES

Toward that end, local pharmacies have started to give vaccinations. In early March, the city announced it would begin

doing in-home vaccinations for homebound New Yorkers. On March 6, the city opened a vaccination center at Co-op City, the massive union-built affordable housing complex in the northeastern Bronx. The move came at the behest of freshman congressman Jamaal Bowman and other Bronx elected officials and with funding from the Biden Administration.

"The best way to vaccinate people is in their own neighborhood," Mayor de Blasio said at a Co-op City press conference.

Meanwhile, local figures like Rev. Udo-Okon and Oumar Ann and medical professionals like Dr. Kolod continue working with the vulnerable directly, offering resources and information.

On the first Saturday in March, the line of people waiting for food in 32-degree weather stretched a little over half a block, down from Word of Life to a nearby intersection and just around the corner.

"Can you imagine if there were fliers being given out to all these people? That would make a lot of difference," said Rev. Udo-Okon.

In the afternoon, Oumar Ann arrived by car at the pantry.

In the trunk were boxes of the city's informational signs and palm cards about COVID safety tips, including some in Arabic, and at least one box of fliers titled "What New Yorkers Need to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines." Written on the box with a felt-tip pen was "2,000 Spanish, 2,000 English."

READY FOR THE JAB: Max Daniel says he tried to sign up for a Covid-19 vaccination with no success.

BEING OF SERVICE: Rev. Felicia Udo-Okon and Rev. John Udo-Okon at the Word of Life International's food pantry in the South Bronx.

NYC VACCINATIONS ROUNDUP

Having a hard time keeping up with how to get vaccinated in New York City? We've sifted through the latest information and compiled some basics for you. As more doses become available and more groups are eligible for vaccines, the following information is subject to change.

- **COVID-19 vaccines protect people from severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death.**
- **The vaccine is free and you do not need to provide a Social Security number to get vaccinated. You will not be charged, even if you do not have health insurance. If you have insurance, bring your insurance card (your insurance may be billed by the vaccination provider, but there is no copay).**
- **On February 24, the FDA authorized the Johnson & Johnson COVID vaccine, which only requires one shot, as opposed to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, which require two shots.**
- **You can find vaccine sites near you via the vaccine finder at vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/**
- **You can schedule an appointment, including home visits, at on.nyc.gov/20lcWUe or by calling (877) 829-4692.**

Once you schedule an appointment, you must complete the form at on.nyc.gov/20hPur5

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

Visit on.nyc.gov/30pSUdU for details on the following categories.

- **People with underlying conditions including cancer, heart conditions, pregnancy, immune compromised, diabetes, and plenty more. Find them here: on.nyc.gov/3qr0q2l**
- **People 60 or older**
- **Group living facility staff and residents**
- **Correction, probation, or juvenile detention officers**
- **Fire, police, public safety communications, other sworn and civilian personnel**
- **Grocery/convenience store/bodega workers and restaurant workers, including delivery workers and unpaid food pantry/soup kitchen workers**
- **Health care workers, including coroners, dentists/orthodontists and receptionists who come in contact with patients**
- **Hotel staff**
- **Public transit and TLC (Taxi and Limousine Commission) workers, including airline and airport staff and ferry/port authority staff**
- **School, college and child care workers**
- **As of March 17: Public facing non-**

profit workers and government and public employees and public-facing building service workers (not construction workers)

Between March and April, the city will designate more eligible at-risk groups and essential workers. The general public should be eligible by summer 2021.

Vaccination sites will require proof of eligibility for eligible workers and people over the age of 60. They will ask you to self-certify but will not require that you show proof if you have an underlying condition; they may ask for proof that you live in New York State.

HOMEBOUND RESIDENTS

On March 4, the city began an initiative to vaccinate people who are homebound. Teams of FDNY and medical professionals are reaching out to homebound seniors to register them for and administer the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Homebound residents should fill out a form at forms.cityofnewyork.us/f/homebound expressing interest in getting vaccinated. The city initially sent out five teams to housing complexes in the Bronx (Co-op City) and in Brighton Beach. By the week of March 15, officials expect there to be 30 teams each vaccinating 240 seniors per day.

BUSING

Eligible senior candidates who sign up for their appointment online will be screened and directed to transportation options, the city says. Department for the Aging providers will contact New Yorkers by phone to coordinate ride pick-ups.

STATE SITES

On Feb. 24 community-based New York State vaccination sites at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn and York College in Queens opened. The MTA launched a pilot program to enhance bus service in Brooklyn and Queens to connect New Yorkers in these boroughs to the two vaccination sites. See the additional bus routes at new.mta.info/coronavirus/vaccine-sites. The state is also partnering with faith leaders in Brooklyn and Queens to launch a vaccination drive to encourage more community members to sign up for appointments at these sites using phone banking. To get vaccinated at one of these sites, visit the state website at on.ny.gov/3t1k1rZ, drop into the center or call (833) 697-4829.

To be vaccinated at Medgar Evers, you must live in one of the following zip codes: 11203, 11206, 11207, 11208, 11210, 11212, 11213, 11216, 11221, 11225, 11226, 11233, 11236, or 11238.

For York College: 11411, 11412, 11413, 11418, 11419, 11420, 11422, 11423, 11427, 11428, 11429, 11430, 11432, 11433, 11434, 11435, 11436, 11439, 11691, 11692, or 11693.

There is also a mass state site open at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Bronx residents can schedule appointments by visiting soms Vaccinations.com or by calling (833) 766-6769. Hours: Monday–Friday, 7 am–11 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 8 am–8 pm.

24-hour mass vaccine sites are open at Citi Field and Empire Outlets. To make appointments, visit nyc.gov/VaccineFinder or call (877) 829-4692.

—AMBA GUERGUERIAN



COURTESY

LOVE US LIKE YOU LOVE OUR FOOD

BY LEIA DORAN

This year has seen a sharp rise in violent attacks against Asian Americans—Asian American elders in particular.

Technically, I'm Asian American. Specifically, I'm half Korean, half Italian-Irish-etc. But before saying anything else I'd like to mention some of the victims' stories and (where possible) names.

1) 12.15.20 — PORTLAND, OR
An Asian American man was attacked by another man who asked "Are you Chinese?" before punching him in the face and fleeing.

2) 12.17.20 — NEW YORK CITY
Six attackers hurled COVID-related slurs and beat an Asian woman after confronting her for not wearing a face mask on the A train.

3) 12.23.20 — ANTIOCH, CA
Police kneeled on the neck of 30-year-old Filipino American Angelo Quinto until blood flowed from his mouth. Angelo, who had been suffering a mental health crisis, died at the hospital three days later. His sister said "I'm always going to regret calling the police and hope no one has to regret doing what they think is the right thing."

4) 12.30.20 — EAST BAY, PA
State Police responding to calls about a "distracted" man on an overpass claimed that 19-year-old Chinese American Christian Hall had "retrieved a firearm" and "pointed it in the Troopers' direction" forcing them to fatally shoot him in self-defense. A witness video later surfaced, showing Christian standing on the bridge with his hands raised as the officers opened fire.

5) 1.28.21 — SAN FRANCISCO
84-year-old Vicha Ratanapakdee was taking his daily walk when an attacker ran across the street and threw him to the ground. He sustained brain hemorrhaging and died in the hospital without regaining consciousness.

6) 1.31.21 OAKLAND, CA
Three attacks in Oakland's Chinatown district. A 91-year-old man "suffered lacerations, abrasions and a contusion" when a stranger approached him from behind and shoved him to the ground. The perpetrator attacked two more elderly Asians before being caught.

7) 2.4.21 — BROOKLYN
Noel Quintana, a 61-year-old Filipino American, was riding the L train when an attacker lashed out with a box-cutter, leaving a deep scar across Quintana's face that would require 100 stitches. "I asked for help," said Quintana. "but nobody helped. Nobody moved. I don't want to think because I'm Asian. I don't want to think about that. Because it could also happen to anybody, but — I don't know."

8) 2.16.21 — NEW YORK CITY
52-year-old Leelee Chin-Yeung was knocked out by a stranger. In unrelated incidents on the same day, a 71-year-old and a 68-year-old, both Asian, were punched while riding the subway.

This isn't new. The historical precedent for anti-Asian prejudice in America is overwhelming and under-taught.

In 1871, 18 Chinese boys and men were lynched by a mob in Los Angeles after a white civilian was killed in the crossfire of a fight between two Chinese men. The pursuit of justice in the massacre's aftermath was complicated by an 1863 that which barred Asian Americans from participating in court proceedings as witnesses or victims.

From 1882 to 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act barred most Chinese laborers from immigrating or becoming citizens. The Immigration Act of 1917 went further, creating an "Asiatic Barred Zone" stretching all the way from Polynesia to Turkey.

Japanese internment camps. Yellow Peril. Vincent Chin. The "Model Minority" myth, which allows our perceived successes to be invoked at a bigot's convenience for the purpose of disparaging another group, almost always Black people. Kung Flu.

Despite this history, I struggle to accept that this current wave of violence is racially motivated. I search for excuses that diminish the very possibility. Surely it's just a robbery, and the victims happen to be Asian. Absolutely anyone can get stabbed on the subway. Rick Moranis got punched too. And police "resolving" mental illness through excessive or lethal force is hardly unique to us.

Thankfully, tragically, we have numbers on which to anchor our sense of the facts. Stop AAPI Hate has released a report that quantifies this disturbing upswing — over 2,800 cases between March and December. New York City in 2020 saw a jaw-dropping 1,900% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes.

As the attacks against Asian Americans slowly gain visibility in the news, the questions multiply. How do we reconcile our desire for justice with knowledge that the legal and carceral systems have been sucking the lifeblood from the communities of Black and brown Americans? How can we address cross-cultural tensions responsibly while guarding against racial suspicion and anti-Black-

ness? Few things are more depleting than watching the comments sections under stories about these attacks collapse in a toxic froth of back-and-forth accusations, grievance one-upmanship, and mutual gaslighting.

I find hope in groups like SafeWalks NYC, a community safety organization originally founded in response to a string of attacks in Bushwick. Volunteers make themselves available to neighbors, providing escorted walks to and from subway stations. SafeWalks feels ideologically resonant in a year where the goal of defunding police and investing in restorative, community-based solutions seems attainable rather than utopian. They recently launched their Chinatown chapter.

I also wonder — if we're hearing about so many cases of violence against Asian elders, how many more unreported incidents must there be? Surely there are victims whose attacks weren't recorded by bystanders or security cameras, who picked themselves up off the ground and headed home in that disoriented dream-state familiar to anyone who has ever been mugged. What about people who don't have social-media-savvy children and grandchildren to spread the outrage of their stories? And even those who do ... some of us might not be surprised to see our elders slap a bandaid on a cut that should have stitches, shut down our anxious interrogation, wave away suggestions of police reports and hospital visits, and mask up in the morning for their daily walk, private, stubborn, and scared.

I don't mean to assume the character of anyone else's elders. My own don't fit all the stereotypes. "Asian American" is a broad, problematic label, encompassing too many ethnicities, economic realities, and cultures to make sense of anything. The richest Asian Americans in the country earn more than whites, while Asians in New York are the lowest-earning immigrant group. The Trump era exacerbated these disparities. For example, the Cambodian American refugee community suffered a 279% increase in deportations between 2017 and 2018, while 2020 saw Tony Pham, a Vietnamese refugee whose family arrived from Saigon in 1975, promoted to interim Director of ICE. Some of our countries of origin have colonized each other. Some of us trace our roots to places so geographically removed that before landing here in the melting pot our people might never have crossed paths at all.

But these distinctions probably won't matter to someone who attacks an Asian person, and so this fear might be one of the few experiences shared by otherwise unrelated people who check that box when filling out a census. That is, the fear that someday soon, a bigot on the subway might punch us in the head, and the people around us might decide that we deserve it.

To learn more about organizations engaged in the fight for racial justice, visit stopaapihate.org, imreadymovement.org (AAPI Women Lead) and advancingjustice-aajc.org (Asian Americans Advancing Justice).

LEIA DORAN

THE DAY I WAS DOXXED BY RUSH LIMBAUGH

(AND THE LIFE AFTER)

BY ASH MARINACCIO

“Look at the evacuations from Katrina. We didn’t expect to be getting out any time soon.”

This was the quote that gave me my first 15 minutes of “CNN fame” (or at least what felt like it). Little did I know, Rush Limbaugh was listening and intent on extending my notoriety for many more weeks.

At 21, I was a rising senior at Pace University studying abroad in Lebanon in an Arabic-language immersion program. This coincided with Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 2006, which garnered a lot of international media attention. The U.S. media focused on the Americans who were being evacuated from Lebanon. I was interviewed on *American Morning* by Soledad O’Brien about my experience exiting Beirut aboard a Norwegian ship and asked whether or not I had thought the United States was going to send help sooner, to which I replied, “Look at the evacuations from Katrina. We didn’t expect to be getting out any time soon.”

This quote enraged Limbaugh who took it upon himself to make an example of me on his nationally syndicated radio show. He was eager to push back against charges from leading Democrats that the Bush administration was fumbling the Lebanon evacuation just as it had failed a year before to properly respond to Hurricane Katrina, leaving thousands of Black New Orleans residents stranded for days on their rooftops. To his thinking, Katrina wasn’t a tragedy that presented lessons to be learned but a “race card” used by liberals to rile up Blacks against Republicans and in a mid-term election year no less.

For my Katrina reference, I was denounced as a spoiled “ingrate.” To Limbaugh and his army of dittoheads, I was a clueless coed, a liberal damsel-in-distress who had traipsed off to a foreign land, got herself in a tight spot and was too self-absorbed to appreciate the Navy SEALs who had belatedly tried to come to the rescue. Instead of gnawing once more on the old bones of D.C. Democrats like Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, Limbaugh’s fans had fresh young meat to tear into: Me.

Limbaugh’s words galvanized his listeners, several of whom doxxed me on rightwing online chat groups, releasing my school information and phone numbers, home phone number, home address, and email addresses. Learning of my involvement with the Campus Antiwar Network and a staging of *The Vagina Monologues* at my school further incited the haters.

When Limbaugh died in February of cancer at the age of 70, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both delicately referred to him as a “radio provocateur” in their initial obituary headlines. A more accurate term might be “media terrorist,” “bombastic bigot” or “pioneering propagandist” of the kind of fake news and conspiracy theories that are now endemic to our social discourse.

Following the discussion of me on his July 19, 2006, show, I received non-stop death threats by phone and email for a month including to my mom’s home phone and to my personal cell phone. These callers made it clear they knew where I lived and went to school and threatened to kill me either at home or

at school. They threatened both my paraplegic, wheelchair-bound mother and me with rape and sexual violence in order to “teach me a lesson.” There were threats to torture and kill my pet cat. To be extra vigilant, my mom had to keep the cat primarily inside. The threats continued into the beginning of the fall semester when someone called Pace claimed to have a gun, so the university tightened security at my dorm.

The threats were generally anonymous, though I still can recall an email from a woman in Pennsylvania describing how she brought her children into her living room to do a homeschool lesson on me as an example of what they should never become. There were, of course, several lonely white men who insisted I had inside information on Osama Bin Laden and that they would put me on trial for treason. There were many comments about my body and weight.

I had daily panic attacks. I couldn’t work and struggled to focus on my studies. I contemplated dropping out of school in my senior year, or at least transferring to a place where “they” couldn’t find me. Most days I was scared to leave the house. Nobody around me quite knew how to handle what was happening, so it was met with a lot of shame, especially because I had put my mother at such risk. I was told to toughen up — that if I wanted to dish it out, I’d have to be able to take it (because, of course, a 21-year-old college student has the same amount of power as Rush Limbaugh and it’s an even playing field ...). Some people thought it was “cool” and a “badge of honor.” I contemplated joining the Army to prove I was a “good American” and I contemplated suicide.

In the years to follow, I did a lot of work in therapy to reclaim how I view myself. But I engaged in a lot of self-destructive behavior as well. Much of it still manifests in extreme anxiety, imposter syndrome, and general fear of verbalizing my opinions — or not taking credit for my work — which I have to constantly keep in check, even now.

I didn’t know there was a term for what happened to me until nearly 15 years later when I started working on my PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center and my ITP class was discussing doxxing. I tentatively raised my hand and said I was doxxed by Rush Limbaugh and the room fell silent. After sharing my experience many others have contacted me expressing similar stories and backlash. For the past year, I have listened to other women’s stories, all of whom have elements that are similar to mine. They talk about experiencing the same emotions I did when it happened and living with the fear and shame and constant anxiety. I have read numerous articles that discuss what to do in the event that you are doxxed. They provide what I imagine could be helpful resources to cancel social media accounts, access to public information, etc. However, a social media presence is necessary to my line of work as a theatre director, filmmaker, and performer, as it is to many others at this juncture. Erasing yourself is not an answer to combatting a culture of online violence.

I see doxxing as a systemic issue and part of the international epidemic of violence against women. It cannot be seen as separate from the offline violence that women endure. The violence women experience online is part of a larger culture of violence against women and should be addressed as such. In November 2017, Amnesty International conducted a survey on internet violence and found that a third of women in the United States experience violence online in the form of harassment and doxxing. I have known many public scholars, artists and thinkers who take extended breaks from social media because of the regular violence they face and the impact it has on their families. This can only be addressed through systemic change and collective efforts by communities, institutions and governments.

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ESTERAN JIMENEZ

BEYOND WORK

Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone

BY SARAH JAFFE

BOLD TYPE BOOKS, 2021

By Matt Wasserman

Economist John Maynard Keynes famously predicted in 1930 that his grandchildren would work 15-hour weeks. Universal basic income proponents claim that robots are coming for our jobs (and maybe they are). But here, in the dystopian present, those of us fortunate enough to have jobs mostly work too much. Professionals work unpaid overtime; service workers take on second jobs. We work longer hours than our European counterparts and longer hours than the past generation.

Sarah Jaffe's new book, *Work Won't Love You Back*, examines the ideology and lived reality of work in the post-Fordist economy. Through a series of case studies, bookended by an introduction and conclusion rich with theory, she explores how workers invest themselves in their jobs — and how they're organizing for better working conditions across a variety of industries.

The first section chronicles those laboring in the helping professions and the service industry, engaging in affective labor. Jaffe

“follow[s] the labor of love as it moves from women's unpaid work in the home through paid domestic work, teaching, retail work, and the nonprofit sector.” Whether raising children, helping clients or delivering “service with a smile,” each job requires workers to “put themselves second to the feelings and needs of their customers or charges.” Traditionally coded as feminine, such jobs are typically (de)valued accordingly.

The second section focuses on those working (or try-

ing to obtain) what one might call “dream jobs,” jobs where the work itself is supposed to be your passion. Jaffe investigates how the “myth of the starving, devoted artist has leapt from art workers to unpaid workers, precarious academics, computer programmers, and even professional athletes.” It will surprise few to learn that when the work is supposed to be its own reward, the pay and working conditions are often lacking.

that work was boring. The first half of the book catalogues how women have been fully integrated into the workforce, albeit often relegated to care work. The second half describes how “do what you love” was recuperated as a corporate marketing and management strategy, forcing workers to profess to love their jobs. Rather than disrupting the accumulation of capital, capitalism has reconstituted itself around these twin critiques — as the gains have been redistributed relentlessly upwards.

A reader may object, with some reason, that software engineers making \$200,000 a year at a workplace with air hockey tables and catered lunches have little in common with retail workers fighting for \$15. While some fractions of the professional classes, like adjunct professors, have lost control of the conditions of their labor and joined the ranks of the precarious, not all have been so affected. Jaffe's urge to synthesize and find the commonality of struggles is admirable, but the two halves of the book could belong to separate projects — and the introduction and conclusion could belong to yet a third book. This is a minor quibble, however, with a deeply engaging work.

Many of us, of course, have more to lose than our chains. Yet Jaffe convincingly insists that we all nonetheless have much to gain in uniting to throw off the shackles of work. In a lyrical and powerful introduction and conclusion, she urges us to abandon the idea that our jobs give meaning to our life or define us. Instead, she urges the reader to discover “the pleasures that are to be found in rebellion, in collec-

tive action, in solidarity” and to lay “claim to their time and their hearts and minds outside of the workplace.” This is perhaps less of a political program than championing the right to be lazy or fully automated luxury communism. But it would certainly be a good start.



CHRISTINE LARSEN

Jaffe's background as a labor journalist shows. The prose is crisp and compulsively readable. And her approach is grounded not only in academic research but also in individual interviews.

Although the stories Jaffe tells are disparate, she synthesizes them as the story of how capitalism responded to two '60s critiques. First, the critique of *The Feminine Mystique*: Women were isolated and miserable in their suburban homes/workplaces. And, second, the critique

SOCIALISTS

Continued from page 13

amicable but deflected, claiming that Gianaris had to make calculated choices about what he supports as deputy majority leader.

Still, “the students were very clear that if the senator's staff wanted to highlight his role as a leader, that they expected him to lead on this issue,” Corsillo said.

The next day, Corsillo received an email from Gianaris thanking him for arranging the meeting. Separately, the veteran legislator announced that he had co-sponsored all six bills, providing them with the credence of the second-highest-ranking senator in Albany. Corsillo wondered if the staffers' report back from the meeting had made an impression on Gianaris.

“[Gianaris's turnaround] was profound,

and I think that the students are the reason for that,” Corsillo said. “The personal stories of, ‘this is where the money was going last year and how that was benefiting me as a student, and then that program was cut, and here's exactly how it hurt me’ — any adult that could listen to a student say that and not be moved would have to be a really cold person.”

Drashti Brahmabhatt, one of the campaign's organizers, credited the campaign with moving Benjamin, Gianaris, and 10 at least other legislators to partially or fully sign on to the IONY package.

“I think politics in Albany is not the same anymore,” Whitesides said. “You can't just show up, take a few votes and go home. People are demanding that their legislators do their jobs and actually deliver support for people. If legislators are feeling the pressure, that's the whole point.”

In the short run, some of that pressure has

been relieved. The stimulus funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act, which is expected to be signed by President Joe Biden in March, would deliver \$12.5 billion in federal aid for the state. However, that falls short of the \$15 billion for which Cuomo had lobbied to fill the budget gap and, as Whitesides noted, would merely let Albany kick the can down the road until next budget season.

“Fundamentally, the federal aid isn't particularly meaningful for this project,” they countered. “If you have one-time federal aid without an equal increase in annual revenue, you ensure a big fiscal cliff. You're funding an expansion of public services with no way to sustain that expansion, so a few years from now [the budget] will require bigger cuts than what we faced now.”

Meanwhile, the corporate world is ringing the alarm bells of capital flight, and significant reaction has been targeted toward

the tax on financial transactions, or the “Wall Street tax,” sponsored by progressive Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou and democratic socialist Senator Julia Salazar. The New York Stock Exchange, backed by groups like the deficit-wary Citizens Budget Commission, has threatened to mutiny if financial transactions are taxed.

DSA chapters across New York State are pushing Albany to call Wall Street's bluff.

“When people don't take you seriously, they ignore you,” Whitesides said. “But Wall Street's been hammering on it being a bad idea, and that's because they're scared. The financial transactions tax is a fantastic bill and the movement that we've seen from the entrenched political establishment to push back on bills like that shows to me that they're afraid it might actually pass.”



BRANDON O'NEILL

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Billy,
I want to swipe right on Tinder again. I want to go out dancing at a crowded bar with friends. I want to sit in a packed movie theater again. I want to go to a protest where it doesn't feel like I'm in a hospital ward where everyone is standing 6 feet apart and wearing medical masks. It's been a year. I want to live my full life again. Please don't guilt me for that. I bet you do too.

JESS
Bed-Stuy

...

Rev Billy,
Do you think I should get vaccinated? I don't want to get really sick or die from Covid. But, I also don't trust the government.

DELIA
Woodside

Delia! Delia!

Get vaccinated, Delia! I refer you to the advice to Jess above. Your first emotion is not the last word. Mistrust the government on your own time. You need to be your own government now, in the sense that you govern your own actions, enforce the law yourself. Getting vaccinated is about other people too. We get vaccinated so that together we have a chance. Delia, and your readers too — Get Vaccinated Now!

I want I want I want I want I want....

REV

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

Jess,
Your letter looks like: "I want I want I want I want I want...."

Look, Jess. Our leadership at this time in history is the Movement for Black Lives, #metoo and the Women's March, LGBTQ and Gender Rights, and Standing Rock and the fight for the Earth. From the Black body to water is sacred — these movements all have in common the demand for health and safety.

And now everyone is changing. If we used to get drunk and party a lot — now we can change. Desire is no longer the same thing as liberty. That's what Republicans think. They have mask-burnings to celebrate their freedom. The infection spikes come straight from their "liberty."

Now we desire a full life for everyone, and our individual cravings are no longer the first item. I'm from the Church of Stop Shopping, so let me preach that the consumerism of scratch-that-itch has trained us to ignore the larger good. We concentrate on ME.

...want want want want want...

The CDC has recently given fully vaccinated people permission to hug, bump and grind, and generally carry on — without masks. Here's your chance, Jess! You are probably at the local watering hole as I write.

My parting advice: In the UK, what we call the "advice column" is called the "agony column." Jess, you're in agony over the disappearance of the crowded bar but you'll have more agony the next time some desire is denied. Let that agony go, Amen? Come to the really HOT party. Let's dance to the music of Justice For All!

REV

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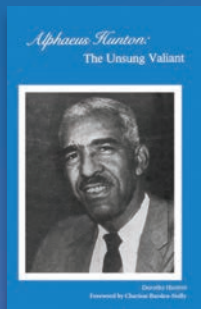
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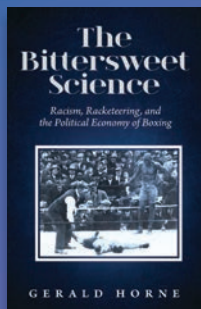


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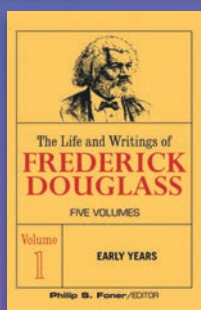
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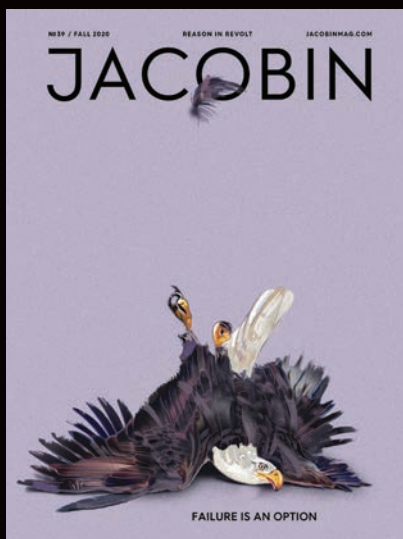
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