

THE

WHY ALICE NEEL NEVER STOPPED PAINTING — P18

INDYPENDENT

#263: MAY 2021



MARCIAL MORELOS

"The End of the American Dream" by former ICE detainee Marcial Morales is based on his time in the Essex County Jail in Newark, NJ.

COLD AS ICE

LOCAL NEW JERSEY GOVERNMENTS ARE MAKING MILLIONS OFF OF RUNNING IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTERS. WHAT HAPPENS ON THE INSIDE IS SHOCKING.

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN, P12

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Ellen Davidson, Alina
Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas
Powers, Steven Wishnia

ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR

Frank Reynoso

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Mikael Tarkela

DESIGNERS

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

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS

Linda Martín Alcoff, Eleanor
J. Bader, Bennett Baumer, Sue
Brisk, Roman Broskowski,
Emlyn Cameron, Rico Cleffi,
Renée Feltz, Todd Fine,
Lynne Foster, Esteban Guerra,
Theodore Hamm, David
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**MAY****THROUGH MAY 2**

10am–5pm

EXHIBIT: GOYA'S GRAPHIC IMAGINATION

Regarded as one of the most remarkable artists from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Francisco Goya (1746–1828) is renowned for his prolific activity as a draftsman and printmaker, producing about 900 drawings and 300 prints during his long career. Through his drawings and prints, he expressed his political liberalism, criticism of superstition and distaste for intellectual oppression in unique and compelling ways.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 5th Ave., Manhattan

THROUGH MAY 31

10:30am–5:30pm • \$14–\$25

EXHIBIT: RECONSTRUCTIONS: ARCHITECTURE AND BLACKNESS IN AMERICA

How does race structure America's cities? MoMA's first exhibition to explore the relationship between architecture and the spaces of African-American and African diaspora communities, "Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America," presents 11 newly commissioned works by architects, designers and artists that explore ways in which histories can be made visible and equity can be built.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53 St., Manhattan

THROUGH OCT 31

10am–6pm • \$25–\$35

INSTALLATION: KUSAMA: COSMIC NATURE

Spectacular installations feature Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's lifelong fascination with the natural world, beginning with her childhood spent in the greenhouses and fields of her family's seed nursery. Her multifaceted art includes monumental floral sculptures that transform New York Botanical Garden's 250-acre landmark landscape.

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN
2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx

PREMIERES APR 30

Select times TBD • \$15

FILM: ENDLESSNESS

A kaleidoscope of the human condition, Endlessness includes scenes of a couple floating over war-torn Germany, a father and his daughter in the pouring rain, a teenager dancing outside a cafe and a defeated army marching to a prisoner-of-war camp. Swedish master absurdist Roy Andersson is known for movies that are intricately designed, photographed and lit with deadpan comic timing.

FILM FORUM

209 W. Houston St., Manhattan

(Also available virtually at filmforum.org/film/about-endlessness)

STARTING MAY 1

10am–6pm, 7pm on weekends • FREE

OUTDOORS: GOVERNORS ISLAND

Governors Island, a 172-acre island in the heart of New York Harbor, is reopening to the public. In addition to the 43-acre public park, Governors Island includes free arts and cultural events, as well as recreational activities.

Brooklyn ferry from Pier 6 or Red Hook, Manhattan ferry from the Battery Maritime Building

MAY 8

7pm • FREE

JAZZ: KEYON HARROLD AT THE BREATHING PAVILLION

The Breathing Pavilion, Ekene Ijeoma's public sculpture, will host a series of site-specific musical performances. Grammy-winning trumpeter, singer and composer Keyon Harrold has played with artists such as Beyoncé, Common, Erykah Badu, Rihanna, Eminem and D'Angelo.

THE PLAZA

300 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn

MAY 8–9 & 15–16

Time and cost TBD

PERFORMANCE: 1:1 CONCERTS

Brooklyn Academy of Music curated a private outdoor concert experience. In secluded corners of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, artists from the Silkroad Ensemble and their guests from New York's thriving music scene await. Follow your unique path to a socially distant, private stage and discover which musician will share their artistry in a 10-minute, one-to-one concert.

BROOKLYN NAVY YARD

141 Flushing Ave, Brooklyn

MAY 10–SEP

9am–12am • FREE/Low cost

PERFORMING ARTS:

RESTART STAGES

Lincoln Center is opening a giant outdoor performing arts center that will include 10 different performance and rehearsal spaces. Audience members can expect free and low-cost events, an outdoor reading room and a wealth of family programming. Enjoy a concert and cabaret series, film screenings, summer concerts, dance workshops and more.

LINCOLN CENTER

Lincoln Center Plaza, Manhattan

MAY 10–NOV 14

6am–11pm • FREE

PUBLIC ART: MAYA LIN: GHOST FOREST

In nature, a ghost forest is the evidence of a dead woodland that was once vibrant. Maya Lin's Ghost Forest, a towering stand of 50 haunting Atlantic white cedar trees, is a newly-commissioned public art work at Madison Square Park. The 40-foot trees serve as a memory of germination, vegetation and abundance, and as a harsh symbol of the devastation of climate change.

MADISON SQUARE PARK

11 Madison Ave., Manhattan

ONGOING

7:30pm • \$50

JAZZ: SMALLS REOPENS

A true New York jazz lover's favorite, Smalls Jazz Club has featured some of the most talented players in the city since it opened in the '90s. The club is still running its first sets as online streaming only but has returned to live, COVID-friendly performances for second sets at 7:30 p.m. If you're vaxxed and able to splurge, go enjoy the soundwaves. Show listings are available at www.smallslive.com/events/calendar/

SMALLS

130 W. 10 St., Manhattan

GET

OUTSIDE: The work of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama will be on display all summer at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx.

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It will be a lot easier for public school students to avoid participating in standardized tests this year. And that's a good thing.



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Three Democratic-run counties in northern New Jersey earn millions running ICE detention centers inside their jails. They want to keep it that way.



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Once you're vaccinated, who's ready for a hug?

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Alice Neel believed everyone deserved everyone deserved a great portrait, not just the rich. Now, her work is on display at the Met.



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Superstar economist Thomas Piketty warns of the perils of inequality and false solutions proffered by right-wing nativists.

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The U.S.'s vast riches will never be widely shared until we overcome a system based on zero-sum racism, says Heather McGhee.

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Queer Studies should be about liberation not accommodation, a CUNY prof writes in his new book.



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Join us to celebrate the life of

**FRANCES
GOLDIN**

activist and literary agent
who died last year,
at an online memorial.



Date and time:

**Saturday, May 15, 2021,
at 2:00 p.m. EST.**

The event will be live-streamed on YouTube:

bit.ly/CelebrateFrancesGoldin

If you cannot make it at that time, the link will remain
active and you can watch it at your convenience.

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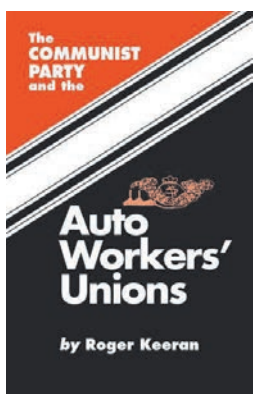
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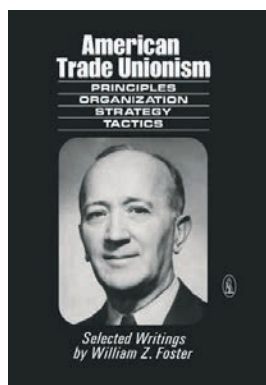
New items from IP

This month International Publishers has brought out new editions of two classic works on topics of immediate interest and of great importance. One on labor history and the other on labor organizing—Roger Keeran’s unique and previously untold history of unionization in the US Auto industry, and a “Bible” of union organizing, written by the great labor and political leader, William Z. Foster, who drew from his own long experience as a union organizer in the United States in writing this book.

Both are “must have” additions to the libraries of both students and organizer of labor in the United States.



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LABOR



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WORKERS AT SMALLER THEATERS WIN PAY & LABOR EQUITY

BY DEREK LUDOVICI

As of April 2, entertainment venues in New York have the green light to resume operations at 33% capacity, with a limit of 100 indoor seats and 200 outdoor seats. Broadway theaters probably will not reopen until September, as they don’t see a limited opening as viable, but this is welcome news for smaller theaters and their workers who were laid off in March 2020. These professionals won a significant victory in late March, when the Playbill and BroadwayWorld Websites agreed to require clear pay rates on their job listings.

Costume Professionals for Wage Equity (CPfWE) and On Our Team, two organizations advocating pay and labor equity in the theater industry, released an open letter on March 5 requesting that Playbill require clear rates of pay on all job listings posted on its site. After a 21-day online campaign, Playbill announced it would on March 26.

Playbill is one of the largest theater sites in the United States. Its job listings range from brick-and-mortar theaters to cruise ships in all 50 states and Abu Dhabi. That scope makes it particularly useful for individuals looking for jobs in different locales.

“When I was younger, Playbill was one of my main go-to places to look for jobs,”

VICTORIOUS: Genevieve Beller (left) and Jeannette Aultz of Costume Professionals for Wage Equity in the Theater District.

says Jessa-Ray Court, an organizer with CPfWE. “I grew up in New Hampshire, so sometimes I looked for jobs in or near my hometown, because I wanted to spend the summer being a little more accessible to my parents.”

In major cities, unions like the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees set minimum rates within large companies. Many professionals in smaller theaters, however, are not represented by unions. Clear pay rates are one way that they can make sure they are getting the fee they seek.

“It’s much easier and much appreciated when they list the pay rate upfront, especially because in the theater world and the nonprofit theater world where I tend to work, pay rates can really span a very long range,” Jenna, a freelance stage manager who did not want to give her last name, told *The Independent* before the policy change. “I just had an experience where I saw a listing for a stage manager, and it didn’t list any details. It didn’t list a pay rate or the schedule.”

Playbill’s website now states: “For Paid jobs, the AMOUNT field is now required. Please enter a numerical value or range; leaving the field blank or entering TBD or similar will result in a delay in approval or rejection.”

Clear pay rates also make it easier to compare what the company is offering different workers. “About three or four years ago I was working on a project and I got a phone call from the lighting designer who I had previously worked with,” says Genevieve Beller, another CPfWE organizer. “He said, ‘Hey, do you want to compare contracts and see who’s getting what?’ Nobody had ever done that with me before. On the surface, we were getting the same design fee, but the work requirement was

Continued on page 22



SMOKED OUT

HOW NY PROGRESSIVES CORNERED CUOMO TO WIN BEST-IN-THE-NATION MARIJUANA REFORM LAW — AND WHAT COMES NEXT.

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Late on a warm April afternoon in Manhattan, the breeze on a side street southwest of Midtown wafts the aromas of joints and cigar-tinged blunts.

The duos and trios sparking up in the after-work sunshine no longer have to worry about being arrested. New York State legalized pot on March 31, when Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, one day after it passed by votes of 40–23 in the state Senate and 94–56 in the Assembly. The law allows possession of up to three ounces, and smoking is now legal almost anywhere cigarettes are permitted.

Ten years ago, at the peak of New York City’s stop-and-frisk era, more than 100 people a day were busted for possession. About 85 percent of them were Black or Latino.

“Today is an historic day for New Yorkers,” Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), the bill’s lead sponsor, declared on the Senate floor March 30. “The bill we have held out for will create a nation-leading model for legalization.”

Eighteen states now allow growing and selling cannabis for non-medical use. New Jersey legalized it in February, and New Mexico and Virginia followed New York within a week. But it is unlikely that reefer retailers will open before late next year, as it will take time to license and establish businesses.

There was some opposition. Sen. Philip M. Boyle (R-Suffolk) said marijuana is a “gateway drug” that leads to heroin, and that states where it is legal have seen “carnage on the streets” and “people going to work stoned.” Sen. Anna Kaplan (D-Nassau), one of three Democrats to vote no, said legalization was premature when there’s no measurement equivalent to blood-alcohol concentration for detecting intoxicated drivers, and “rates of addiction are skyrocketing.”

But overall, the debate between Gov. Cuomo and the Legislature’s leadership was over how to structure the industry to ensure “social equity” for the people and neighborhoods most affected by prohibition and prevent domination by the fast-growing corporate chains that have the money and political connections to navigate an expensive and cumbersome application process. In other words, that the street dealer in Browns-

ville should be able to move from selling \$20 sacks to opening a legal weed shop.

“It’s absolutely important that people who have been part of the legacy market don’t get shut out,” says Melissa Moore, state director of the Drug Policy Alliance. (“Legacy market,” a term borrowed from tech corporations, is a euphemism for “old-style pot dealer or grower.”) The system should have “as many entry points as possible for people with limited capital,” she adds.

Low or nominal application fees are important, concurs Carly Wolfe, state policy director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

Unlike New York’s 2014 medical-marijuana law, the new law prohibits “vertical integration,” in which one company can grow, process, and retail cannabis.

Instead, like the state’s alcohol regulations, it will separate cultivation, distribution, and retail. That “automatically breaks up the process for Big Cannabis to create a monopoly,” says Jawanza Williams, organizing director for VOCAL-NY, a grassroots group that builds power among low-income people directly affected by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, mass incarceration and homelessness. The exceptions are that the companies in the medical system will be allowed some retailing — with the proceeds going to social-equity programs — and “micro-businesses” can do all three, much like a craft brewery can sell six-packs.

The law sets a goal that half of new licenses should go to social-equity applicants, including small farmers. It earmarks 40 percent of tax revenue for reinvestment in communities most affected by the drug war. It also automatically expunges convictions for marijuana offenses that are no longer illegal, and the smell of weed will no longer be probable cause for a police search except as evidence of impaired driving.

Pot sales will face a 13% tax, plus a half-cent per milligram on THC content; for a 7-gram bag of buds that’s 15% THC, that tax would be \$5.25. Individuals may grow up to six plants at home. Local governments will be allowed to ban retail sales if they do so by Dec. 31, with sentiment for that appearing strongest on Long Island.

Employers will be barred from penalizing workers for marijuana use off the job, unless it impairs their performance or violates licensing regulations or federal law. The law also requires all license applicants to agree in writing not to interfere with union attempts to organize. For applicants that have 25 or more employees, the state Office of Cannabis Management (OCM), the agency that will be created to oversee the industry, must give priority to those who already have labor-peace agreements or used union labor to build their facilities.

New Jersey and California also require labor-peace agreements. Colorado’s pot industry is completely nonunion.

How the state will reach its social-equity goals, however, remains up in the air. Key issues, such as whether the state will limit the number of licenses and how it will define and enforce the 50-percent requirement, will be up to the OCM.

“We’re going to try to influence the OCM, but right now,

there are no rules,” says Nancy Udell, a longtime activist with Empire State NORML. But, she adds, “we’ve seen what happened in other states. We know what to do.”

Illinois, she notes, has social-equity provisions in its law, but “didn’t really put in a mechanism to make it happen.”

“Obviously, we don’t know what will happen until licenses are issued,” says Williams. But, he adds, the law has enough specifics to define “what their job is.”

“We don’t get to win and walk away,” he concludes. “We have got to keep an eye on them.”

WHAT CHANGED POLITICALLY?

How did New York politics evolve from the days when Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose stop-and-frisk policing policies put petty pot busts of young Black men at their core, was regularly lauded for running New York City with unprecedented efficiency, to legalization winning an almost two-thirds majority in the Legislature? Activists identify four main factors.

First, organizing. The Start Smart Coalition, founded about six years ago to advocate legalization and social equity, grew to more than 70 organizations from Long Island to Buffalo, including the Working Families Party, the state NAACP, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Desis Rising Up & Moving, and two large labor unions — 1199SEIU and 32BJ SEIU.

Second, the ethnic disparities of pot busts were so extreme that their racist overtones were “painfully obvious,” says Udell. It wasn’t like marijuana was “effectively legal” for white people, but it was also obvious that they made up a lot more than 15% of the pot smokers in New York City. The racial disparities were also extreme on Long Island and in Albany, Buffalo, and Rochester, says Moore.

Third, the growth of public support for legalization. More than 40% of the U.S. population now lives in states that have legalized it, says Wolfe. New Jersey legalizing made it “untenable” for New York to retain prohibition, says Moore, as pot shops would be open a short PATH train ride from Manhattan or a quick drive from Rockland County.

Finally, political changes in Albany. Democrats won a solid majority in the state Senate in 2018, ending decades of control by Republicans. And Gov. Cuomo, who opposed legalization until a few years ago and had proposed a separate bill with much vaguer social-equity provisions, was weakened by the COVID nursing-home and sexual-harassment scandals.

Cuomo “was not interested in repairing the structural harms,” says Williams, and also wanted to maintain peripheral criminalization such as keeping public smoking illegal and having the smell of pot be a justification for police searches. The governor won concessions on the THC-content tax, says Udell, but overall, “he wasn’t in a position to say, ‘no, my way or the highway.’”

Williams credits years of “consistent organizing.” Yes, Cuomo was weakened, he says, “but also, we were ready.”

TYRONE WALLACE

MAY 2021 THE INDEPENDENT



SUE BRISK

HOUSING FOR WHOM?

STATE, CITY NIX PROPOSAL TO BUILD 1,000 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS AT WORLD TRADE CENTER SITE. WILL BIDEN GO ALONG?

BY TODD FINE

Twenty years after September 11, 2001, President Biden is seeking to end the U.S. military deployment in Afghanistan. At the World Trade Center site, our own never-ending battle over real estate is coming to a close.

In February, a complex set of public entities controlled by Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio reached a deal to make 5 World Trade Center, the last unallocated lot owned by the public, into a luxury residential skyscraper developed by a joint venture of Silverstein Properties and Brookfield Properties. Located at 130 Liberty St. south of the September 11 Memorial, Site 5 would become the first official World Trade Center building to contain residences. With the two partners controlling at least 10 buildings in the immediate vicinity, the decision would cement a mixed-use megacomplex in Lower Manhattan comparable to Hudson Yards.

Although many other social and commercial possibilities for the site had been floated over the years — such as an office building, public housing, a hospital or university — the ultimate decision confirms the continued government devotion to the luxury residential skyscraper boom in Lower Manhattan, despite its questionable economics both before and after COVID-19. Consistent with de Blasio's approach to "affordable housing" that relies on private-sector incentives, the deal calls for 25% of the 1,325 rental units in the 900-foot tower to be priced as "affordable," with the actual meaning of that pledge to be determined.

As this is publicly-owned land, local activists and Community Board 1 plan to advocate for higher levels of affordability during a complicated approval process. The World Trade Center's General Project Plan will have to be changed to allow residences. Additionally, because the site (a former headquarters for Deutsche Bank) was purchased with federal disaster funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Develop-

ment (HUD), the project also puts the Biden administration in the uncomfortable position of being asked to endorse a luxury residential project sponsored by taxpayer money.

This conclusion to the World Trade Center reconstruction saga occurs at a time when affordable housing has declined significantly in the surrounding area south of Chambers Street. This is not because of a lack of construction. Data published by Community Board 1 indicates that 13,862 new residential units were constructed between 2000 and 2016, although some of the brand-new buildings don't appear to be fully occupied or even completed after years of work. For example, 125 Greenwich St., the 912-foot residential tower across the street from the Site 5 lot, briefly entered foreclosure in 2019 and is languishing in an unfinished state. Yet, because most of those new units are at the extreme high end of the market, the high vacancy rates are unlikely to result in greater affordability.

In 2011, Community Board 1 published the findings of an affordable-housing task force chaired by Battery Park City resident Tom Goodkind. The report revealed how key protections that supported affordability in Lower Manhattan had been dismantled, and that the relatively modest post-September 11 disaster funds that supported housing were often not focused on the immediate area. Alarmed by the growing recognition that low- and middle-income tenants could no longer afford to move to Lower Manhattan, the report advocated that 5 World Trade Center (130 Liberty St.) include affordable housing.

Goodkind later advocated that 5 World Trade Center should include over 1,000 affordable units, with some possibly set aside for artists and for catastrophically injured veterans and first responders. In 2017, he arranged meetings with the public corporation responsible, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, to present this vision. Sadly, however, he died of a chronic degenerative illness in February 2019, at age 65. That June, Gov. Cuomo announced a developer competition for Site 5 that made financial return a more important criterion than affordability.

If Goodkind's plan had been pursued, the building conceivably would have been able to match the 800 units of affordable housing promised by the Department of City Planning's controversial upzoning of historic districts in SoHo and NoHo. In recent months, the constant refrain from the mayor's office and its supporters in the pro-developer group Open New York has been that we must build affordable housing in wealthy Manhattan districts that have access to transportation or are otherwise "amenity-rich." Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, in charge of the mayor's housing initiatives, even stated that the SoHo rezoning was prompted by the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests.

Yet, if achieving a maximal amount of affordable housing was truly the goal, why didn't the government pull out all the stops, especially when the site is on public land and the remaining federal disaster money could have subsidized construction?

Vicki Been hasn't said much about 5 World Trade Center, and Open New York has now telegraphed that it won't contest the ratio of affordability. Although Gov. Cuomo's scandals have enabled his opponents to gain the upper hand over Empire State Development Corporation's megaproject with Vornado around Penn Station, there hasn't yet been any comparable reaction to the plans for 5 World Trade Center.

The idea of having affordable housing be part of the September 11 reconstruction has a long history, although it largely came to naught. In the early years after the attacks, there was strong sentiment to include housing. Dozens of organizations had partnered in the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York with a demand that, since September 11 was considered "an attack on all New Yorkers," the reconstruction should benefit all classes of people. David W. Woods's book *Democracy Deferred: Civic Leadership after 9/11* documents how new affordable housing was often the most popular demand at the dozens of "listening sessions" organized by civic organizations and government agencies in 2002 and 2003. As a result, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which was designated to spend federal disaster funds, originally listed affordable housing as one of its core objectives.

Twenty years later, despite the population south of Chambers Street almost tripling since 2001 to around 61,000 residents, many of whom live in new office-to-residential conversions, there is not much that is affordable. The reconstruction at the World Trade Center was delayed so long that most of the civic organizations wound down before key government decisions were made. Many low-rise affordable buildings have been demolished, or their tenants have been harassed into leaving. Out of the billions of dollars in federal funding, including nearly \$3 billion from HUD, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's "Partial Action Plan 6" for affordable housing only subsidized the design process for a mere 33 new low-income units in a mixed-income building at 270 Greenwich St. The plan spent just \$41 million in total, in comparison with the over \$1 billion spent on the September 11 Memorial and cultural grants.

Now, in 2021, there is one last chance to construct something that could possibly redeem the World Trade Center and be a signature achievement for the Biden administration. Site 5 will be the last skirmish of the reconstruction fight, and the battle lines of activism remain to be formed.

Todd Fine is president of the Washington Street Advocacy Group, an organization that uses creative, guerrilla advocacy tactics to promote historic preservation and historical memory in Lower Manhattan and across New York City.

20 YEARS LATER:
Looking down on the lot for World Trade Center 5, the last parcel of land on the WTC site to not be redeveloped.

REZONING REVAMP

COUNCIL SPEAKER'S PLAN PANNED BY NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS WARY OF TOP-DOWN PROCESS

BY EMLYN CAMERON

City Council Speaker Corey Johnson has introduced legislation to revamp the city's 46-year-old process for making land-use decisions. The bill is meant to increase the system's responsiveness to community needs by mandating a 10-year plan with preferred land uses. But some community organizers and land-use experts are concerned the plan would give local residents little authority over development in their neighborhoods.

"When I saw the plan, I thought, 'oh! great!' But, then, I read it and it makes no place for community planning," Thomas Angotti, a retired professor of urban policy and land use at Hunter College, told *The Independent*.

New York is the only major U.S. city without comprehensive land-use planning, Angotti says. Instead, it has maintained piecemeal zoning regulations favorable to real estate, which he ascribes in part to landlords' lobbying and campaign donations. Now, he says, climate change, calls for racial and economic equity, and community resistance to development are making comprehensive planning politically viable. But he sees Johnson's bill, Intro 2186-2020, as inadequate to meet community desires.

The speaker's bill is meant to modify the city's Uniform Land Use Review Process, commonly known as ULURP, in which the 59 local community boards have only an advisory voice on rezoning plans or major developments in their neighborhoods, and the City Council, which approves or disapproves them, traditionally defers to the opinion of the local member. In the de Blasio administration's rezoning of neighborhoods like Inwood, Highbridge, East New York, and Chinatown for high-rise luxury housing with a trickle-down amount of "affordable" apartments, this has often played out as community boards opposing the rezoning, and the administration dismissing their ideas, but offering enough concessions for the local councilmember to vote yes.

Johnson's legislation would set up a 10-year plan, and the council would vote on which land-use scenarios to adopt for each district in the plan. The choices would be meant to reflect community needs established in meetings, hearings, and suggestions from institutions such as the community boards, as it moves along the path from a "preliminary citywide goals statement" to the adoption of the eventual long-term plan.

Council Communications Director Jennifer Fermino says plan-aligned applications would go through ULURP, but the council reviewing them would be discretionary rather than mandatory. Councilmembers could have them "called up" for a hearing and vote by obtaining the signatures of seven other members, and the applications would be able to cite relevant portions of a "generic environmental impact statement" to supplement studies of the environmental effects.

Angotti, however, believes the bill misses a key part of planning's renaissance: communities' desire to take the initiative themselves in determining land use. Community boards would still be understaffed, underfunded, and only able to offer advisory opinions, he points out. He hopes to see an alternative that would give communities more substantive leadership, such as increasing community boards' resources to develop and propose plans themselves.

"It's a matter of an ongoing conversation with these communities," he said.

THE SPECTER OF ROBERT MOSES

Angotti is not alone in thinking planning under the proposed bill may end up being imposed from above. The ULURP process is "not perfect by any stretch of the imagination," says Kirsten Theodos of the People's Citywide Land Use Alliance, which organized a March rally against the bill in front of City Hall, "but what this legislation does is create essentially a Robert Moses."

The bill would empower a director of long-term planning to propose three land-use scenarios for each district in a draft long-

GRASSROOTS VOICES: Alicia Boyd of the People's Citywide Land Use Alliance speaks at a rally outside City Hall.

term plan, and gives the director authority to select one of those three if the City Council does not vote for a land use to include in the final long-term plan.

This evokes the specter of Moses, who autocratically ruled development decisions in the metropolitan area from 1924 to 1968, from building Jones Beach to ramming the Cross-Bronx Expressway through the heart of working-class neighborhoods.

Opponents of the bill say that the legislation would give the planning director final say what proposed land uses make it into the final long-term plan, and, by extension, which types of proposals are subject to discretionary review and can use the generic environmental impact statement.

Fermino says the council wouldn't have to adopt any of the land uses put before it, and that the local institutions involved in the review — community boards, borough presidents, the long-term planning steering committee — could create their own suggested land uses and submit them as part of their recommendations to the council. The council could also conceive land uses to vote into the long-term plan, with the director only stepping in if it doesn't select any land use.

Opponents respond that this isn't explicit in the bill's text. It says that the steering committee, borough presidents, and community boards "shall each submit ... a recommended preferred land-use scenario for each applicable community district" to the speaker. The council must "adopt a single resolution establishing one preferred land use scenario for each community district," but the bill doesn't specify if it must be one of the director's proposals or can be their own.

POWER IMBALANCES

Other activists believe the bill will reduce power imbalances in the land-use process. The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, whose work ranges from helping tenant coalitions organize against harassment to advising nonprofit developers, is backing the bill with caveats. Emily Goldstein, the group's director of organizing and advocacy, believes it will give councilmembers more resources to assess land-use proposals, putting them on a more equal footing with developers and city agencies such as the Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission. (The Department of City Planning is opposing the bill on the grounds of expense, practicality, and predicted outcomes, Director Marisa Lago said in written testimony to which the *Indy* was referred by DCP).

At a February hearing of the council's Subcommittee on Capital Budget, Johnson argued that the bill would not substantially alter the ULURP process or reduce the role of community boards or other representatives. He emphasized that its purpose was to create a system robust enough to respond to systemic inequalities and climate change.

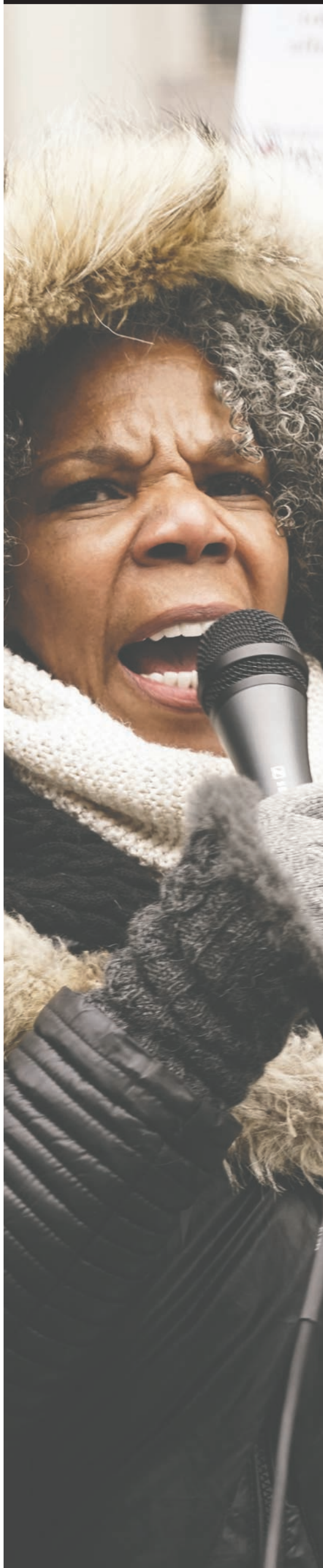
"We have worked hard as a council to advance equity and justice and to undo the city's harmful and exclusionary policies, but we, as a city, have not acknowledged — let alone reformed — the ways in which our city's fundamental failure to plan has upheld the status quo," Johnson said.

The hearing did not inspire confidence in everyone. Philip Simpson, a lawyer and member of Inwood Legal Action, which unsuccessfully challenged the de Blasio administration's rezoning of the neighborhood, believes the city government showed its true attitude about community input elsewhere: Three community boards submitted testimony saying that they had not learned about the bill until shortly before the hearing.

Fermino responded that the bill was going through the normal legislative process and feedback was being solicited from communities and community boards.

Simpson and other opponents say they will need to see more proof that the administration is truly committed to comprehensive planning that is responsive to communities, instead of imposing top-down planning.

"I think the whole bill should be scrapped. We need citywide planning, but it needs to start at the bottom and filter up," he said.



SUE BRISK



PENCIL US OUT

IT'S GOOD NYC MADE STANDARDIZED TESTING 'OPT IN' THIS YEAR. NOW, LET'S CANCEL THE TESTS.

BY ALEXA AVILÉS

This spring, I will not be giving my daughters the “test pep talk.” I will not be reminding them that they need sharpened #2 pencils, nor will I be giving them the candy that will get them through the day. They won’t be sharing nervous stares with their friends, and teachers won’t be giving them Smarties while anxiously drilling testing rules and quick strategies to use over the next several hours. My girls aren’t taking the state’s standardized exams this spring. And yours shouldn’t either.

In a year in which my daughters have lost loved ones and suffered through the uncertainty and confusion of our education system’s bungled response to COVID-19, I cannot fathom putting them through the additional anxiety of standardized testing. These tests don’t help our kids or our schools. Instead, they perpetuate injustice.

The NYC Department of Education recently announced that the standardized tests given to students in grades third through eighth will be offered on a voluntary basis, where parents who wish to have their children tested must opt them in. Making the tests opt-in is a start, but now is the moment to talk about ending them entirely. We know that standardized tests have reinforced the inequities inherent in our school system and perpetuated the de facto segregation of our schools, placing pressure and stigma on the students and teachers of underserved schools. Students from poor and working-class communities and communities of color are set up to fail.

Even when the system tries to accommodate students who face learning challenges, it falls short. For students who have a hard time paying attention, for example, subjecting them to a six-hour test instead of a two-hour one does nothing to address their needs. And teachers are caught between teaching exclusively to the test, at the expense of a more enriching curriculum, or risking the career consequences and lifelong impact on students that come with poor standardized test results.

I speak from personal experience. As a Puerto Rico-born kid growing up in East New York, I was originally placed in a Spanish-speaking class, but my mother had me moved to an English one when she discovered that the bilingual classes were a full year behind their grade level. This kind of gap would be unacceptable anywhere, but it’s especially egregious in a city where 49 percent of households speak a language other than English at home, according to census data from the New York City Department of City Planning. In Community District 7, which is comprised of Windsor Terrace and Sunset Park, that number is even higher — 75 percent of residents speak a language other than English at home. I’ve lived in Sunset Park for nearly two decades, and I’ve helped countless parents opt their kids out of state testing for this very reason.

Despite this flawed system, we know why high-stakes testing proliferates: It’s big business. Nationwide, the standardized testing industry makes over

\$1 billion per year on state contracts, and just last week, New York State agreed to pay Questar Assessment roughly \$72 million to develop new tests for grades third through eighth. This is state money that goes to private testing companies like Pearson and McGraw-Hill instead of going to our schools.

This year, we have the opportunity to do something different. We have a chance to send a clear message to the DOE that we want a reimagined system of assessment for students and teachers. Allow me

to paint a picture for you of an alternative system, one that treats our students and educators like the complex, talented and unique human beings they are. Instead of basing educational decisions on test scores, we could listen to teachers, who understand their students better than any test. We should take their advice when they report on students’ development in critical thinking and creativity and use holistic methods of tracking students’ development through content-based assessments, projects, teachers’ notes and students’ self-evaluation of their work. Instead of spending money on testing contracts, we could use those funds to hire more teachers, lowering class sizes and ensuring that our students get more individual attention at school. Freed from the constraints of teaching to what they often refer to as *that damn test*, our teachers could tailor their curricula to the needs of their students.

Building a better world for our children starts with making our public schools into world-class learning environments. That’s what I’ve spent my life fighting for, and why I’m running for City Council in District 38, a beautiful and vibrant community that deserves better than the overcrowded, underfunded and over-tested schools we currently have. We’ve got a lot of work to do, but I know we can get there. That means putting into place more child-centered, appropriate ways of assessing kids’

WE NEED TO REIMAGINE HOW WE MEASURE STUDENT SUCCESS.

learning and progress and in the case of standardized testing, opting out for good.

Alexa Avilés serves as a Parent Representative of the M.S. 88 School Leadership Team and as Chair of the New York City Youth Board. She is running as a democratic socialist for City Council in District 38 in Sunset Park.



COURTESY: SCOTT STRINGER CAMPAIGN

IS 'READY ON DAY ONE' ENOUGH?

SCOTT STRINGER WANTS TO REALIGN HIMSELF WITH THE MOVEMENT, NOT THE MACHINE. CAN HE PULL IT OFF?

BY ROB M. KATZ

On Jan. 24, 1977, *The New York Times* ran two letters under the header “The Youth Input.” One short note by a seventh-grader reads: “I was indignant to note that [Manhattan Borough President] Percy Sutton appointed two boys to the Community Planning Boards. Why should boys represent New York teenagers when girls constitute more than one half of this age group? Ideally there should be equal representation of both sexes.”

The second, longer note praised Sutton’s decision to place two 16-year-old high-school students on a pair of Manhattan community boards. “I believe we will bring a different viewpoint to our respective community planning boards,” wrote one Scott Stringer, a student at John F. Kennedy High School in Marble Hill who was one of the two adolescent appointees.

Stringer would go on to be an assemblymember and then Manhattan borough president, and is currently city comptroller. The child of well-connected liberals (his mother was a city councilmember and a cousin of ’70s feminist hero Rep. Bella Abzug; his father was a senior aide to Mayor Abe Beame), he fundraised like a well-connected Manhattan liberal. A 2013 article in *Vogue* magazine described TV star Lena Dunham introducing the middle-aged politico at a Maritime Hotel cocktail fundraiser, where a crowd of socialites, luxury fashion designers, and cosmetics entrepreneurs gathered to

hear how Stringer planned to be “a mature steward of a \$140 billion pension fund.”

The question is: Why should Scott Stringer, a mainstay of local politics for 30 years, preside over a progressive, majority-minority city in the midst of profound post-pandemic change — and rapid political realignments across the five boroughs’ Democratic parties?

...

STRINGER HAS CULTIVATED an impressive collective of endorsers from New York’s ascendant left to help answer that question in his favor. They include Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-Bronx/Westchester), Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou (D-Manhattan), and state Senators Alessandra Biaggi of the Bronx, Jessica Ramos of Queens, and Julia Salazar of Brooklyn, all of whom Stringer endorsed early on in their outsider campaigns.

Stringer’s platform has meaty policy planks. His NYC Under 3 early childhood plan, lauded by Bowman, a former middle-school principal, aims to triple the number of infants and toddlers in city care. He’d launch “the largest teacher residency program in the country” and put two teachers, a mentor and a resident, in every classroom from kindergarten through fifth grade. He’d make the City University of New York tuition free. His climate plan is ambitious, calling for a ban on all new fossil-fuel infrastructure, converting Rikers Island into a renewable-energy hub, and advocat-

STRINGER HAS CULTIVATED AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF ENDORSERS FROM NEW YORK’S ASCENDANT LEFT.

ing a Green New Deal for public housing, modeled after the bill introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Many of these promises meet demands popularized by organizations on the left over the past decade.

“I think there was excitement in seeing someone like Scott Stringer who didn’t come out of the [Democratic Socialists of America] or something, who wasn’t some far-left politician from back in the day, seeing how powerful progressives have become in the city,” said Gabe Tobias, an alumnus of the left-leaning national organization Justice

Democrats, which played a key role in electing Ocasio-Cortez to Congress. “It’s to our credit as a movement that someone like Scott is uplifting positions and things that we want to see happen.”

Tobias now heads Our City, an independent-expenditure committee that supports progressive candidates in districts where they face strong corporate-backed opponents. They intend to focus on races in about a dozen districts along with the mayoral and comptroller contests, and want to ensure a progressive trifecta.

Still, Stringer has hesitated to embrace the much more controversial movement to dramatically reduce the Police Department’s \$6 billion annual budget. Where he previously called for defunding the NYPD by \$1 billion over four years during the protests after George Floyd was killed last year, his online mayoral platform bears little resemblance to that outspoken posture, only calling for capping overtime use and removing overtime bonuses for arrests, and focusing on “investments” in social services and moving responsibilities away from the police.

Organizations like VOCAL-NY, NYC-DSA, and the Working Families Party have been demanding that between \$1 billion and \$3 billion be redirected from the NYPD budget into social services like public education and homeless outreach, which they believe would reduce crime.

Nonprofit executive Dianne Morales, who has steadily built a base of young left-wing activist support in recent months and recently unlocked public matching funds, took advantage of that daylight between Stringer and the left’s

CAMPAIGN TRAIL:

Scott Stringer stumps in Queens with State Senator Jessica Ramos at his side.

racial-justice demands when she announced her pledge to defund the NYPD by \$3 billion.

More contradictions come with Stringer’s jumping into the “movement politics” lane after a career of carefully calculated triangulation. He has morphed into a critic of real-estate interests and pledged to reject any new real-estate donations to his campaign. However, he’s taken flack for donations he received before developer support became taboo — more

Continued on page 20



COURTING THE LEFT

THREE DECARCERAL CANDIDATES ARE VYING TO BE NEXT MANHATTAN DA. BUT WILL WALL STREET'S FAVORITE PREVAIL OVER A FRACTURED FIELD?

BY THEODORE HAMM

Although the Manhattan district attorney's office is the second largest in the United States (after Los Angeles), it is far and away the most prominent. During his three terms, outgoing DA Cy Vance made international headlines because of his controversial handling of cases involving Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Harvey Weinstein and Donald Trump.

On a much lower-profile level, Vance's office routinely outpaced its city counterparts in terms of prosecuting misdemeanors, a practice that ensnared the city's Black and Latinx residents. But anytime Vance announced a new policy regarding prosecutions, it got plenty of media attention.

Over the past few years, a wave of progressive prosecutors has taken over district attorneys' offices across the country, including recently in L.A. and New Orleans. But no office can match Manhattan's media influence. If he were shaking things up here, Philadelphia's radical DA Larry Krasner would be a household name outside of the criminal justice world right now.

As the June 22 primary race takes off, many criminal justice activists nonetheless fear that Tali Farhadian Weinstein, the candidate most similar to Cy Vance, may emerge victorious in the crowded field.

"Progressives need to coalesce against a billionaire [Farhadian Weinstein] so there's no continuation of Vance's legacy of discriminatory prosecution against people of color and in favor of the wealthy," says Tahanie Aboushi's campaign manager Jamarah Hayner, who recently handled George Gascón's successful left-wing run to become L.A. district attorney.

In recent weeks, Aboushi, one of three decarceral candidates (along with Eliza Orlins and Dan Quart), has picked up high-profile endorsements, including from the Working Families Party, Jumaane Williams, Jamaal Bowman, Cynthia Nixon, and Yuh-Line Niou. How many votes such support will yield remains to be seen.

Several campaigns tell *The Independent* that the winner in the June 22 Democratic primary will need approximately 70,000 votes. Because the district attorney is a state office, the ranked-choice voting process currently being rolled out in NYC elections does not apply in the race.

Farhadian Weinstein, the leading fundraiser (with over \$2.25 million), has a base of support among the city elite. Her campaign's media team answers to Stu Loeser, former press secretary for Michael Bloom-

berg, the figure most responsible for Vance's ascent in 2009.

Alvin Bragg, running as a reformer, has the clearest traction thus far among the left-of-center candidates. As of the January campaign finance filing, Bragg has the most individual donors (nearly 2,000) from Manhattan of the eight candidates (Orlins is second, with roughly 1,300). In addition to his support from Black leadership in Harlem, where he grew up and still lives, Bragg has been endorsed by more than a dozen Democratic clubs, a reliable source of Manhattan votes.

Quart, meanwhile, is backed by seven clubs, and he has the support of several Latinx elected officials representing Upper Manhattan, including Jose Serano, Carmen de la Rosa, Robert Rodriguez and Diana Ayala. Votes from Washington Heights (where Quart was raised) through Inwood could play a pivotal role in the race.

In the 2018 primary for attorney general, Zephyr Teachout defeated Tish James in Manhattan by 20,000 votes (105,000–85,000). Both candidates carried stretches of Washington Heights and Inwood, trouncing centrist Sean P. Maloney. Running as the "anti-Teachout," Maloney collected 42,000 votes, largely in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen.

Orlins, a longtime Chelsea resident, views her campaign as playing well with LGBT voters in the area. Her pre-public defender career in the entertainment industry likely will appeal to many West Village and Tribeca residents. While Orlins has the backing of the Downtown Independent Democrats, the Chelsea Reform Dems are backing Quart and the Village Independent Dems are supporting Bragg.

Aboushi's strategy is to pick up swaths of votes across Manhattan, starting with younger Black as well as Muslim residents of Harlem, where she lives. Yuh-Line Niou will help rally support in Chinatown and Jumaane Williams will bring out NYCHA residents downtown and elsewhere. Like all the contenders, Aboushi hopes to grab a solid chunk of support on the Upper West Side through Morningside Heights.

Aboushi's edge in institutional endorsements appears to be the handiwork of her consultant Camille Rivera, co-founder of New Deal Strategies. As Jeff Coltin of *City & State* reported, the Manhattan chapter of the Working Families Party voted to endorse Orlins, only to be overruled by higher-ups. Sources tell *The Independent* that Rivera's husband Jonathan Westin of NY Communities for Change, a leading organization within the WFP, was pivotal.

Rivera's close ties to city labor leaders likely helped influence the decision of the executive com-

THE MANHATTAN DA'S MANY POWERS

With its nearly \$170 million budget and 500 prosecutors, the Manhattan district attorney's office is the second-largest in the United States (after Los Angeles), but it is far and away the most prominent.

The Manhattan DA's office has the power to:

- Fully target white-collar fraud, including tax evasion and money laundering in real estate deals (e.g. Trump Soho).
- Become a national leader in reducing the number of people prosecuted for nonviolent crimes.
- Establish new directions for prosecuting violent crimes (e.g. away from excessive sentencing).
- Hold the NYPD accountable by exposing cops who provide false information.
- Initiate crackdowns on wage theft and other forms of worker exploitation.

—THEODORE HAMM

mittee of DC 37, the large union representing city government workers, to back Aboushi. At the same time, the union's leadership endorsed Eric Adams for mayor — an odd combination of left and center-right picks.

In the DC 37 selection process, Orlins was again slighted. Despite being the only active union member in the race (Legal Aid Society public defenders are represented by UAW 2325, which endorsed Orlins), the candidate was never sent a questionnaire or interviewed. At least three other campaigns say they were given such opportunities. DC 37 delegates ratified the Aboushi endorsement in late March.

In mid-April Bragg snagged the high-profile backing of Zephyr Teachout and Janos Marton, leaders in both the fight for decarceration and against public corruption. Earlier in the month Bragg scooped up the support of 32BJ, which represents building service workers throughout the city. That should help Bragg pick up votes in Upper Manhattan, although there are many members who live throughout the borough.

Aboushi recently gained the backing of UNITE HERE Local 100, which represents food service workers at Madison Square Garden and several larger Midtown restaurants, among other venues. As Politico noted, it is the first time the union has endorsed a Manhattan DA candidate. Quart, meanwhile, has the support of CWA Local 101, which bargains for telecommunications and broadcast media workers, as well as IATSE, the union for Broadway stagehands.

The UFT also revealed in early April that the four finalists for its support are Bragg, Lucy Lang, Orlins and Quart, causing Aboushi's supporters to object to her exclusion. This will be a good one for the candidate who scores it, because the UFT has many members (particularly retirees) living in places like Stuy Town and the Upper West Side.

Union support can be pivotal in competitive races, and backroom maneuvering is how the game is played in

MEET THE CANDIDATES

Eliza Orlins

Profile: Legal Aid Society public defender in Manhattan throughout Vance era.

Distinctiveness: Most highly-rated candidate by Five Boro Defenders, a network of fellow progressive public defenders; most outspoken regarding the need to end "trial tax," which coerces guilty pleas (via threat of a much longer sentence upon trial conviction); committed to fully decriminalizing sex work.

Drawback: Not getting much institutional support (see article).

Dan Quart

Profile: Assemblyman representing Upper East Side for past decade.

Distinctiveness: Leader in Assembly fights for bail reform, repeal of 50-A (shielding NYPD disciplinary records), and weed legalization; highest marks from Five Boro Defenders in terms of accountability for both police and prosecutorial misconduct.

Drawback: Only candidate who would not be a historic first as Manhattan DA (all of whom have been white men).

Tahanie Aboushi

Profile: Civil rights lawyer in private practice since 2010.

Distinctiveness: Successfully sued NYPD for discrimination against Muslim officers and currently represents Dounya Zayer, who was assaulted by police at last year's BLM protest outside Barclay's Center; committed to never charging juveniles as adults; won't seek sentences that exceed 20 years (and will review past sentences exceeding that length).

Drawback: Path to victory remains unclear (see article).

Alvin Bragg

Profile: 15-year career as a prosecutor, including as chief deputy attorney general of New York State.

Distinctiveness: Co-counsel in current case that seeks full transparency regarding the NYPD's handling of the Eric Garner case; wide range of experience regarding white-collar prosecutions; pledges to review all cases handled by Central Park Five prosecutor Linda Fairstein.

Drawback: Often stakes out middle ground, which may not excite voters.

Tali Farhadian Weinstein

Profile: Former federal prosecutor who served as counsel to AG Eric Holder and then as general counsel to Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez.

Distinctiveness: Ranked as the least progressive candidate by Five Boro Defenders; frequently touts her role in overseeing report by Gonzalez's office that analyzed prosecutorial misconduct in exoneration cases (although the report did not identify specific prosecutors); clear ability to raise funds among city elite.

Drawback: Benefits from split among left candidates.

REST OF THE FIELD

Note: All are former prosecutors in the Manhattan DA's office.

Lucy Lang is widely considered to be Vance's preferred successor, but she has struggled to gain traction. After a dispute over her misconduct in a large construction fraud case, **Diana Florence** is most certainly not Vance's pick; and, as with Lang, it's hard to see a lane for Florence. **Liz Crotty** has a lane open on the right, but she may lack the resources to pursue it.

city politics. While it's hard to forecast how it will play out, the fact that the splintering left factions could allow Farhadian Weinstein to emerge victorious remains an alarming prospect.



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COLD AS ICE

THREE NEW JERSEY COUNTIES ARE RAKING IN MILLIONS FROM THE FEDS WHILE HOLDING IMMIGRANT DETAINEES IN SUBHUMAN CONDITIONS

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN WITH JOHN TARLETON

On March 6, 2020, Marcial Morales was sent to the Essex County Jail in Newark, New Jersey to await deportation proceedings. For the 37-year-old pizzeria manager and father of three children, it was the beginning of a nine-month ordeal in the pits of the U.S. immigrant detention system. For the local jails that contract with the federal Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hold detainees like Morales, it was money in the bank — \$110–\$120 per night, or roughly \$30,000 before he was released in November.

“To make money, they keep the detainees in there, hoping they will be so dismayed that they give up and go back to their birth country,” says Morales, who journeyed alone to the United States from Guatemala when he was 15 years old.

On any given night, the jails in Bergen, Essex and Hudson counties combine to hold hundreds of immigrant detainees from New York and New Jersey and are capable of holding many more. Their law libraries have no legal books, their water is hardly potable and detainees are very rarely allowed to breathe fresh air. The Bergen County Jail in Hackensack is overrun with rats and mosquitoes, Morales says, while at Essex, guards routinely administer violent beatings and guard-on-prisoner rape is not uncommon. At Hudson, militarized law enforcement is called upon instead of medical staff to deal with health emergencies.

When a detainee at the Hudson County Jail in Kearny suffered an epileptic seizure, he had to wait 15–20 minutes before a single nurse came to his aid, said ex-detainee Bryan Vergara. “He was there on the floor with his head thrashing, blood everywhere,” Vergara said. “The first people to arrive are police, like a SWAT team just for the jail. They cuffed his legs and hands and let him continue to convulse on the floor.”

For the Democratic Party leaders who control Essex and Hudson counties and the Democratic sheriff who presides over Bergen County’s corrections spending, though, immigrant detention is a lucrative business that pads their annual budgets with millions of dollars in extra revenues (See sidebar). Their story is also a cautionary tale of how the stark partisan divide over immigration in the Trump era will become blurrier in the Biden era.

At the same time, support for immigrant rights intensified on the left during the Trump years and is fueling the opposition to the cozy arrangements that have filled the coffers of the three North Jersey counties for years. Hunger strikes by detainees have galvanized protests on the outside while advocates are insisting immigrants should be treated humanely no matter which party is in charge.

“We need to stop using immigration detention. It’s never good for anyone. It costs [federal] money, it hurts people. They come out different — whether they’ve been in there three months or three years, they experience dramatic psychological trauma,” says Chia-Chia Wang, organizing and advocacy director at the American Friends Service Committee’s Immigrant Rights Program.

A WAVE OF HUNGER STRIKES

Morales found himself in ICE detention at the Essex County Jail when he took a plea deal after having served 21 months in the Warren County Jail awaiting a trial that resulted in a hung jury.

“My lawyer said, ‘You’ll go home. You’ll go back to see your kids’ and all of that. So I took the plea deal, and then, they sent me to ICE.”

After being held in Essex County for nearly eight months, Morales was transferred to the Bergen County Jail, along with 60 other detainees. Upon arrival, they were locked in “quarantine” — virtually solitary confinement. After being kept in quarantine cells for 18 days, Morales organized his unit to go on a hunger strike.

“They told us we’d be in quarantine for one week,” he said. He and 41 detainees refused meals to protest the jail’s poor conditions, lack of proper medical care and ICE’s failure to release detainees whose medical complications made them eligible for parole.

With his health deteriorating because of his diabetes, Morales was released on parole in November after the ninth day of his hunger strike. He is now back at the pizzeria, working 80-hour weeks in order to pay for the immigration lawyer who is helping him fight his deportation orders. When he asked ICE for a lighter ankle monitor, they replaced the two-pound device he was wearing with a six-pound one that has the ability to record his conversations.

Despite his busy schedule, Marcial has created a communication web that connects journalists, anti-ICE advocates and organizers, and detainees in New Jersey and New York.

It was through him that *The Independent* was connected with Bonilla, who organized a hunger strike at the Essex jail in January. After a week during which he was put in solitary confinement and threatened with being force-fed as punishment, Bonilla was transferred to a federal detention facility in Buffalo, New York, more than 350 miles from his home in North Brunswick, New Jersey. “The two things they needed to move me, a negative COVID test and a legally valid reason, they didn’t have,” he said.

Bonilla and Morales are among the hundreds of ICE detainees who have gone on hunger strike over the past year to protest the conditions at the Essex, Hudson and Bergen county jails and ICE’s impunity toward immigrants. Only 11 have been released.

INSIDE-OUTSIDE

The hunger strikes were supported by daily and weekly protests outside the Bergen County Jail and more sporadic protests at the Hudson and Essex jails. In December, police kettled and attacked protesters outside the Bergen jail, and more than a dozen people were arrested.

While protesters make noise outside, the people inside are being told that they’ll never see their families again if they continue to fast, says Bryan Vergara. They are kept in their cells around the clock, and some are put on suicide watch — despite not hav-



AMBA GUERGUERIAN



MARCIAL MORALES

ing indicated suicidal tendencies — where they are stripped naked.

Vergara, who organized a hunger strike at the Hudson jail in December, was kept on suicide watch for a week as retribution. “They put me in a cell with no water that was very dirty. They stripped me. They didn’t give me a blanket or anything. They said, ‘If you don’t want to eat, that means you want to kill yourself,’” he told *The Indy*.

NO ICE US, a group formed in January to build awareness and support for the detainees, continues holding bi-weekly solidarity actions outside the Bergen jail. Drawing on Morales’s network of contacts, members of the group are in communication with detainees, often those who are on hunger strike. Each time they meet, they receive a call from the inside and listen to it in a parking lot in front of the jail.

“I really appreciate what you guys do for us,” said one hunger striker calling from the Hudson jail on a Saturday afternoon in March. A group of about 20 people stood in a circle around the loudspeaker his voice was reverberating from. “The way they treat us here is not the way you’re supposed to treat a human being,” he added. “This is really sad. We’re locked down 24 hours.”

The organizers, most of whom are in their early to mid-twenties, are encountering the same frustrations that detainees and their families have been struggling with for years. Their phone numbers are being blocked by the jails, and when outgoing calls get through, the connection is often spotty.

“The quality of the phone calls is terrible. It’s impossible,” said Micah Jay, an organizer with NO ICE US. “Even if [the detainees] want to keep their privacy, they can’t, because they have to yell through the phone. I have tons of recordings where you can barely make them out.”

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Since 2009, the federal budget has financed an “immigration bed mandate” of 34,000 to 40,520 beds a year to detain immigrants in the United States. In 2019, ICE detained a record high of more than 55,000 immigrants. That required shifting the budget lines around. The federal mandate funds more beds than privately run detention centers can furnish. The extra space is accounted for by county jails, like those in Bergen, Essex and Hudson, and state prisons that enter into contracts to rent their beds to ICE.

A 2018 report by the federal Office of the Inspector General found that contracts made directly with county jails and prisons often circumvent ICE’s own standards for how a federal contract should be obtained.

“They’re supposed to actually provide justification when they enter into a new agreement. They often just bypass that requirement,” says Jesse Franzblau, senior policy analyst at the National Immigrant Justice Center. “If ICE didn’t take shortcuts with their federal procurement process, it would likely be more difficult for them to maintain as many empty beds, as many contracts.”

Essex County made \$33.4 million from its ICE contract in 2019. That dropped to \$20.9 million in 2020 after the release of some detainees due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The office of County Executive Joseph “Joe D.” DiVincenzo did not reply to queries from *The Indy* about how the additional revenues from ICE were allocated.

Continued on next page

BERGEN COUNTY JAIL

HACKENSACK, NJ
SHERRIFF: Anthony Cureton

CURRENT/RECENT # OF DETAINEES	105
TYPICAL # OF DETAINEES (PRE-COVID)	500
PER DIEM (PER ICE DETAINEE)	\$110
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2019	\$14.4 MILLION
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2020	\$6.7 MILLION
CONTRACT LENGTH/END DATE	OPEN-ENDED



ESSEX COUNTY JAIL

NEWARK, NJ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE: Joseph DiVincenzo

CURRENT/RECENT # OF DETAINEES	195
TYPICAL # OF DETAINEES (PRE-COVID)	800
PER DIEM (PER ICE DETAINEE)	\$117
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2019	\$33.4 MILLION
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2020	\$20.9 MILLION
CONTRACT LENGTH/END DATE	10 YEARS/2026



HUDSON COUNTY JAIL

KEARNY, NEW JERSEY
COUNTY EXECUTIVE: Tom DeGise

CURRENT/RECENT # OF DETAINEES	49
TYPICAL # OF DETAINEES (PRE-COVID)	800
PER DIEM (PER ICE DETAINEE)	\$120
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2019	\$19.8 MILLION
TOTAL REVENUE CLAIMED BY COUNTY 2020	\$7.7 MILLION
CONTRACT LENGTH/END DATE	10 YEARS/2031



COLD AS ICE

Continued from previous page

“The money they [Essex and Hudson] get from the ICE contracts is often more than what was planned for in the budget,” says Imani Oakley, an Essex County-based political organizer and former legislative director for the New Jersey Working Families Party. “They tend to have more money left over that they can use to do extra things, whatever that may be. But it’s blood money. There are other ways they can get money to the county.”

Advocates and activists are unable to discern how the money is being spent. In a secret recording provided to *The Indy* of an August 2018 meeting between ICE abolitionists and Essex County freeholders (New Jersey’s term for county legislators) Michael Parlavecchio and Wayne Richardson, one of the activists asked, “If I take my kids to the zoo, am I supporting — are we visiting something that was built using money from \$117 per night per detainee? Or no?” Parlavecchio explicitly confirmed that ICE money “is certainly part of it”—in reference to the funding for the Essex County Parks and Zoo.

Richardson defended the conditions of the detention facility following a federal inspection that found conditions at the site to be so bad that even the Trump administration’s Department of Homeland Security condemned it.

Hudson County has long been notorious for corruption. Since the 1970s, it has seen a county executive, two Jersey City mayors and two Jersey City Council speakers convicted. “Our politicians still take money in brown paper bags,” the editor of the now-defunct *Hudson Dispatch* told a newly hired reporter in 1990, during a three-year period in which the mayors of eight of the county’s 12 cities and towns were indicted or convicted. From 2014 to 2016, Jersey City police officers participated in a no-show job scheme.

In 2019, the county earned \$19.8 million from its ICE contract. It did not respond to *The Indy*’s request for information on how much it made from ICE in 2020.

On March 11, the state Senate’s Law and Public Safety Committee held hearings on a bill that would keep ICE from expanding or renewing its contracts in New Jersey. Anthony Vainieri, chair of the Hudson County Board of Freeholders, testified against it, bemoaning the revenue that would be lost if his county left the contract, on top of the money it has already lost due to fewer people being incarcerated during the pandemic. About an hour later, he attended a meeting where the commissioners voted a raise for themselves and other county officials.

Bergen County gave out \$2.4 million in bonuses to county employees during the pandemic, despite a COVID-tightened budget. One of the beneficiaries was the wife of Sheriff Anthony Cureton, who has come under scrutiny for his ICE contract, from which the county says it took in \$14.4 million in 2019.

‘BERGEN IS A BLACK BOX’

The Bergen County commissioners, unlike those in Hudson and Essex counties, do not vote on the county’s ICE contract. Instead, Sheriff Cureton approves and signs it. The seven county commissioners have not demanded more power to review the contract.

“We provide the best quality care with a clean environment, nutritious food, accredited medical staff and a robust complaint reporting system,” the Bergen County Sheriff’s Office claims.

Morales begs to differ. “There are mosquitoes and rats all over the place. I would fill plastic bags with the water, and it would be filled with debris and metal. And a lot of time the sinks don’t even work, so you have to drink out of the toilet,” he told *The Indy*. “In one week, one guy killed seven rats. They don’t want to be rat hunters but they have to be. As soon as the lights are turned off, all the rats start coming out and going into the cells... Even now, if I’m alone in my room at home, I feel that something is around me. I feel rats around me. They’re not there.”

He can’t say much for the medical staff, either. He, like Vergara, was put on suicide watch despite not having shown suicidal tendencies. “I asked him why I was there, and that’s when they started to strip me. They said the doctor said I was Level One suicide watch. I told him I hadn’t talked to the doctor.”

“Bergen is a black box. There’s no information going in or out,” says Chia-Chia Wang. “The sheriff said that there’s nothing they need to improve and his jail is like a hotel.”

In January, the Legal Aid Society, the Bronx Defenders and Brooklyn Defender Services wrote a letter to ICE, saying they had received “alarming” reports from detainees that there was no heat in various detainee cellblocks. “At least one detainee has been told ‘the cold will kill the coronavirus, so we’re not turning it on,’” read the letter.

PARTY MACHINES

Bergen County has been under Democratic control since 2015. Old-school Democratic Party machines have ruled Essex and Hudson counties for decades, going back at least to the 1930s when Jersey City Mayor Frank “I Am the Law” Hague was party boss, and have wielded outsized power in state government as well. At the same time, New Jersey’s machine-friendly ballot rules make it almost impossible for progressives to primary Democratic incumbents successfully.

“Party machines build a patronage mill that creates tremendous power, but also further limits public accountability,” says Kathy O’Leary, the New Jersey regional coordinator for Pax Christi USA. “The political power is great enough that party bosses can then wield it outside their borders. The jails and the federal contracts play an important role in providing jobs and subcontracts that can only be gained or maintained through loyalty to the party machine.”

In 2018, when public outrage over former President Trump’s policy of separating families and caging immigrant children was at its height, Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise announced that he would initiate a “path to exit” from the county’s ICE contract.

Later that year, when the county’s 10-year contract with ICE was expiring, DeGise extended it for only two years, promising the county would end its relationship with ICE after that. Instead, in November 2020, after a 10-hour Board of Freeholders hearing in which none of the roughly 100 speakers favored renewal, Hudson County signed another a 10-year contract with ICE. Unlike the previous agreements, the new contract gave DeGise full authority over contract negotiations. For the next decade, he, like Bergen’s Sheriff Cureton, will be able to change the terms of the contract without the approval of the freeholders.

“I just came down on the side of continuing it, because I was convinced that it’s a very effective law-enforcement tool in trying to keep some bad guys out of our communities and off of our streets,” DeGise told *NJ Spotlight*.

Detainee numbers are down in Hudson County due to the pandemic. However, Amy Torres, head of the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice, warns that the worst impacts of the economic crisis have yet to hit low-income communities. “There’s going to be mass evictions,” she says. “And what happens when people get evicted? They are much more likely to have trouble with law enforcement.”

ESSEX COUNTY

In Essex County, Joseph DiVincenzo has reigned as county executive since 2003. A 2011 *New York Times* feature hailed him as “the king of North Jersey,” a hard-charging political operator who “has shown a knack for bringing in revenue” through government contracts.

The ICE contract DiVincenzo signed, in line with the federal government’s definition of detention, calls immigrant detention a “civil detention system that is not penal in nature,” but the detainees *The Indy* spoke with describe a harsh environment.

“The regular inmates in jail are allowed to go outside and hang out in the yard, but the detainees aren’t,” said Morales,

who was held in the Essex jail from March to October 2020. “I used to go to medical and watch the inmates playing soccer, knowing I wasn’t allowed outside.”

Detained immigrant detainees are not allowed to interact with the inmates, he added, “because they are ‘prisoners’ and we are ‘civil detainees.’ But the same correction officers deal with us. That’s why they treat everybody like criminals. That’s all they know to do.”

There’s “a lot of abuse going on,” Morales continued. “It’s common knowledge that a lot of guys get raped by the officers. ... Once I saw a guard beating up a detainee really badly. Two of my friends there told me they were raped at the same time. Then one was deported and one was sent to Buffalo Correctional Facility.”

In 2019, Bronx cab driver Faruk Karimu was swiftly deported to Ghana after he claimed to have been raped by guards at the Essex County Jail with an unknown object that caused painful internal bleeding.

Public affairs officers that represent ICE in Essex, Hudson and Bergen counties issued identical statements in response to those allegations: “ICE remains committed to ensuring its facilities adhere to ICE’s detention standards, which provide several levels of oversight in order to ensure that residents in ICE custody reside in safe, secure and humane environments.”

At the pandemic’s local peak last April, the Essex County Board of Freeholders passed a resolution urging the release of nonviolent federal detainees. But ICE is known to dub detainees a “threat to society” even if they haven’t committed a crime. And legally, a resolution holds little weight.

“Don’t waste your time with a resolution,” said Imani Oakley. “Take the steps to make the change. Your power reaches beyond a mere resolution.”

DON’T CROSS THE ‘COUNTY LINE’

Organizers pushing for an end to ICE detention in New Jersey face an uphill battle. County officials in Bergen, Essex and Hudson are content to rake in the revenues. And New Jersey’s unique ballot configuration — known as the ‘county line’ — is a formidable barrier to outsider candidates running against entrenched incumbents.

Under the system, the candidates backed by the local county machine all appear on the ballot as a single slate, from President down to the lowest office, and are placed on a prominent part of the ballot. Their opponents, if any, are scattered around less visible parts. A study of 2020 primary results by New Jersey Policy Perspective, a nonpartisan think tank, found the average vote margin between candidates appearing on the county line and their opponents was 35 percentage points. Another recent study by the Communications Workers of America, which represents more than 55,000 state and local government workers in New Jersey, found that no incumbent state legislator on the line had lost a primary between 2009 and 2018.

“New Jersey has the most corrupt ballot design in the entirety of the country,” Oakley says. “It basically makes it impossible for anybody that wants to challenge, to move and replace these old machine-elected officials who are perfectly fine with ruining people’s lives for some money to the county.”

Joel Torres, a Hudson County freeholder who voted against the 2020 contract renewal, was taken off the county line, and has since been replaced with someone more to the machine’s liking. “They politically murdered him,” said Hector Oseguera, an anti-money laundering analyst and former congressional candidate.

Both Oakley and Oseguera say the only way to get politicians elected in New Jersey who would sever ties with ICE would be to abolish the county line. In January, a coalition of progressive organizations and candidates joined a lawsuit to end the system, arguing that it violates their constitutional rights to freedom of association and equal protection under the law.

Advocates to end ICE detention have called on Governor Phil Murphy, a Democrat who ran on a progressive, pro-

immigrant platform in 2017 and rode a wave of the anti-Trump resistance, to cancel ICE contracts. He has remained silent on the issue.

“He just didn’t pay attention to us,” says Oseguera, who is a member of the Abolish ICE NJ-NY Coalition. “Murphy is up for election, and he needs the high-density vote from Hudson County. And Hudson County has been known to be spiteful towards Democratic governors running for reelection if they don’t play nice with the machine,” he explains.

Gov. Murphy’s office did not reply to an *Indy* request for comment.

PEOPLE VS. PROFITS

In 2020, ICE released a Request For Information (RFI), exploring the possibility of building two new 900-bed detention facilities in New Jersey.

In January, after weeks of hunger strikes and escalating protests against ICE’s presence in New Jersey, Assemblymember Gordon Johnson (D-Bergen) introduced legislation that would bar local governments from renewing expiring agreements with ICE and prevent public and private detention facilities in the state from signing new contracts.

“Separating people from their families because they overstayed their visa is not what we should be doing,” Johnson said.

Forsaking ICE revenues remains unthink-

able to others. “If we don’t have the contract,” Hudson County Commissioner Anthony Vainieri told *NorthJersey.com*, “can he sponsor legislation to give the counties that will lose \$20 million a year [something] to help us out?”

Johnson’s bill, however, would not affect Bergen County’s open-ended ICE contract, and might not affect Hudson County’s contract either.

The struggle continues. “My goal here is to let the world know what happens inside of these jails. Where the greatest justice in the world should be is the worst place to be,” said Marcial Morales. “And I won’t shut up. I had a couple unknown calls threatening me and saying I should stop. I said, ‘you’d have to cut my tongue out or kill me.’”

All sources of ICE revenue are figures provided by Bergen, Essex and Hudson counties.

For more detailed accounts of conversations, testimonies and jail conditions referenced above, go to indypendent.org/njicesources.

John Tarleton contributed to this article.

Border & Rule



Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism



“This is a book of unsparing truth and dazzling ambition.”
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HARSHA WALIA

Foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley, Afterword by Nick Estes



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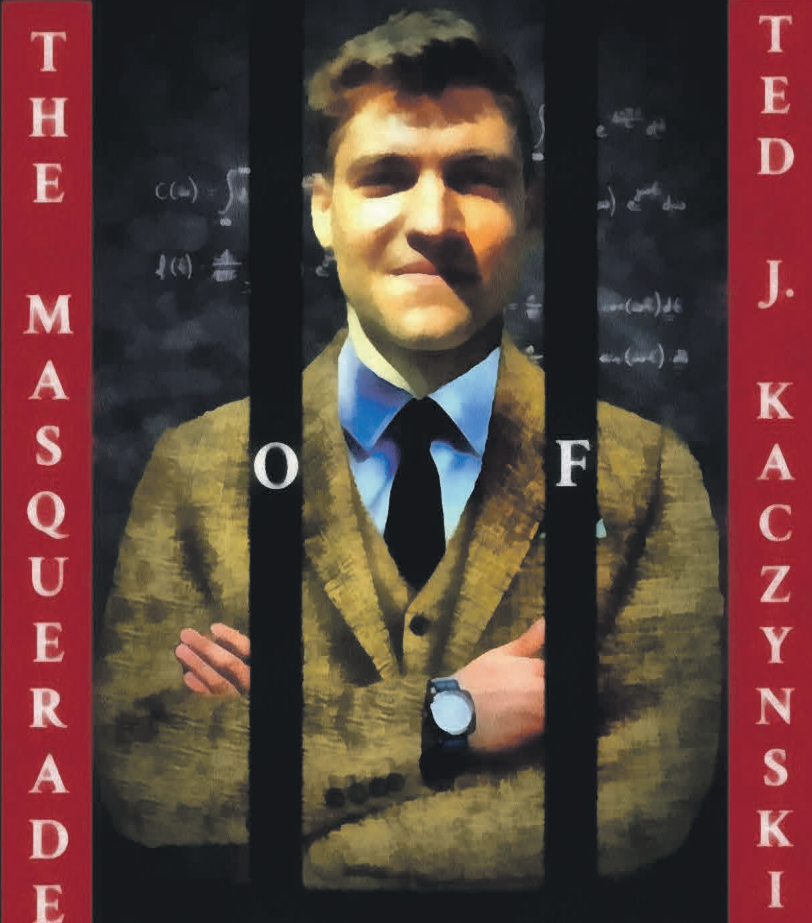
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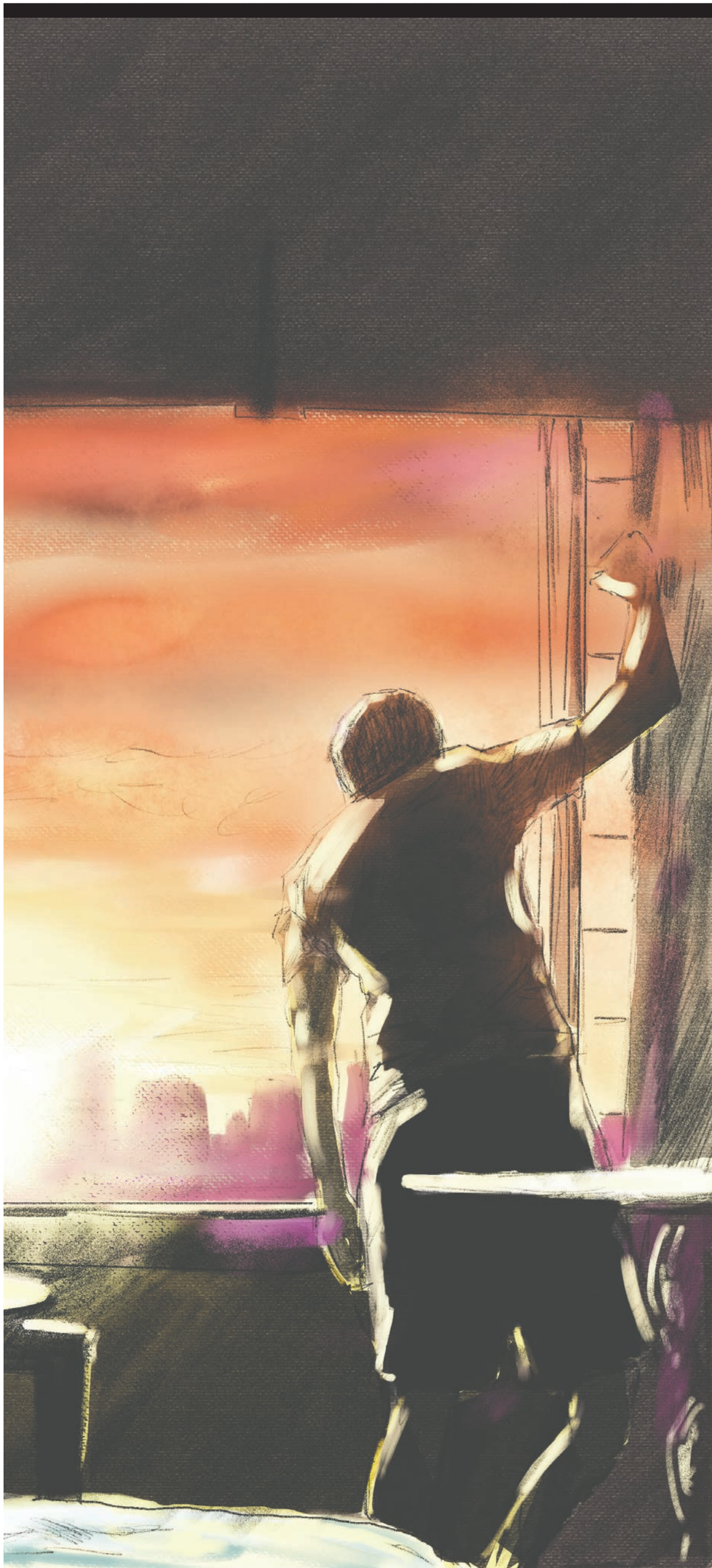
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Death Squads with Impunity



Robert Bruce McLaughlin



BREAKING UP WITH FEAR

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

The Walgreens nurse jabbed me with the needle and it felt like a key opening a jail cell. After a year of being locked inside the apartment, locked inside fear and guilt, I was free, free, free.

“You gave me my life back.” I smiled.

He gave me a fatherly pat and said to wait 15 minutes, in case of a reaction. I paced the aisles and when time was up, sprinted outside, and thrust hands to the sky. On an empty street I ripped off the mask and leaned on a fire hydrant. The sunlight held my face like a pair of hands. A great relief cleansed me. I no longer worried about accidentally killing people.

In that moment, I realized the toll of grinding, relentless fear. The vaccine was the first step in relearning how to live in the aftermath of a pandemic. It threw out the future we took for granted. Now, we have to reimagine the 21st century.

THE CORONATION

Last year, COVID-19 blew over the planet like fatal pollen. First Wuhan, China, reported a virus but from a distance, it seemed more crazy news in a year of Hong Kong protests, Amazon rainforest burning, and President Trump impeached. But headlines blared loud panic. On CNN, Dr. Sanjay Gupta was grim.

Each day the coronavirus spread to more places, killed more people and, like an invisible army of microscopic spiky balls, tinier than the width of a single human hair, it floated through the air. Rolling down the esophagus, the virus inflamed lungs and cut off oxygen. Most who got it became sick and then recovered. But a lot died.

The deaths electrified our conversations. At the bar, we drank as overhead a TV blared more COVID-19 news but disbelief won against fear. I sat with my friend Gabriel, we sipped on beers and asked each other if liberals were hyping the virus to defeat President Trump. I mean Russiagate didn't work. We laughed and clinked glasses.

“To the coronavirus,” I said.

“To the coronavirus,” he said.

The jokes lasted until the lockdown. A funeral pall hung over New York. I stood at my window and watched ambulances pick up the dead and dying. The flashing red lights painted the neighborhood blood red.

My downstairs neighbor died. My friends got sick. My best friend said his mom texted photos from the ICU of her on a ventilator. And then I got a message from him, “My mom died.” I pressed the phone to my heart and blinked back tears.

Later, we met at an outdoor café. His eyes were filled with grief. He said he killed his mom. His marriage was a cold war and, hungry for love, he took up with a younger woman. They met at hotels. They did not get tested and weeks later his family got COVID-19.

I wanted to tell him it wasn't his fault. I wanted to say, don't let guilt transform a far-fetched chance of infection into a murder verdict. His hands shook. I squeezed them as if pumping his mother's heart back to life.

LOSE YOUR ILLUSION

The coronavirus stole from us our bodies and our innocence. We could not take for granted a touch or kiss or hug. We could kill those we loved just by loving them. In order for us to save our lives, we had to suffer in the most difficult way, we suffered alone. We walled ourselves in apartments, binged on Netflix and porn, ate too much, worked out too much, got stimulus checks, and tried not to collaborate with the virus.

No matter how hard we tried, we lost loved ones. We lost jobs. We lost homes. We lost whole futures. We lost dreams. We lost fresh air.

We also lost illusions, like who kept our cities running. Turns out it was not the CEOs, hedge fund managers or Wall Street. It was the invisible workers. It was the delivery men, who rode scooters with boxes of steaming takeout. It was the nurses with dark bruised faces from wearing masks at the hospital, who broke down in their cars after their shifts because they could not stop people from dying. It was the immigrant bodega men, teachers, the truck and train

and bus drivers. It was the Mexican farm and meat plant workers. They put themselves on the line so we could sit at home on our laptops writing articles like this one, or make business deals or bitch about the hike in the minimum wage.

One day, I went to the bodega and saw Louis, the Mexican sandwich maker, leaning on the wall, smoking a cigarette. We tapped elbows. He looked sad. I asked him what was wrong.

“My best friend,” he said. “He went to the hospital for pain, caught the COVID and died.”

“I’m so sorry, hermano.”

He looked at me as if trying to speak from under water. “It’s real, amigo. This thing is fucking real.”

COLLABORATORS

Even as COVID killed and killed, some collaborated with it. Nearly a third of America, under the sway of President Trump, Fox News, Brietbart and Newsmax, thought the quarantine was a Democratic coup attempt, a Silicon Valley power grab, or a plot by Satanic pedophiles to sell the United States to alien lizards.

Republicans stormed capital buildings without masks, hoisting signs to “free Michigan” or “free Oregon.” They brazenly shoved naked mouths and noses into the camera because in their ideology the mask was a sign of emasculation. Only a spineless liberal jellyfish wore it. “Live Free” was a common phrase on the signs they shook. “Give Me Liberty or Give Me COVID-19” was a particularly odd one.

Led by Trump, who said injecting bleach or high-powered light killed the virus, the maskless mob drove COVID across the nation. They collaborated with the virus because they didn’t care if it killed us. They assumed the coronavirus was a “blue state” problem, even as it spread through “red states” with a vengeance.

In New York, you saw the collaborators. On the subway, a man chomped on a sandwich with no mask, no face covering, no nothing. The rest of us relayed the same silent message with our eyes, “Yo, what the fuck is homeboy doing?” The anger in the air built and New Yorkers have a thing we do, where someone is deputized to handle business, so a man casually walked by and smacked the sandwich out of his hands, and told him, “You need to wear a mask or get the fuck off this train.” Subway justice ensued and we berated the guy until he dashed out at the next station.

We checked each other too. No one liked it. No one likes being scolded by friends to wear a mask, or to hear that snide self-righteous tone in their voice that was like fingernails on a chalk board. No one.

We stood in long lines to get tested. We clung to the negative results like a quickly expiring visa to each other’s homes. We met, tore off masks, drank and made love. All the hunger for touch had to be satiated in those brief hours like prisoners getting conjugal visits.

Afterwards, walking the street, masked again and holding hands, we saw the closed businesses and “For Rent” signs on empty buildings. A sinking feeling hit us that maybe the New York we knew was gone forever.

BREATH WORK

“Black Trans Lives Matter! Black Trans Lives Matter!”

Our voices were thunder. Our marching pounded pavement. Signs bobbed like sails on a vast river of faces that rose and fell like waves. I looked side-to-side, saw my lover passing out bright bottles of water, and my friend cupping his mouth and hollering. I checked my make-up in the reverse cellphone camera, seeing the glittery dress hugging my hips and the lipstick to honor the Black trans lives snuffed out by hate.

“Should I have worn heels?” I asked.

“Too much.” She shook her head. “Solidarity not caricature.”

In the midst of the pandemic, we saw a video of a white cop, Derek Chauvin, kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, a Black man, for nine minutes as he begged for air. “I can’t breathe,” he repeated until he died. We saw this before: Emmet Till, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Me Too, immi-

grant kids in cages. American cruelty took so many shapes, so many forms that it was a mythical Hydra with a thousand snapping jaws. It bit our skin color. It bit our gender. It bit our youth and sex and paychecks. When Chauvin killed Floyd, it was another Hydra head that leered at the camera as it sniffed fresh kill. We saw the monster, picked up signs, and trampled it under our feet. Black Lives Mattered. Black Trans Lives Mattered. Black Love Mattered.

After the protest, I bicycled with friends through Brooklyn, saw activists openly drinking, playing music, sitting on curbs and handrails, smoking weed and, for the first time, passionately talking about race. Pride radiated from Black people. Whites had an easy open body language. They shared beers and under the street lights, it looked like Rembrandt had painted urban portraits of young revolutionaries.

New expressions flowed over faces. Raw empathy. Eyes mirrored eyes. Long caring stares. Trusting arms encircling shoulders. Heads touching. It was beautiful because for the first time in the pandemic, really for the first time in years, I saw strangers take off their masks.

THE LIGHT IN THE TUNNEL

“I got vaccinated!”

“You did? How?” I squinted my eyes at her.

“I’m a service provider.” She held up my coffee and muffin. “Jealous?”

“Yes.”

We laughed. Who wouldn’t be? It’s like being in jail and seeing another prisoner wave goodbye. I walked back home, thumbing my cellphone for the NYC/vaccine site, entering my name, age, zip code. Nothing. All the appointments were taken.

On Facebook, friends posted photos smiling as they got the jab. They could re-join the world, not all at

once, the vaccine was not a cure-all and we have not

A WORLD APART

Since Dec. 14, 2020, over 127 million people across the United States have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the rollout continues to reach more eligible groups nationwide. The country is on pace to meet President Joe Biden’s doubled goal of 200 million administered doses by April 28, his 100th day in office, with some experts predicting all U.S. residents could get a shot in 2021.

This high level of vaccine access, however, is a reality only in wealthy countries. The vast majority of the world’s people are experiencing vaccine apartheid, due to pharmaceutical monopolies on COVID-19 vaccines that lay bare the value placed on corporate profit over ending the pandemic on a global scale and providing lifesaving, essential care for those who are most vulnerable.

The artificial scarcity of COVID-19 vaccines is created by Big Pharma and its licensing agreements, which heavily restrict the global production and consequent distribution of vaccines to poor countries. Take the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, which is currently being produced by the Serum Institute in India and was originally intended for 92 low-income countries

tries that are home to 4 billion people – half the global population. Amid a surge in its own COVID-19 cases this spring, India has hoarded the vaccines for its domestic population, keeping significantly more than its fair share of 35% of the doses.

In the midst of the stall in shipments, AstraZeneca has exported millions of doses to wealthy countries that are not included in the 92 intended recipients, such as the United Kingdom. These countries, prior to their purchase of AstraZeneca vaccines from India, were among the first to oppose requests to the World Trade Organization for patent waivers to expand vaccine production globally.

“That the UK, which has vaccinated nearly 50% of its adults with at least one dose, should demand vaccines from India, which has only vaccinated 3% of its people so far, is immoral,” writes Achal Prabhala, a coordinator of the AccessIBSA Project, which campaigns for equal vaccine access, in *The Guardian*. “That the UK has already received several million doses from India, alongside other rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Canada, is a travesty.”

Vaccine apartheid is exacerbating the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 in low-income countries and prolonging risk of exposure for billions of people, as well as further spread of highly infectious variants. A third of the world’s countries have had no public money to deal with the effects of COVID-19, according to an Oxfam report, and the Americas, the world’s hardest-hit region, have seen an acute rise in gender-based violence and deadly attacks on people defending land, water and human rights. China and Russia are practicing vaccine diplomacy by selling or donating vaccines to dozens of low-income countries in Africa, Asia and South America, while Cuba, known for its commitment to universal healthcare and international medical solidarity, is nearing the end of two stage-three clinical trials for its own COVID-19 vaccines. These are

hit herd immunity and new variants of COVID-19 swam in the air, threatening to throw us back into full lockdown, but there was a light at the end of the tunnel and it wasn’t another train.

When I got my Walgreens appointment, I ran down the street on Cloud Nine. I waved at neighbors, the bodega men, even the police parked in front of the building with constant shootings. I was that happy.

Danny, the laundromat owner saw the glow and asked if I had won the lottery.

“Yes,” I said, “I’m going to get vaccinated.” I waited for him to say a Fox News talking point.

“Good.” He nodded. “People say all kinds of crazy stuff about vaccines but they go all the time to doctors, take all types of pills. Do they ask what’s in them? No. But a vaccine comes out and now they’re detectives. Fuck outta here.” He saluted me. “Go be a good New Yorker.”

We touched elbows. Giddy, I rode the train. Giddy, I waited at Walgreens. Giddy, I took off the hoodie, bared my shoulder and felt the quick sting of the needle.

Outside, on the empty street, I took off the mask and rubbed my face with sunlight. A year’s worth of fear peeled away. Skin tingled. What does this mean? I looked at my hands. Did I accidentally kill someone? Could I have done more?

Eyelids shut, the day was an orange glow in the dark. What do we now? How do we repair a broken world?

I kept my eyes closed and followed the sun like a flower. Its light was far away but I could feel it.

examples of pushback against the crippling monopoly on vaccine production: but in order to truly end the spread of COVID-19 and ensure equitable recovery from the devastation of the pandemic, patent monopolies must be waived, as many medical experts and progressive organizations continue to demand.

One hundred and seventy-five former heads of state and Nobel laureates have signed an open letter demanding President Biden waive intellectual property rules for COVID-19 vaccines. A waiver would end monopoly-hindered supply shortages and expand manufacturing capacities, and prioritize the health of people everywhere. Without it, 9 in 10 people in poor countries could go without a vaccine in 2021; and by not vaccinating people globally, the whole world will continue to suffer due to the ongoing spread of COVID-19.

“If this last year has taught us anything, it is that threats to public health are global, and that strategic government investment, action, global cooperation, and solidarity are vital,” the letter reads. “The market cannot adequately meet these challenges, and neither can narrow nationalism.”

– JULIA THOMAS

ALICE NEEL: PAINTING PEOPLE LEFT OUT OF THE PICTURE

Alice Neel: People Come First
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
THROUGH AUGUST 1

By Gerald Meyer

In a world that viewed portrait painting as an affectation of the rich, Alice Neel (1900-1984) believed all people had a right to have a portrait painted. On canvas, Neel depicted everyday people in a way that dignified them and viewed them as agents for change. She gave her subjects both personality and character, a feat that revealed their capacity to endure and to struggle. They are never broken or demoralized. And now we have a glorious new exhibition of more than 100 of her paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that brings her art to life and affirms the belated recognition she has received as one of the great painters of the 20th century.

Neel rejected abstract-expressionism, the prevailing style of painting, where people and their background disappeared or belonged to the artist. Like Van Gogh, Thomas Eaton, Robert Henri, Raphael Soyer and others, she employed social realism, a style of painting where the images in her paintings are recognizable. She vivified social realism by introducing expressionistic techniques: exaggeration, bold colors and, most important, painting directly onto the canvas. Her artistic choices associated her with a style of painting that had been discredited as the imposition of leftists and Communists. She didn't retreat from that accusation, she embraced it and surpassed it. She insisted she was not just painting individuals. Through her subjects she intended, and often succeeded, to paint their times and circumstances. She declared: "When portraits are good art, they reflect the culture, time and many other things." Famously, she argued, "Art is a form of history, painting is an historical act where one has the chance to know both the individual(s) and his/her times." Late in her life, Neel called the collectivity of her paintings, "A monument to the people."

While studying at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Neel met Carlos Enríquez, a Cuban artist who, despite his bourgeois background, was a committed leftist. In 1926, the newly wedded couple arrived in Havana. Bored with upper-class dining and recreational rituals, nightly the newlyweds escaped to Vibora, a harbor district that attracted the desperately poor and those determined to reverse their fate. It was the other side of La Vibora where she encountered revolutionaries such as Alejo Carpentier, a founder of the Cuban Communist Party. There she learned of Marxism and imperialism, which informed her artistic decisions.

In 1927, Neel, now pregnant, left Cuba for New York.

The following two years were an unspeakable catastrophe. She lost two daughters — Santianna, who died in 1928 of diphtheria at the age of one, and Isabetta, whose care was assumed by her husband's family in 1930. Her suicide attempts led to prolonged stays in psychiatric hospitals. These harrowing years explain her many portraits of pregnant women and even more often, children.

Neel then settled in Greenwich Village. There she became immersed in leftist politics. She gained employment in the Works Progress Administration's Federal Arts Program, where she earned a small but steady income working in its coveted brush-and-easel section until the WPA was disbanded in 1943 due to the war.

marchers holding aloft flares and placards. However, these paintings lacked the features that would become her stylistic signature.

In 1934, Neel first met José Santiago Negrón, a Puerto Rican younger than her at a club, where he was singing and playing Latin guitar music. It was José who would provide her with passage to Spanish Harlem, where she would stay for more than two decades.

Her sunny apartment was large enough to serve as a studio and sufficient space to raise two sons, Richard and Hartley. Neel wasn't an outsider in the Barrio — she spoke Spanish with her neighbors and interacted with storekeepers. Like so many others, she raised two sons on her own, one of whom was born there. El Barrio was also a leftist community where a majority of its residents voted for the American Labor Party, who elected Vito Marcantonio to Congress. It was in El Barrio where she painted what have been called her "essential portraits."

Negrón became the subject of some of her earliest East Harlem paintings. He was not the only man she painted erotically, but he was the only one she painted with love. Some of her best portraits are compositions of members of his family. *T.B. Harlem*, for example, shows his brother in bed in a tragic-erotic pose, where white bandaging covers wounds caused by the removal of ribs to treat his tuberculosis. It was in East Harlem where she began painting children in classics such as *The Spanish Family* and *Dominican Boys on 108th Street*. There were the people in a place that best matched up with her art and her politics. Michael Gold, the Communist writer, best summed up the meaning of Neel's East Harlem portraits: "Some of the melancholy of the region counts over her work But there is a truth and unquestionable faith. Neel ennobles her sitters in their quiet dignity."

In 1960, Neel moved to a larger apartment on the Upper East Side. From there she painted a much wider spectrum of subjects: a fuller brush salesman, pregnant women, Communists, gays and lesbians. While the social circumstances of their lives still shine through in paintings like *Margaret Evans Pregnant*, they seem to be more psychological than social. But her work remained unmistakably her.

Never one to flinch from reality, Neel posed for her own nude self-portrait at the age of 80. Shortly before she died, Neel said that the world was divided in a great struggle between socialism and capitalism. There never was a doubt which side she was on.



In stark contrast with the upper-class Enríquez, Neel fell in love with Kenneth Doolittle, a sailor. While living with Doolittle, Alice produced shameless drawings of their love life. "Her intimacy is sexual," one critic noted. These and subsequent works speak to Alice's liberation from patriarchy, but it did not protect her from male brutality. In 1934, fueled by alcohol and jealousy, Doolittle tore to pieces 70 of her oil paintings and incinerated two years of her drawings. In contrast with earlier catastrophes, her tightly-woven support system prevented yet another breakdown.

During this period, Neel did good work. She produced semi-surrealistic paintings that were generated from her grief. Other paintings were blatantly political. *Nazis Kill Jews* depicts a mass demonstration with working-class

Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)

Self-Portrait, 1980

Oil on canvas

53 1/4 x 39 3/4 in. (135.3 x 101 cm)

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

© The Estate of Alice Neel



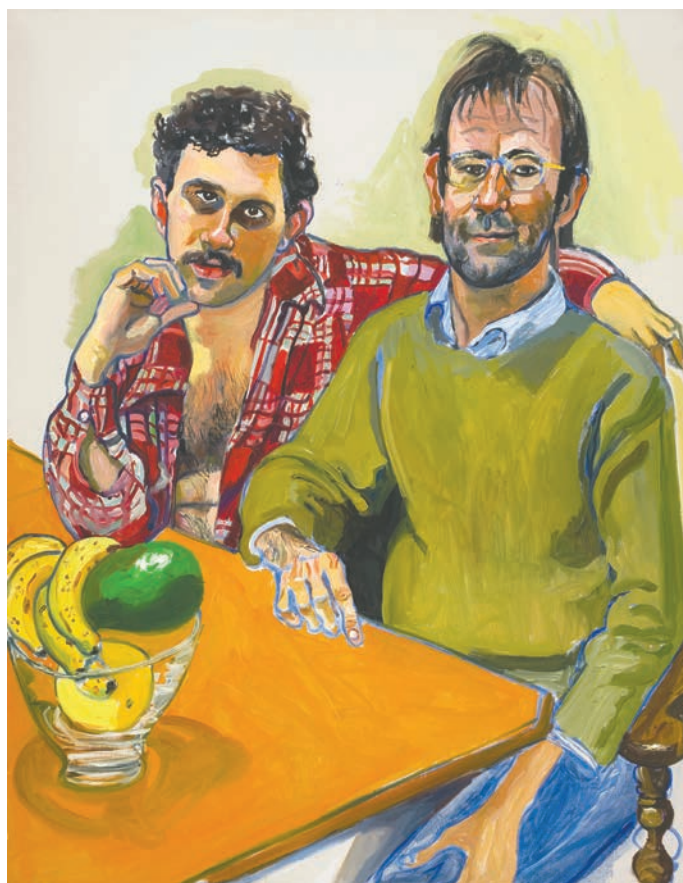
Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
Mercedes Arroyo, 1952
Oil on canvas
25 × 24 1/8 in. (63.5 × 61.3 cm)
Collection of Daryl and Steven Roth
© The Estate of Alice Neel



Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
Margaret Evans Pregnant, 1978
Oil on canvas
57 3/4 × 38 1/2 in. (146.7 × 97.8 cm)
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston,
Gift of Barbara Lee, The Barbara Lee
Collection of Art by Women
© The Estate of Alice Neel

Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
The Spanish Family, 1943
Oil on canvas
34 × 28 in. (86.4 × 71.1 cm)
Estate of Alice Neel
© The Estate of Alice Neel

Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
T.B. Harlem, 1940
Oil on canvas
30 × 30 in. (76.2 × 76.2 cm)
National Museum of Women in
the Arts, Washington, D.C., Gift of
Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay
© The Estate of Alice Neel



Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
Geoffrey Hendricks and Brian, 1978
Oil on canvas
San Francisco Museum of Modern
Art, Purchase, by exchange,
through an anonymous gift
© The Estate of Alice Neel



Alice Neel, (American, 1900-1984)
James Farmer, 1964
Oil on canvas
43 3/4 × 30 1/4 in. (111.1 ×
76.8 cm)
National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C., Gift of Hartley S.
Neel and Richard Neel
© The Estate of Alice Neel



AVOIDING THE MAGA TRAP

Capital and Ideology

BY THOMAS PIKETTY

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR GOLDHAMMER

BELKNAP HARVARD 2020

By Bennett Baumer

In a 2019 campaign video, Bernie Sanders appeared hugging a crying single mother outside her hardscrabble trailer in the Deep South. The video, called “Trapped,” introduced us to a mother living on less than \$1,000 a month in an impoverished rural Black-majority county, in a home that badly needed repairs and sat next to a polluted lagoon, in a rich country where the national minimum wage is a mere \$7.25 per hour. Sanders’ distinctive Brooklyn accent in voiceover explained that this same scene could be in a Latino community in California or in white West Virginia. During the teary embrace, he told the woman, “we won’t forget you.”

Sanders did not forget. But in March, eight Democratic senators, including Joe Manchin of West Virginia, voted against adding a minimum wage increase to \$15 per hour into the COVID relief bill — a hard kick to the millions of low-wage service workers risking their health during the pandemic.

You won’t find direct references to impoverished trailer courts in French economist Thomas Piketty’s latest work, *Capital and Ideology*, but their specter is all over this massive tome. You will find those trailer parks, urban neighborhoods and small towns in the “dramatic collapse” of the lower half of American households’ income. The bottom 50 percent’s share of national income went from 20% in 1980 to just above 12% today, and the miserly federal minimum wage is partially at fault. “This reversal attests to the magnitude of the political-ideological changes that took place in the United States since the 1970s and 1980s,” writes Piketty.

Capital and Ideology is chock-full of graphs with nifty explainers and statistics that show historical income and wealth distributions. This is the “capital” aspect of the book, but it is the “ideology” portion that illuminates how wealth was distributed away from the bottom 50% and towards the one percent at such magnitude.

Postwar politics in the West generally pitted conservative parties (Britain’s Conservatives, the Republicans, Charles DeGaulle in France) with wealthier and more educated constituencies against less educated, working-class left-wing parties. The left-wing parties generally voted for democratic socialism — labor rights, universal healthcare and higher rates of progressive taxation. Piketty terms these politics as a “classist” formation, but it loses steam around the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The 1930s New Deal proved the power of government action to create jobs and alleviate poverty, and the civil-rights and women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s mo-



CHARLES PLATIAU

bilized masses to dismantle Jim Crow and challenge the old boys’ network. The far right’s response, Corey Robin wrote in his excellent *The Reactionary Mind*, has been to “harness the energy of the mass in order to reinforce or restore the power of elites,” beginning with Barry Goldwater’s unsuccessful 1964 presidential run and reaching power in Ronald Reagan’s 1980s counterrevolution.

Capital and Ideology traces this shift in politics across the world’s democracies over the past 50 years. Left parties such as Britain’s Labour and India’s Congress shifted from robust representation of their working-class constituencies to become parties led by an educated, professional and more highly paid elite — the “Brahmin left.” This realignment is

reconfiguring global economics and politics, and everything appears up for grabs. The Brahmin left values international trade, celebrates the winners (managers, tech entrepreneurs) and offers policy pittance to the losers (factory workers, low-paid service workers).

In the United States, Barack Obama’s anemic response to the Great Recession greased the skids for Trump’s bigoted and “America First” economic appeals to lower-earning and less-educated voters. Piketty asserts that across democracies there are four roughly equal electoral camps. The left consists of the Brahmins but also a rising internationalist, pro-wealth-redistribution activist faction embodied in the United States by figures like Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. On the right, the pro-market “merchant right” favors global trade and cooperation, joined uneasily by an empowered nativist and nationalist far-right that talks about wealth redistribution.

Piketty warns of the “social-nativist” trap — where elites can rally the bottom 50% to a platform of redistributive politics to the “native” population, with violent exclusion of immigrants and national minorities. But can a MAGA-infused GOP deliver economic gains to its working- and middle-class nativist base? One-term Trump’s lone legislative victory was a massive tax cut for the rich. His inconclusive trade war with China and disastrous COVID-19 response mostly alienated the merchant right, with notable exceptions like the MyPillow guy and the CEO of the Goya food company.

Polls show the Biden administration’s \$1.9 trillion COVID-relief package is widely popular across the political spectrum, yet not a single Republican voted for it. The bill avoids repeating Obama-era mistakes: It will provide thousands of dollars in direct relief to tens of millions of families, and is a clear blow against austerity politics and a win for the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party. Critics note that the aid is temporary and wonder how we will pay for it. The Biden Administration is eyeing higher corporate taxes and making it harder for multinationals to shift profits to tax havens. But if democracy is to avoid falling into a social-nativist trap, this relief bill is a positive first step.

SCOTT STRINGER

Continued from page 9

than \$800,000 since 2014, much of which he has rolled into his mayoral campaign coffers. Stringer defends his decision to keep the money as a pragmatic necessity when facing well-financed rivals. (He has compiled a strong pro-tenant record, including backing a proposed state law to prohibit evictions without “good cause.”)

Adolfo Abreu, the organizing director of Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and a City Council candidate backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, credited Stringer for being “extremely strategic” in endorsing progressive outsiders when it was risky to do so, but was skeptical about the likelihood that he would intentionally incorporate social-movement demands into his governance.

“Do I think Scott Stringer will be a bad mayor? I don’t think so,” Abreu said. “I just think that there will be multiple times where we’re going to have to hold him accountable ... We’re tired of having to consistently do protests and rallies and all these other mechanisms to hold people accountable to the things that they ran on. I think it’s just more of, who’s going to be committed to ac-

tion and be extremely movable and from day one have the commitment to bringing real stakeholders in the room?”

Abreu, who worked as Biaggi’s field director in 2018, has endorsed and been endorsed by Morales. He points to a similar problem during the 2013 mayoral election, when progressives struggled to coalesce around a candidate before Bill de Blasio took charge late in the race, thanks to an iconic ad featuring his biracial son Dante.

• • •

POLLING FOR THIS YEAR’S RACE has been sparse but consistently shows entrepreneur and former 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang as the frontrunner, with Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams running second. A March 24 poll by Fontas Advisors and Core Decision Analytics placed Yang at 16% and Adams at 10%, with Stringer lagging at 5%, ahead of Morales but also trailing former de Blasio counsel and MSNBC legal analyst Maya Wiley, who clocked in at 6%.

But with less than 100 days until the June 22 Democratic primary that will almost certainly decide the next mayor, 50% of voters

are undecided. The poll’s authors called the race “wide open.”

Tobias said a lack of voter awareness was the most likely reason for Stringer, Morales, and Wiley’s low numbers.

“A lot of voters haven’t really decided what they want in the race,” he said. He added that Morales and Wiley’s supporters would likely rank Stringer high on their ranked-choice ballots.

Yang’s limited political record and post-political messaging (“Not left. Not right. Forward” was the mantra of his national campaign) have made him a popular choice, Tobias said, for voters looking for something new despite Yang’s fairly conservative positions on most issues. With increased voter outreach in the coming months, as well as the coalitional politics encouraged by ranked-choice voting, that 50% undecided should disperse across several camps.

“The good thing about ranked-choice [is] we don’t have to fight about the one true progressive who is the actual best one,” Tobias said. “We can say, here are the good progressive candidates who have committed to our vision, and not the ones who are opposed to it.”

As *The Independent* goes to press, the Working Families Party has just tapped Stringer as its top endorsee, followed by

Morales and Wiley. And the United Federation of Teachers, which represents nearly 200,000 teachers and daycare workers, is soon expected to announce its pick.

At the UFT’s final endorsement forum, Stringer was raring to make a good impression. As comptroller, he has been a strict and outspoken auditor of the Department of Education, and often joined UFT President Michael Mulgrew at press events. On this day, he would contrast his education platform with the charter school-friendly pasts of Adams and Yang, make a few jokes, and avoid the fire that was about to be trained on Yang.

In a moment ripe for a precocious student to shine, Mulgrew asked the candidates if they had “done their homework.” (“You mean, when I was a kid?” Yang stammered.) It turned out the UFT leader was referring to the union’s five-point plan to reopen schools in September. Had Adams, Wiley, Yang or Stringer read it?

Adams, yes. Wiley, “a Cliff Notes version.” Yang, no. Stringer? “I’ve done my homework, sir!” The question is, will a lifetime of preparation and a late-career shift to the left pay off for this scion of New York’s liberal establishment?

CHRONICLER OF INEQUALITY:

Thomas Piketty

WHY AMERICANS CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS

The Sum Of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone And How We Can Prosper Together

BY HEATHER MCGHEE

ONE WORLD BOOKS, 2021

By Teddy Ostrow

In the summer of 2010, 15-year-old Dekendrix Warner slipped down a clay-surfaced bank in a shallow recreation area in the Red River in Shreveport, Louisiana, falling into 20-foot-deep waters. Spotting Warner in distress, five other teenagers came after him. Neither they nor the adults watching in horror from the river bank — all Black — could swim. The six teenagers drowned.

The incident was tragic but not new to Black America. In 1953, when Baltimore's seven public pools were all segregated, a 13-year-old Black boy drowned in the Patapsco River while swimming with three friends, two of whom were white. The group couldn't go to any of the city's pools together, so they opted for the rougher open water.

A NAACP lawsuit desegregated Baltimore's pools just three years later, though what followed was far from friendly integration. Whites violently intimidated Black people who sought to use public pools in white neighborhoods, and many white people just stopped going to them. As other public pools across the country desegregated, instead of becoming hubs of interracial amusement, many of these gems of early 20th-century public infrastructure were drained, filled with cement, forgotten or replaced with (white) private pools. If whites couldn't have the pools to themselves, then no one but the white elite could have them at all.

The result of segregation and the closing of public pools is that today white Americans are twice as likely to know how to swim as Black Americans, and Black children are three times as likely to drown.

But, as Heather McGhee argues in her new book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We can Prosper Together*, draining pools in the name of white supremacy doesn't just hurt Black people, whether they're literal ones or other "pools" of public investment, like Medicaid or federal Pell grants for students. Rather, they hurt everyone, including white people. "Racism got in the way of all of us having nice things," McGhee writes bluntly.

Indeed, whites lost those public pools too.

The Sum of Us is in many ways a personal tale. An economic policy wonk, McGhee left her post as president of the liberal think tank Demos in 2018, frustrated with many progressives' lack of engagement with race in their economic justice programs. She views the biggest obstacle to a more just America as the "zero-sum" ideology widespread among white Americans: that their own prosperity must come at the expense of people of other races, and that improving the status of racial minorities means worsening the status of white people.

For the book, McGhee journeyed across America to understand how this zero-sum paradigm emerged and how it functions. What she found was a white populace manipulated by elites who stoke racialized fears and tensions to fragment the working classes for their own gain. "The zero

sum is a story sold by wealthy interests for their own profit, and its persistence requires people desperate enough to buy it," she writes.

White slaveholders' status in the pre-Civil War United States quite literally was zero-sum, as they benefited from the cruel system of African slave labor. She draws from W.E.B. Du Bois's concept in *Black Reconstruction* of the "public and psychological wage of whiteness," whites' elevated social status over enslavable Blacks, which sabotaged the clear economic benefit both groups would reap from interracial solidarity against the exploitative, propertied class.

In the following chapters, McGhee illustrates how the afterlives of America's original sin and the zero-sum racism that it bred have harmed all of us. She convincingly argues that racism foreclosed social democracy in the United States.

Another striking example of racism's what-goes-around-comes-around nature is in the housing sector. McGhee traces banks' predatory lending practices against African-Americans in the decades leading up to the subprime mortgage boom that precipitated the financial crisis of 2008. Those practices were the canary in the coal mine for a much broader crisis, which harmed Black people and other racial minorities disproportionately, but did not spare millions of white people.

"Such financial malfeasance was allowed to flourish because the people who were its first victims didn't matter nearly as much as the profits their pain generated," McGhee writes. "But the systems set up to exploit one part of society rarely stay contained."

Central to McGhee's proposed path forward is the "refilling of the public pool," the formation of a social democracy, but with targeted programs and stopgaps to make sure universalized policies are truly universal. McGhee spurns repeating the exclusion of predominantly African-American groups of workers from New Deal programs such as Social Security and the minimum wage. Further, she suggests a national, government-funded process of consciousness-raising to rewrite the ill-informed dominant narrative about race in the United States.

The Sum of Us is a readable work, packed with compelling history, personal narrative and heart-wrenching stories of both white and Black people whose lives were upturned by the discriminate and indiscriminate nature of structural racism. But McGhee also presents empowering tales of multiracial solidarity bringing significant victories, or "Solidarity Dividends" as she calls them — from the national Fight for \$15 movement to organizing for a "just transition" in Richmond, California.

In the end, *The Sum of Us* is a call to organize cross-racially against white supremacy, bringing whites — and people of all races — into the fold not by ignoring the importance of racism, but by reframing it as an issue that holds us all back.

Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential campaign was perhaps the closest the United States got in decades to refilling the pools. Sanders built a young, multiracial coalition on a platform of social-democratic reforms and a commitment to solidarity. But the movement failed to cajole enough working-class voters. Meanwhile, older Black and white voters alike stuck with their establishment gut, at least in part because they didn't trust that zero-sum America would vote for the candidate of "nice things."

In this way, among the American left's many political obstacles is not only a white majority steeped in that self-sabotaging zero-sum ideology, but a substantial number of would-be allies unconvinced that that majority would ever take their hands in solidarity. The Sanders campaigns unveiled the dividends in waiting. Only organizing, together, will allow us to start cashing the checks.



LYNNE FOSTER

The neoliberal turn in the 1970s and '80s that drained the pool of public investment was pushed through by politicians like Ronald Reagan, who used racist dog whistles to turn the white majority against "society's two strongest vessels for collective action: the government and labor unions." The result: millions of Americans, the majority of whom are white, suffer without basic social provisions such as universal healthcare, free college and the workplace advantages of union membership.

THE ZERO-SUM RACISM THAT SLAVERY BRED HAS HARMED ALL OF US.

POOR QUEER STUDIES ENTERS DAILY LIFE

Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University

BY MATT BRIM

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2021, 247 PAGES

By Eleanor J. Bader

It's a well-documented fact that the US system of higher education steers all but the most exceptional Black, Brown and low-income students into two-year and unranked four-year colleges and universities or for-profit proprietary programs that promise real-world job training and placement to graduates. It's also well known that many students who enroll never earn a degree. Instead, they drop out when it becomes too difficult to juggle course completion with family and financial responsibilities.

Still, as common as this scenario is in public universities throughout the 50 states, another parallel academic universe exists. In this one, top-tier—read rich—students attend top-tier schools and have the luxury of focusing on their studies and social lives to the exclusion of all else.

Call it the rich school / poor school-divide.

Matt Brim, an associate professor of Queer Studies at the College of Staten Island [CSI] of the City University of New York has taught at both types of institutions so has the expertise to compare and contrast them. Indeed, his reflections on the frustrations and joys of teaching queer studies classes to poor and working-class students at the chronically underfunded CSI are heartfelt and enraging. Nonetheless, *Poor Queer Studies* may be off-putting to readers unfamiliar with the many texts he references and the jargon used.

That said, the book is at its best when chronicling the many obstacles facing CSI's students, many of whom live at home with parents and siblings, have children of their own, and more-likely-than-not hold down full-time jobs while enrolled.

Grabbing a candy bar from a vending machine in lieu of a meal, then sitting in an overheated, underheated, or leaky classroom—with a computer and overhead projector that may or not be working during a particular class—will be appallingly familiar to many CUNY students and instructors.

Likewise, they'll recognize the restrictions on students whose ability to access readings are stymied by limitations on how many total copies they can print for free

each semester—at CSI it is 350.

Unlike richer schools where such conditions are unheard of, Brim posits that these deficits, however frustrating, also have an upside. By integrating with community, “Poor queer studies at a public commuter college makes its way home, into houses, neighborhoods, and into workplaces by traveling with its dynamic students,” he writes. This, he explains, can provoke questions and dis-

ate and practice speaking in a shared, nonstandard queer studies tongue...My students translate our classroom discussions, filled as they are with standard and queer academic languages and rhetoric, into non-academic and non queer languages and rhetoric: cross cultural ones, religious ones, familial ones.”

Black queer studies classes raise the ante further, he writes, by centering stories that might otherwise be dismissed or forgotten.

Brim finds this inclusiveness exciting and sees significant potential in the ability of poor queer studies to straddle the class divide and push a more egalitarian politics forward. “Poor queer studies refuses to pit race, class, and queer-ness against each other,” he writes, “even as it necessarily asks how rich queer studies participates in class stratification in the academy in its own ways and with its own impacts and with its own race-queer-class negotiations.”

Brim further believes that poor queer studies instructors can reject classism “as part of their intersectional work.” As the same time, he concedes that while “cross-class ferrying” is possible, “class and race contradictions abound.”

The stakes of eliminating these contradictions are, of course, extremely high. “As long as higher education operates from the current system of race and class sorting, as long as the rich get access to one kind of education and the poor get access only to another,” he writes, “and as long as queer studies follows the line of educational hierarchy rather than steps out of line to form collective resistance,” the status quo will be maintained. As someone who taught at Kingsborough Community College-CUNY for 16 years, I know that creating an egalitarian academy will require a complete reorganization, with a redistribution of resources to ensure that every student has full access to the materials and financial supports that are necessary for them to thrive. To do less betrays the long-deferred dream of education as a universal race-class-gender equalizer.

Eleanor J. Bader taught in the English Department at Kingsborough Community College from September 2004 until June 2020.



GARY MARTIN

cussion amongst those who glimpse titles such as *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens* being read.

Add in the benefits of an inter-generational student body and the richness of the personal and political exchanges that are fostered becomes evident. What's more, it becomes clear that poor queer studies classes—like classes in other disciplines—can provide a richer tableau than is found within more homogeneous student populations.

This crossover, Brim writes, allows students “to cre-

SUPPORT OUR TROUPES

Continued from Page 4

that I be on site for an additional two weeks.”

When the fee was calculated per day, she was making less. She talked to the theatre and they increased her pay. “How many times had I miss out on that opportunity to have that negotiation by not discussing the pay?” Beller asks.

“Requiring a clear rate of pay for all jobs listed on these popular job sites will promote pay transparency, help to reduce pay gaps based on biases, and combat deeply rooted pay inequity that subsidizes the industry and undermines the field’s potential diversity, sustainability, and artistic vitality,” says CP-FWE co-founder Elizabeth Wislar.

Requiring clear rates of pay is part of a larger movement by On Our Team and CP-FWE to remove gender and racial pay disparities in the theater industry.

“The largest subsidy for the arts comes not from governments, patrons, or the private sector, but from artists themselves in the form of unpaid or underpaid labor,” stated a 2019 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. “This requires new thinking to revise labor and social protection frameworks that take into account the unique and atypical manner in which artists work, especially female artists.”

“Concealment surrounding pay exacerbates the gender and racial pay gaps by rewarding job seekers who are able to aggressively negotiate or who have a history of a higher wage — a system that leaves women and marginalized populations at a

serious disadvantage,” the letter calling on Playbill to require pay rates in job postings said. “Playbill’s continued facilitation of pay secrecy perpetuates an arts community made up of the few people who are privileged enough to have a low (or no) personal bottom line. Transparency of pay will help organizations fulfill their missions of diversity and inclusion by leveling the playing field and eliminating unconscious biases.”

Nonwhite actors also tend to have lower salaries because plays featuring them tend to be relegated to smaller theaters, according to the Visibility Report: Racial Representation on New York City Stages, released in September 2020 by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition and based on data from 18 nonprofit theaters in the city. It said that while salary figures for Broadway are not published, it is “highly likely that a significant wage gap exists.”

Playbill is not the first theater Website to require job listings to include clear rates of pay. The Chicago-based OffStageJobs became one of the first major theater job posting sites to do so in 2018, with its “Post-The-Pay” rule. This required employers to include the numeric pay rate, starting pay rate, or potential pay rate range of the job, or state that there is no pay.

“We are celebrating the changes Playbill and BroadwayWorld have made and the transparency it will lead to,” says Elsa Hiltner, cofounder of On Our Team. “And beyond this campaign, we’re inspired by all the action and activism by theatre workers that is leading to positive systemic change.”



BRANDON O'NEILL

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Billy,
I'm fully vaxxed. I'm in my mid-40s and in good health but going back out into the world still seems scary, especially the thought of being indoors around lots of people or taking off my mask in the company of other people. How do I unlearn the fear of this past year?

DONNA
Sunset Park

Donna,
Your fear is real and reasonable. But "un-learning" it isn't realistic. Our fear of the coronavirus will be with us all of our days. In your first indoors experience with unmasked folks, all of you will be dealing with the fear and all of you will be bringing your own antidote for it, which is openness and trust.

This reunion we're going through, well, we need each other, because we are threatened in 2021 with virus, flood, fire and pestilence ... all the extreme events spinning out of the larger extinction of the Earth. Accepting all this, Donna, is not unlearning fear but relearning it. The time we live in tells us we must learn to live with fear.

Some of us had the privilege to feel safe for much of our lives. People of color, non-cisgender people, women living with sexist violence — think of those who find in COVID something to add to years of living in fear. They are our teachers now, as we go forward into the unknown. Oh, what a time we live in!

Courage, Donna!

— BILLY

Rev Billy,
My 12-year-old daughter is bored and miserable with life in the pandemic. Whether she goes to school (assuming it hasn't closed again due to COVID) or stays at home, her classes are conducted via Zoom. She sees less of her friends and when they are together, the 6-foot rule applies. How do I convince someone so young that it won't be this way forever even if it feels that way?

OLIVER
Washington Heights

Oliver,
The big old institutions are not our leaders. You act as if you let schools make your young one's educational choices. There is home schooling, neighborhood schooling, Coney Island schooling and Greta Thunberg schooling, which is striking every Friday for the Earth. Millions of students did just that and it impacted the curriculum, at least it did in our 11-year-old's Brooklyn school. Oliver! Bring the change! Radicalized individuals and families have the education in them, with or without COVID. If parents are realistic about the world they are leaving their children, then they will share a political conscience with their children.

Time for a teach-in!

— 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.

Notice of Formation of **PERSONA INTEGRATED MEDICAL ARTS LLC.**

Arts of Org filed with Secy of State of NY (SSNY) on 03/03/2021.

Office Loc: NY County.

SSNY designated as agent upon whom process may be served against LLC to:
720 Ft Washington Ave.,
New York, NY 10040.

Reg. Agent:
US Corp. Agents Inc.
7014 13th Ave, Ste 202, Bklyn, NY 11228.
Purpose: any lawful act.

LABOR and the Movements for Peace and Justice

A Forum Why is Labor's participation so important?
What's the history?
Where is Labor's involvement today?

Join the discussion
Wed. May 5th 6:30 pm

Christine Lewis - Organizer for Domestic Workers United, activist, writer, and performer.

Steve Kramer - Executive VP, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

Mike Zweig - Professor Emeritus, Stonybrook University
Former Director, Center for Study of Working Class Life.

Iris Deluto - VP, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Organized Labor has sometimes been in the forefront of movements for peace and social justice. But often, they have stood on the sidelines as attacks on unions during the McCarthy era diminished their power and left them more cautious. What is the history of that trend? Is the recent action against Amazon indicative of renewed upsurge in labor? Where and when have unions been active beyond their immediate economic issues? What is Labor's involvement in the NYC campaign to pass the City Council RES. 747A putting the city on record against bloated Pentagon budgets passed by Congress?

On Zoom!

Register here --
bit.ly/Labor4Peace



a BROOKLYN FOR PEACE
digital forum

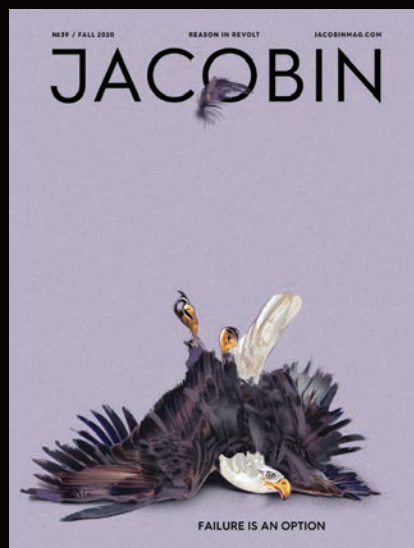
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