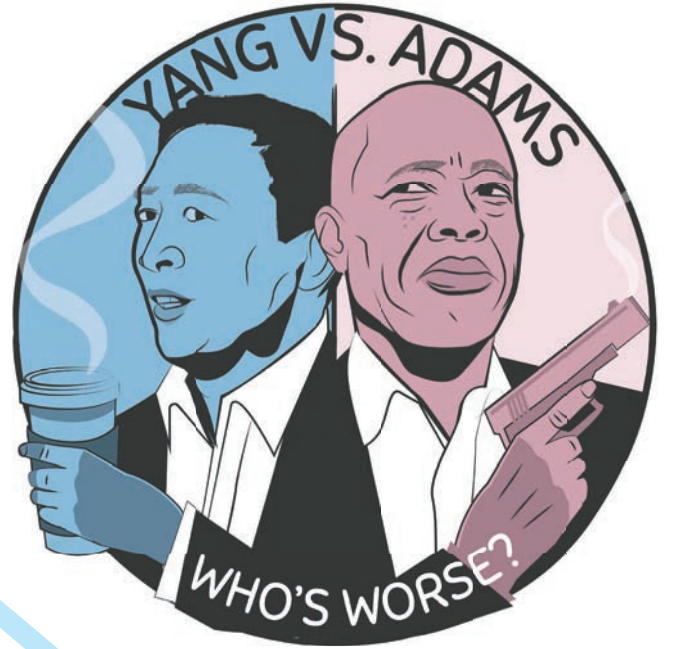


THE

EARLY VOTING STARTS JUNE 12 — ELECTION DAY JUNE 22

# INDYPENDENT

#264: JUNE 2021



# { 2021 NYC } ELECTION » GUIDE «

THE MAYOR'S RACE IS A HOT MESS,  
BUT THE LEFT CAN STILL WIN BIG IN OTHER DOWNBALLOT RACES  
{P8-15}



RANKED CHOICE VOTING


DO'S & DON'TS





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**EVENT CALENDAR**

SUE BRISK

**JUNE****JUNE 4-20**

TIME & PRICE (EST. \$50) TBD.  
POP UP MAGAZINE: THE SIDE-  
WALK ISSUE

This spring, the multimedia  
storytelling company Pop-Up  
Magazine takes to the streets.  
Walk, listen, read, and im-  
merse yourself in a series of  
story installations that unfold  
across Fort Greene. In true  
Pop-Up Magazine style, this  
boundary-pushing work mixes  
journalism, storytelling, and  
art to create a unique theatrical  
experience. Visit [bam.org/pop-up-magazine-the-sidewalk-issue](http://bam.org/pop-up-magazine-the-sidewalk-issue) for updates.  
**FORT GREENE PARK**  
*Dekalb Ave. & S Portland Ave.,  
Brooklyn*

**JUNE 4-13**

3PM-LATE • \$15-\$50  
BROOKLYN FILM FESTIVAL  
New York residents are getting  
vaccinated in large numbers.  
Cinemas are reopening with  
new, safer policies and criteria.  
Because of this, we feel we are  
experiencing a slow awakening  
from a two-year hibernation.  
Films will be shown virtually  
with a smaller selection of in-  
person showings. Visit <https://www.brooklynfilmfestival.org/festival> for more.  
**WINDMILL STUDIOS**  
*300 Kingsland Ave, Brooklyn*

**JUNE 11**

REOPENING: BAM ROSE  
CINEMA  
\$11-\$16  
BAM offers nuanced collec-

tions of films that  
include political,  
pathbreaking and  
visually inspir-  
ing selections.

The theater will  
continue to offer virtual  
cinema for those that don't yet  
feel comfortable going to the  
movies in person.  
**BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF  
MUSIC**  
*30 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn*

**JUNE 8-29**

8PM • FREE  
WASHINGTON SQUARE MUSIC  
FESTIVAL  
The Washington Square Music  
Festival resumes this year with  
free concerts of diverse kinds  
of music: jazz, fado, classic  
music and salsa every Tuesday  
evening in June. Performances  
will follow all state and lo-  
cal regulations regarding  
large-scale outdoor events.  
Admittance will require a free  
ticket, proof of vaccine and/or  
negative COVID test. Programs  
to follow, but Save the Date!  
Visit [ws-mf.org](http://ws-mf.org) for more.  
**WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK**  
*Washington Square, Manhattan*

**JUNE 16**

2PM-3PM • FREE  
RADICAL LAW: MICHAEL  
RATNER  
Join the Center for Constitu-  
tional Rights for a discussion  
about Michael Ratner's just  
published autobiography  
"Moving the Bar" (See review  
on Page 22) and reflect on his  
lessons for the next genera-  
tion of movement lawyers and  
activists. Contact [tjackson-mau@ccrjustice.org](mailto:tjackson-mau@ccrjustice.org) or 212-  
614-6448 to RSVP, for Zoom

and call-in instructions, or  
questions. RSVP by June 14.  
**VIRTUAL**

**JUNE 18-20**

JUNETEENTH NY FESTIVAL •  
FREE  
Juneteenth NYC's 12th  
annual celebration starts on  
Friday with professionals and  
residents talking about Health  
and Wellness; Saturday our  
hybrid virtual / in-person  
festival and ends highlighting  
aspiring youth entrepreneurs  
on Sunday at the Juneteenth  
Pomp. Visit [bit.ly/3fezCAN](http://bit.ly/3fezCAN) for  
registration details.  
**VIRTUAL & IN-PERSON IF  
RESTRICTIONS ALLOW**

**JUNE 26**

5PM  
NYC DYKE MARCH  
The NYC Dyke March is back  
this year. It will step off from  
Bryant Park at 5 p.m. on Satur-  
day, June 26, 2021 and march  
down Fifth Avenue ending at  
the fountain in Washington  
Square Park. Currently seeking  
volunteers to marshal the  
march. Visit [nycdykemarch.com/news](http://nycdykemarch.com/news) for more.  
**BRYANT PARK**  
*41 W. 40th St., Manhattan*

**JUNE 27**

2:30PM-6PM  
QUEER LIBERATION MARCH  
Now in its third year, the Queer  
Liberation March has become  
the boisterous antidote to the  
corporate-infused, police-  
entangled, politician-heavy  
parades that now dominate  
Pride celebrations. Enough is  
Enough; "Off of the sidelines  
and onto the streets," virtually  
as well as in person.

**BRYANT PARK**  
*41 W. 40th St.,  
Manhattan*

**ONGOING**

8AM-5PM • FREE  
OUTDOORS: SHIRLEY CH-  
ISHOLM STATE PARK  
Named in honor of a Brooklyn-  
born trailblazer who was the  
first Black congresswoman,  
as well as the first woman  
and African-American to run  
for President, this new park  
rises 130 feet above sea level.  
It offers spectacular views of  
the Empire State Building to  
the northwest, the Verrazano-  
Narrows Bridge and New  
York Harbor to the west, and  
Jamaica Bay to the south. The  
park features three murals.  
**SHIRLEY CHISHOLM STATE  
PARK**  
*1750 Granville Payne Ave,  
Brooklyn*

**THRU OCT 3**

THU-MON 10AM-6PM •  
\$0-\$25  
PHOTOGRAPHY: DAWOUD BEY:  
AN AMERICAN PROJECT  
Since the mid-1970s, Dawoud  
Bey has chronicled communi-  
ties and histories that have  
been largely underrepresented  
or even unseen, and his work  
lends renewed urgency to an  
enduring conversation about  
what it means to represent  
America with a camera. See  
review, Page 21.  
**THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF  
AMERICAN ART**  
*99 Gansevoort Street, Manhattan*

**ONGOING**

9AM-12AM FREE/ LOW COST  
PERFORMING ARTS: RESTART  
STAGES

**SPIRIT OF STONEWALL:** The  
third annual Queer Liberation March will be  
held Sunday June 27.

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*

**ONGOING**

WED-SUN 11AM-6/8PM •  
SUGGESTED CONTRIBUTION  
\$0-\$16  
ART MUSEUM: INSTALLATIONS  
"Lorraine O'Grady: Both/And"  
is the first retrospective of one  
of the most significant con-  
temporary figures working in  
performance, conceptual, and  
feminist art. The exhibition fea-  
tures 12 of the major projects  
O'Grady has produced over her  
four-decade career and also  
debuts a much-anticipated  
new installation. In addition,  
five of O'Grady's projects are  
installed in collection galleries  
throughout the Museum.  
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# IN THIS ISSUE

## NYPD'S NEW LOW, P4

After being arrested at a police brutality protest, Mailla Beach was stripped naked by the cops and left standing exposed.



## SOHO BAIT-AND-SWITCH, P6

The de Blasio administration's SoHo rezoning plan is a giveaway to real estate interests. So why is George Floyd being cited as an inspiration?

## END OF AN ERA, P7

Barbara Bowen reflects on her 21 years leading NYC's most leftwing union local & the ongoing struggle to transform the City University of New York.



## MORALES MELTDOWN, P8

Diana Morales's upstart mayoral campaign imploded in late May when her own staff went on strike against her. How did this happen?

## A STRANGE SCANDAL, P9

Jean Kim's allegation that Scott Stringer groped her 20 years ago upended the NYC mayor's race. It also left lingering questions.



## COPS VS. TECH BRO, P9

Eric Adams and Andrew Yang have led in most mayoral polls. They each would be terrible in their own unique way.

## A NEW WAY TO VOTE, P11

Learn how to make the most of your five votes per race in NYC's new ranked choice voting system.

## CITY COUNCIL WATCH, P12

Left candidates are running competitive campaigns across the city. If enough prevail, the impact could be transformative.

# {CITY COUNCIL} RACES » TO WATCH «

## SHOWDOWN IN DISTRICT 35, P15

It's liberals vs. socialists in a high-stakes battle for this Brooklyn Council seat.



## ROADMAP TO APARTHEID, P16

The oppression of the Palestinians is baked into Israel's founding ideology.

## WHEN COVID RAGES ON, P17

Tanzania's first woman president tries to undo the distrust of science that her predecessor sewed throughout society.



## THE RIGHT'S NEW BOGEYMAN, P18

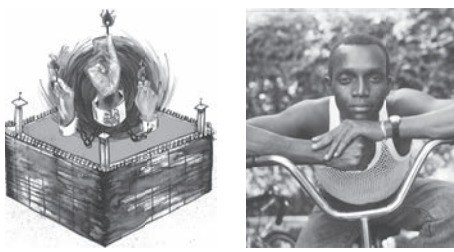
Critical race theory is about the impact of history on institutions, policies, laws, and most importantly, ideas.

## BLACK MOMS & MIDWIVES MATTER, P19

Black people in the US suffer disproportionately when they give birth due to centuries of racism and a for-profit medical system.

## BEYOND POLICE & PRISONS, P20

Mariame Kaba refuses to conflate retribution with justice in her new book.



## THE WHITNEY SENDS A MESSAGE, P21

Inspired by Black Lives Matter, the Whitney is hosting four concurrent exhibits by Black artists.

## MICHAEL RATNER'S MEMOIR, P22

A legal legend reflects on a half century of fighting for justice inside and outside the courtroom.



## REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS, P23

Reverend Billy wrestles with "All Lives Matter."



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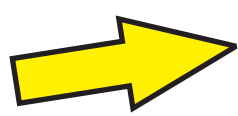
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## Take action And stand up for peace in for Palestinian the Mid East! rights!

As Americans, we are horrified by the horrific bombing campaign that Israel has unleashed on Gaza. And we are aghast that U.S. military aid to Israel, funded by our taxes, is used to kill innocent people and destroy Gaza's infrastructure, a land that is already suffering terribly and desperately poor due to malignant Israeli control.

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- End Israeli evictions, house demolitions and policies of ethnic cleansing. These illegal actions are what ignited this war in the first place.

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ADRIAN L. CHILDRESS



ERIC LANSNER

# PROTESTER ALLEGES NYP STRIPPED HER IN PUBLIC

**“HE PULLED MY PANTS DOWN TO MY ANKLES AND THEN MADE ME WALK ACROSS THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE NAKED,” SHE SAYS.**

BY OLIVIA RIGGIO WITH AMBA GUERGUERIAN

A protester is accusing NYPD officers of publicly stripping her naked while arresting her during a demonstration on the Brooklyn Bridge last month.

Demonstrator Maila Beach, 27, said that during an April 24 protest on the Brooklyn Bridge against NYPD misconduct, male Strategic Response Group (SRG) officers pulled her shirt over her head and her leggings down to her ankles while arresting her. Beach said the officers then severely beat her with their fists.

Beach went to the hospital after the incident, where she said the staff was alarmed by the severity of her injuries from the arrest.

“The doctor said that if the nurse hadn’t given him the rundown of what happened first and he hadn’t noticed ... all the marks against my wrists that correspond with being arrested, he would’ve thought I was coming in from a bad car accident because I had severe whiplash and a severe concussion,” she told *The Independent*.

Beach, who is pressing charges against the NYPD, is represented by Manhattan District Attorney candidate Tahanie Aboushi. The two detailed the incident at a May 6 press conference on the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge.

“Going out to marches, it’s understood that you could get arrested, but sexual assault never came to mind,” Beach said at the conference.

• • •

BEACH WAS DEMONSTRATING as part of a group led by organizer Terrell “Relly” Harper, who also spoke at the press conference. Since January, Harper’s group has been marching to the 84th Precinct near downtown Brooklyn every week, calling for the firing of NYPD officer Artem Prusayev, who was caught on video pulling a gun on protesters in January.

Beach, who was fired from her job as a commercial auto parts driver due to her arrest, says she is one of four people who have had their clothes pulled off in public at the hands of the NYPD in recent weeks. She is currently the only victim of these strippings speaking publicly.

Harper told *The Indy* that one week prior to Beach’s arrest, the police pulled another young protester’s pants down to their ankles and left them in zip-tie handcuffs lying on the ground for several minutes, exposed. This occurred at another “Fire Artem” demonstration held at the Barclays Center.

“They’re saying, ‘Relly, Relly, look,’” recalled Harper. I look down — they’re on the ground and they’re handcuffed, and their pants are to their ankles ... They’re just like, ‘What the hell is going on?’”

Harper said the other two victims have been associated with a group called The Stonewall Protests, which has been marching weekly since last summer to advocate for Black transgender and queer liberation. He said one of the demonstrators who police publicly stripped was a transgender woman who police sent to an all-male unit despite her I.D. listing her sex as female.

*The Indy* was unable to interview the other victims, who wish to stay anonymous at this time.

• • •

THE NIGHT OF APRIL 24 began with the protesters marching over the bridge to the 84th Precinct near Brooklyn Heights. After the group’s demonstration, officers began pushing the group back over the bridge’s roadway toward Manhattan, Beach says.

The cops then allegedly kettled the protesters and demanded they get on the sidewalk, despite there being no sidewalk on the bridge.

In the flurry of the kettle, Beach said she was grabbed by officers who forced her to the ground and put her hands behind her back.

During the arrest, Beach said, her shirt was pulled up completely above her chest. When she tried to move her hand out from behind her back to pull her shirt down, the officers accused her of resisting arrest. She says they then began beating her with their fists.

“I tried to tell them then that I had epilepsy and I said it extremely loud. I know that they heard me and they kept hitting me in the back of the head,” Beach said.

After she allowed them to fasten the zip-ties, the officers pulled her up from the ground. Then, Beach claims, one pulled her shirt behind her head so the front of it was against the back of her neck.

“One of them grabbed hold of my pants,” she said. “He pulled them down to my ankles and then made me walk across the Brooklyn Bridge naked.”

Beach said she had to walk from the center of the bridge to the Brooklyn side completely exposed. After close to 15 minutes, officers pulled Beach’s clothes back on. She says that not only did officers offer no reason for stripping her, but didn’t even search her.

After a few minutes of sitting in the police van, Beach noticed her hand had gone completely numb. When the officers pulled over to readjust her zip-ties after an hour of Beach pleading for them to do so, they allowed her to move her hand before re-cuffing it about as tightly as before. Beach pulled her hand in front of her and noticed it had turned purple, she said.

Beach said she was pulled so aggressively from the car when she arrived at the precinct that her pants began slipping again. After several minutes, another woman officer pulled them up for her. Beach said the same officer also advocated for her to have water to rinse out the mace in her eyes.

“She was the only one who was actually trying to follow the rules. All the rest of them did not care,” Beach says.

The NYPD responded to *The Indy*’s request for comment with the following statement. They also said over e-mail that they’d review Beach’s lawsuit when served.

“A preliminary review of the incident indicates that officers made every effort to ensure the individual remained clothed during the arrest, including asking for the assistance of a female officer in the process.”

• • •

“EVEN IF SHE WANTED TO obstruct traffic. Even if she was resistant — which she wasn’t, she complied,” Aboushi told *The Indy*. “They beat her up when she was on the floor, they beat her up when she was handcuffed. Even whatever they’re accusing her of doing wrong, it doesn’t warrant that brutality. It doesn’t warrant stripping and having her exposed to the public.”

Aboushi maintains that the officers did not make any effort to keep her client clothed, and that several witnesses can attest to that.

“The reason why the NYPD feels so comfortable



displaying their complete disregard for the law in front of cameras, in front of witnesses, is because they have been able to rely on [special] treatment,” Aboushi said at the press conference.

---

**FIGHTING BACK:** *Maila Beach speaks about her experience of being publicly stripped by the NYPD at a May 6 press conference.*

---

**STAND-OFF:** *Black Lives Matter protesters and the NYPD meet again earlier this spring.*

---

• • •

AN APRIL 2021 REPORT by New York City’s Department of Investigation, while treading lightly, found that the NYPD’s response to the George Floyd protests was poorly planned and executed and involved excessive force.

Mayor Bill de Blasio responded by changing the NYPD’s guidance for protests, building from the DOI’s recommendations. “There were clear lessons to be learned from the protest response last year and a desire to see real, on the ground changes,” said the mayor in April.

The NYPD’s April reforms of its protest policing included changes such as keeping the Strategic Response Group — heavily armored bike cops that have been key players in flanking marches and kettling protesters over the past year — at bay during demonstrations.

According to the DOI & Law Protest Recommendation Tracker, the NYPD’s implementation of the DOI’s recommendations regarding the SRG is “in progress.”

Another change introduced by the reforms is that the NYPD will no longer use kettling, a practice that pens in protesters after they are told they must disperse or be arrested, normally resulting in a slew of messy and often violent arrests. The police department came under heat from not only the Office of the Inspector General, but Attorney General Letitia James, Human Rights Watch and the NYCLU, among others, for their aggressive use of kettling during the George Floyd uprising. “Kettling is not an acceptable tactic and will not be used by the Department,” the mayor’s office said when it announced the April reforms.

Body cameras, of course, were always to be worn. New York State requires police officers to begin recording before an officer interacts with a person or situation. The leaked “Floyd Demo Quick Reference,” a sheet of instructions of how to deal with the Floyd protests, reminds all protest police to upload all of their body cam footage “at the end of their tour.”

Despite the mayor’s announced reforms, Beach and Harper say they have seen SRG officers at multiple protests recently and that the elite police unit kettled demonstrators on the Brooklyn Bridge on April 24. There is no known body cam footage of Beach’s arrest.

Harper says that the “Fire Artem”

marches to the 84th Precinct have only recently been met with excessive force, despite going on for months.

Janet Burns, head reporter at PROTEST\_NYC, a journalism collective that has been on the ground reporting at protests for the past year, says that she has seen an uptick in reports of sexual violence perpetrated by police in the past several weeks.

“Sexual violence is part of the NYPD’s toolkit, period,” she told *The Indy*. “This is clear from decades of community outcry, as well as from the consistent, seemingly escalating series of incidents that protesters have reported over the past year — ranging from sexualized insults and invasive, public and/or arbitrary ‘strip searches’ to hog-tying and groping — many of which our team have witnessed

## THREE OTHER PROTESTERS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY STRIPPED BY THE NYPD THIS SPRING, INCLUDING A TRANSGENDER WOMAN.

first-hand (or, in a few cases, endured).”

Beach said she’s unable to outline the demands of her upcoming lawsuit at this time. She came forward with her story, she said, so that others aren’t subjected to the same experience.

“My main goal is to stop this from happening to other girls, especially the younger girls that do come and protest with us,” said Beach.

Go to [independent.org/2021/05/stripped-in-public/](https://independent.org/2021/05/stripped-in-public/) for a longer version of this article.

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Both are “must have” additions to the libraries of anyone wishing to ground themselves in Marxist principles and will provide the lucky reader with excellent reference and study aides to accompany a reading of Marx’ *Capital*

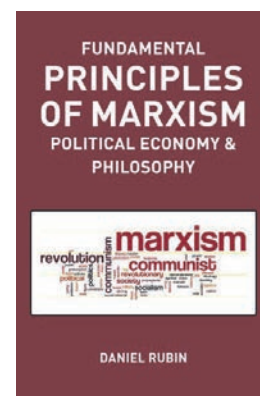
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**Heidi Boghosian**,  
Executive Director, A. Muste Memorial Institute;  
and **Michael Steven Smith**,  
New York City attorney and author.

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## NEIGHBORHOODS



# SOCIAL JUSTICE SWITCHEROO

## CITY INVOKES GEORGE FLOYD'S NAME TO JUSTIFY DEVELOPER GIVEAWAY IN SOHO REZONING BATTLE.

BY TODD FINE

City Hall suggests that Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to rezone SoHo, NoHo and a chunk of Chinatown is a courageous act of racial and social justice. Deputy Mayor Vicki Beckett said that the killing of George Floyd motivated the effort, and *The New York Times* and several mayoral candidates have called it a model for urban "desegregation." Yet, several tenants' rights groups and neighborhood activists argue that the plan would produce little to no new affordable housing, and might actually reduce racial diversity by displacing working-class residents of Chinatown.

The plan relies on Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH), the de Blasio administration's chief mechanism for trying to create "affordable" apartments. It would upzone the area to let developers build taller buildings than would normally be allowed, ostensibly in exchange for making 25% to 30% of residential units below market rate. The Department of City Planning projects that the rezoning would lead to about 3,200 new apartments, with 600 to 900 of them "affordable."

The rezoning would be the Mayor's first in a predominantly white and relatively affluent area. Previous rezonings largely occurred in poor and working-class black/Latino neighborhoods such as East New York, the west Bronx, Inwood and East Harlem. Thus, the SoHo action is being sold as the "anti-rezoning" in a "rich, white" neighborhood. That has some liberal urbanists excited. Artists' loft conversions transformed SoHo from a declining manufacturing zone into a posh arts and shopping district that has good schools and convenient transportation, making it a prime target for advocates of greater density.

The main criticism of previous rezonings is that the "affordable" apartments they produced were too expensive for neighborhood residents. The luxury development they depend on set off waves of speculation that displaced current tenants, and City Planning has had no effective mechanism to address displacement. Displacement is extremely likely here, as developers are given an incentive to tear down lower-rise buildings. The SoHo and NoHo zoning districts are dotted with rent-regulated apartments, especially on the Bowery and Thompson Street, and the plan's most aggressive upzoning is reserved for a section of Chinatown along Canal Street that is significantly Asian and low-income.

In addition, plan opponents like Village Preservation, TenantsPAC, and the Chinatown Working Group say their analysis shows that the rezoning "is likely to produce little, if any, of the promised affordable housing." A report released May 14 by Village Preservation said the plan is "structured to make it more profitable for developers to build entirely without affordable housing." The report concludes that on 76 of the 84 sites where the City projects affordable housing will be built, "developers could actually construct 100% market-rate buildings with no affordable housing" that would be just as large as options that include affordable housing, and that on the other eight sites, buildings with no affordable housing would have to be only slightly smaller.

One loophole is that the MIH requirement is triggered only if a particular development includes more than 25,000 square feet of residential space. If developers decline to build affordable housing in

**THE OTHER SOHO:** Hank Dombrowski and his neighbor Penny Brown are rent-stabilized tenants who have both lived in SoHo for decades. They worry a planned rezoning could lead to their displacement.

new projects above 12,500 square feet of residential, yet below 25,000, they are supposed to contribute to a fund for affordable housing, yet such mechanisms are historically abused and may not meaningfully influence developer decision-making.

In the plan's prime development areas, on a smaller lot of 2,000 to 2,500 square feet, a developer could legally construct a 10- to 12-story residential building with zero affordable housing. In the zoning districts in the so-called "historic cores" of SoHo and NoHo, City Planning asserts that developers will actively choose to participate in MIH and donate 20% to 30% of their square footage, even though they could fulfill their entire allotted square footage with market-rate units.

All retail, commercial, office, and community-facility usages are exempt from affordable-housing requirements, and the plan does not prevent developers from mixing residential with other functions. Therefore, on many of the lots projected for MIH construction, developers have an entire menu of options to adjust the percentages between to avoid triggering the MIH rules. Building 25,000 square feet of market-rate residential on top of a commercial and retail base is not a bad choice, given that the higher floors are more valuable with their views and are quieter on busy arteries like Canal Street or Broadway.

On the largest potential sites, City Planning predicts that developers will merge zoning lots and build sizable, new residential complexes with significant amounts of affordable housing. However, there is nothing stopping them from constructing several buildings next to each other, none of which would pass the 25,000 square-foot threshold on their own. This possibility includes the parking lots at 174 Centre St. and 375 Lafayette St. owned by Edison Properties, a donor to de Blasio's political campaigns that also holds several other properties in the area slated for rezoning.

The plan also gives owners incentives to build new luxury residential additions on top of landmarked buildings. Such penthouses, perhaps the tackiest violation of the historic buildings of SoHo, could be the crowning jewels of a real-estate giveaway. No affordable housing would be required, and the construction could be used to harass loft-law and rent-regulated tenants.

The pro-developer group Open New York, which campaigns for any and all types of residential construction, is worried that the plan would encourage pure commercial development rather than residential. Articles in the real-estate press also suggest that the hypothetical residential zoning benefits may not be enough to sweeten the deal.

The uncertain result is juxtaposed against the 5 World Trade Center site down the street, where the City and State are voluntarily declining an affordable development on public land that could easily exceed the entire projected units of the SoHo rezoning.

"The affordable-housing loopholes in this plan are so big you can drive all 84 sites where the mayor claims affordable housing will be built through them, and that's no accident. This plan was designed as a giveaway to the developers who have lobbied and donated generously for it for years," Village Preservation executive director Andrew Berman said in a statement May 14. "If this plan is approved in the final hours of the de Blasio administration, its impact won't be seen until long after the mayor's out of office, leaving New Yorkers holding the bag. The mayor may wrap his plan in a veneer of social-justice rhetoric, but it's nothing more than a cynical scheme to line the pockets of his developer donor friends."



# PASSING THE TORCH

## RETIRING LEADER OF NYC'S LEFTMOST UNION LOCAL LOOKS BACK ON LONG STRUGGLE TO TRANSFORM CUNY

BY JOHN TARLETON

**I**t was the spring of 2000 and neoliberalism was flowering all across the land when a contingent of unabashedly left-wing professors at the City University of New York running as the New Caucus won control of their dormant faculty union.

With the left excluded from power almost everywhere and most of the labor movement in a decades-long slumber, the New Caucus's victory at the largest urban university system in the country marked a rare breakthrough.

The newly elected leaders of the Professional Staff Congress had been protesting the defunding of CUNY for years. In March 1995, some of them donned their academic robes and joined 20,000 CUNY students in an unpermitted march near Rudy Giuliani's City Hall that ended with mounted police charging into the crowd on horses. The New Caucus also had clamored to no avail, for their union to join the fightback. Now, they were in charge and had to deliver.

"It was an exciting time," recalls Barbara Bowen, the Queens College Professor of English Literature who became the PSC's new president in 2000 and stepped down last month after 21 years on the job.

The newly energized union held mass membership meetings, created an organizing department from scratch, built a modern filing system (which had previously been a single bag full of random papers), revamped the union newspaper, created new committees — including ones for cultural programming and international solidarity — and launched a contract campaign that grew to have 174 demands. Everyone's voice would be heard!

"What I'm proudest of is that we were able to make the PSC a fighting union that does not give up," said Bowen, who will take a year-long research sabbatical before returning to the classroom. "When something happens on campus or some edict comes out from management, the first thing a lot of members say is, 'Where's the union on this?' I love that because when I first came to CUNY, no one would ever ask where the union was."

During Bowen's tenure, the PSC earned its reputation as arguably the most left-wing union local in the city. Its membership increased from 17,000 to 30,000 members. It embraced radical grassroots movements from Mexico to South Africa while achieving concrete gains for its members — rescuing its welfare fund from insolvency and becoming the public sector union in New York to win paid parental leave, targeted increases to address salary inequities of race and gender, paid research leave for untenured faculty and paid office hours for part-time faculty.

"We use the contract, I think really creatively, as an arena of struggle to reshape the university," Bowen said.

"Barbara's one of the most effective union leaders in the country," said Nancy Romer, a retired Brooklyn College professor who served on the PSC Executive Council for nine years. "She and the New Caucus took a moribund union and made it a fighting union."

Bowen grew up in England. Her parents didn't receive a college education but still infused a love of learning in their children. She studied at Oberlin and Yale with an interlude of organizing migrant tobacco pickers. During her graduate studies, she also threw herself into supporting a union drive by Yale's clerical workers. By the time she came to CUNY in 1985, it was probably inevitable that she would be drawn to union activism at the austerity-ridden university.

**COLLECTIVE ACTION:** PSC President Barbara Bowen leads a 2011 protest outside a CUNY Board of Trustees meeting.

I felt a rush of emotions when I learned of her retirement. From 2009 to 2014, I served as associate editor of the PSC's monthly newspaper and had a front row seat as the union continued to push forward against the headwinds of a neoliberal era.

Bowen lived and breathed the union and was a talented public speaker. Her knowledge of CUNY's 25 campuses, their academic departments and individual union members is encyclopedic. She has been a tenacious negotiator with the city, the state and CUNY management, but is also someone who once led the union's delegate assembly in joyously singing "If I Had a Hammer" to honor the passing of folk music legend Pete Seeger.

My time at the PSC was a master class in the intersection of idealism and realpolitik led by Bowen, First Vice President Steve London and other New Caucus members.

Even the smallest victory was hard fought. And there were always looming budget cuts to reverse. Big victories, such as getting 2,000 veteran adjuncts on the city's health care plan, sometimes took more than a decade. Relationships with other unions had to be tended to. Mainstream politicians had to be educated and cultivated. The needs of competing power centers within the union had to be balanced. CUNY's corporate-minded leaders were adversaries one day and potential allies the next, depending on circumstances.

For an ascendant left that has gained in clout and confidence in recent years with previously unimaginable electoral victories at the federal, state and local level, there's much to be learned from the New Caucus's experience of wielding power.

Not that everything has gone as hoped for the PSC. The austerity budgets of New York City and State have not ended. To the frustration of some PSC activists, the union's leadership has never directly challenged the Taylor Law, the New York State statute that bars public sector unions from striking and levies devastating penalties against them if they do. Most vexing of all, the union has been unable to end the two-tier labor system at CUNY that has taken hold in academia over the past 40 years and left poorly paid part-time faculty teaching the majority of classes.

"What's most vivid in my mind," Bowen said, "are the things not done rather than the things done because they weigh heavily."

Even hard-fought victories sometimes must be struggled for anew. Last year, 2,000 part-time faculty lost their jobs at CUNY amid the pandemic. Some of the rehired adjuncts have not received enough teaching hours to qualify for the city worker health care plan. During last year's pandemic, CUNY Chancellor Félix Mattos unilaterally revoked a 2% raise that had been agreed to in the union's current collective bargaining agreement. Additional pay raises for historically underpaid job titles were eliminated.

Bowen says the union will not rest until it wins back those concessions. That battle and others will be carried forward by a younger generation led by incoming President James Davis. Davis told *The Independent* the pandemic has forced the union to decentralize its operations.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," Davis said. "We've developed strengths that will serve us well in the future."

For Bowen, her final, pandemic year in office was her most demanding. After 21 years of total commitment to her work, letting go isn't easy. But, she says she is ready for the change.

"You haven't done your job as a leader if you haven't prepared the people to take over for you," she said.



DAVE SANDERS



# DIANNE MORALES'S 'BEAUTIFUL MESS'

BY JULIA THOMAS

On a Saturday afternoon in early May, dozens of people milled about Sunset Park's namesake green space during a block party for New York City mayoral candidate Dianne Morales. It was a chilly, slightly overcast day, and a spirited crowd had gathered to support Morales on a hilltop near the center of the park. Lower Manhattan's skyscrapers could be seen glistening in the distance.

And yet, Morales was on the ground in the heart of Sunset Park, a historically working-class Latinx neighborhood that is also home to Brooklyn's first Chinatown. In a speech to the crowd, she shared her vision for a New York City centered around "dignity, care, and Solidarity," the values her campaign has claimed to uphold.

"This is not about me," Morales said. "This is about the movement that we are building together."

"The core sort of premise of my platform is co-governance and the co-creation of a future city for New Yorkers," she told *The Independent* over a phone call that same week.

After significant upheaval within Morales's campaign, these words are now ringing hollow for many New Yorkers who saw Morales, a 53-year-old Bed-Stuy native and former nonprofit executive with a background in social services and education, as the candidate with the most progressive values in the crowded mayoral race. In a shocking turn of events, Morales's once-promising campaign unraveled in late May amid accusations of a toxic workplace, union busting and a failure to pay campaign staffers their salaries.

The long-shot bid of Morales had excited the left and gained momentum in the weeks leading up to the June 22 mayoral primary, receiving prominent endorsements from left-wing groups inspired by her unapologetic support for progressive causes.

"There's two good words for Dianne Morales: competent and cool," said Allen Roskoff, president of the Jim Owles Club, earlier that month at a press conference announcing that the Chelsea-based group of progressive LGBTQ Democrats had endorsed her. "Dianne Morales knows what empathy is."

## STAFF REVOLT

Many of her own staffers would beg to disagree. Employees for weeks had raised concerns about "a culture of manipulation, harassment and abuse" in the campaign office and described their grievances directly to Morales, according to a statement from the Dianne Morales for Mayor Union. However, staffers and involved supporters received "vague and unclear statements on what would be done to transform this toxic workspace," in response.

And so commenced a flurry of resignations and firings: First, campaign manager Whitney Hu quit. Days later, Ifeoma Ike, a senior adviser, resigned. Then came the dismissal of staffers Ramses Duke and Amanda Van Kesell, whom a Morales campaign spokesperson confirmed were the employees accused of misconduct.

When some of the remaining staff decided to launch a unionization effort to address employee complaints, Morales fired four of the union leaders minutes before she was supposed to meet with her staff to discuss their collective demands.

A day later, on May 28, Morales staffers went out on strike and publicly protested at Bryant Park.

Staffers at the protest vowed to continue their strike until their core demands, including the immediate reinstatement of the four union leaders who were fired, revised equitable compensation, a leadership structure co-created with campaign staff and a grievance process for



reporting misconduct, were met.

"It is deeply disappointing that a candidate who claims to support unions refused to engage in this conversation," the Mayrales Union said in a statement. "Our team is ready to coordinate with Dianne as soon as she agrees to our demands and respects our workers, workers who devoted their lives and risked their livelihoods in order to build a dignified movement in New York City."

Morales put an optimistic spin on the situation, calling it a "beautiful mess" that highlighted her ability to continue multitasking through a crisis. She said she refused to recognize the union because it only included some of her staffers and that it was engaged in a "coup" to take over her campaign.

So, how did we get to this tumultuous place, just weeks before the mayoral primary and after months of campaigning? It's the lack of a strong candidate on the Left and the current tendency of progressives to give "reflexive deference towards people that deploy a certain kind of vocabulary around social justice," said Matt Thomas, a Queens-based writer, researcher

and democratic socialist who served as communications director for Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani (D-Astoria) in his upset victory last year over a five-term incumbent.

"The unfortunate thing about the mayor's race," Thomas added, "is that there was no option, nobody talking about what it would really take to implement a radical agenda."

Morales filled a void by running well to the left of other major candidates. She proposed to defund the NYPD's annual budget by \$3 billion, or about 50%, (compared to Maya Wiley's proposal to defund by \$1 billion and enact surface-level reforms, or Scott Stringer's commitment to "improve police accountability and oversight") and fundamentally transform the city's approach to public safety.

"She really caught on because she's the only candidate in the race who has supported fully defunding the police, and there's no one else who has embraced it in any way except for her," Ross Barkan, a journalist and columnist, told *The Indy*. "That's why she has drawn attention and excited younger progressives, because she's unapologetic on that particular issue."

## AVOIDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Throughout her campaign, Morales managed to deflect questions about her role for about the past 10 years as CEO and executive director at Phipps Neighborhoods, a social services branch of Phipps Houses, which is notorious for evicting low-income people and being one of New York City's worst landlords.

"There's no evidence that she ever spoke up against Phipps, or criticized Phipps or attempted to change the internal culture there," Barkan said.

On May 17, Thomas re-shared a recording from a February 2020 podcast in which Morales described herself as "resistant to the label" of progressive or democratic socialist, and "a strong believer" in school choice, or parents' ability to use public funds to send their children to privately-managed schools. She told the interviewers she couldn't remember who she voted for in the 2018 gubernatorial primary, but that it "probably" was Gov. Andrew Cuomo instead of his left-wing challenger Cynthia Nixon.

"There's just no universe in which there's somebody that has this commitment to some kind of progressive change and is pro-Cuomo," said Thomas, who subsequently released an in-depth report on Morales's nearly two-decade-long immersion in the charter school movement, which has been lavishly funded by Wall Street and billionaires like Bill Gates and the Walton Family who are intent on privatizing public education.

As *The Indy* goes to press, it remains to be seen whether Morales can revive her campaign. Regardless, Morales's sudden appearance on the political scene as a "movement candidate" and the late-breaking controversies that engulfed her campaign offer valuable lessons for leftists in New York, including the need to scrutinize candidates more closely.

"I think that there is a lot to be considered about Morales that is unrelated to the staff blow-up," Thomas said. "I'd encourage people to think more seriously about the substance of her platform, and whether or not it's in accord with what she has demonstrated throughout her career."

**THE CANDIDATE:**  
Dianne Morales greets a supporter in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.





LEIA DORAN

# STRINGERGATE'S MANY QUESTIONS

BY JOHN TARLETON

It was the single most dramatic moment so far in this year's Democratic mayoral primary. And one that has left many lingering questions.

On April 28, City Hall lobbyist Jean Kim and her lawyer Patricia Pastor held a brief press conference outside City Hall in which Kim alleged that City Comptroller and top tier mayoral candidate Scott Stringer had groped and forcibly kissed her without her consent and offered to trade political favors for sex 20 years earlier when she was working on another campaign of his.

The fallout was swift among Stringer's younger progressive supporters

State Senator Jessica Ramos rescinded her endorsement within 24 hours. State Senators Alessandra Biaggi and Julia Salazar, Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou, Congressman Jamaal Bowman and the New York Working Families Party exited the Stringer campaign en masse a couple of days later. So too the Sunrise Movement which issued this statement.

"After a deep inquiry into the details of this situation and hearing Kim's brave testimony recounting her trauma, Sunrise NYC immediately rescinds our endorsement of Scott Stringer and calls for him to drop out of the race for Mayor of New York City."

Stringer's response to the charges — that he had done nothing wrong and in fact was involved in a consensual relationship with Kim in 2001 — further infuriated his now-former supporters.

Before Kim's allegation, Stringer's mayoral run as a progressive with unparalleled political and administrative experience was finally gaining momentum. In the previous week, he had won the endorsement of the Working Families Party and the United Federation of Teachers and polls had him rising to a close third behind Andrew Yang and Eric Adams. Now his campaign was suddenly a smoldering wreck.

Me Too scandals have followed a familiar path in recent years — one high-profile allegation leads to other victims coming forward with similar accounts of abusive behavior (Gov. Andrew Cuomo, for example, now faces 11 Me Too allegations). Corroboration also comes in the form of testimony of friends and associates the victim may have confided in. Once a pattern has been established, the perpetrator is driven from the powerful position they inhabit.

In Stringer's case, there has been no contemporaneous corroboration of Kim's allegation. In fact, *The Intercept* subsequently published reporting that documented that a number of Kim's claims about the context and nature of her relationship to Stringer and the Upper West Side political club they both belonged to were false. This includes Kim's claims about how and when she met Stringer, her involvement with Stringer's political club which continued for more than a decade after the alleged incident and her applying for a position on Stringer's 2013 campaign for Comptroller which she initially denied. In the same article, several mutual friends of Stringer and Kim from 20 years ago said they were widely believed to be in a relationship at the time and recalled Stringer and Kim holding hands and walking with their arms around each other on a number of occasions.

Subsequent reporting by *The Intercept* revealed that Patricia Pastor was not primarily a "sex crimes attorney" as she had claimed at the April 28 press conference. Instead, she had worked for the previous decade as general counsel with an anti-union construction company that had clashed with Stringer when he sided with unions in a labor dispute at the Hudson Yards mega-project.

None of these revelations prove Kim's original allegation is false. On June 4, the *New York Times* reported that a second woman, Teresa Logan, was accusing Stringer of sexually harassing her. Logan, who is also represented by Pastor, worked in 1992 as a waitress at restaurant Stringer co-owned.

Stringer, meanwhile, continues to hover on the edge of the race. Polls show him with 10-15% of the first choice vote and running third or fourth place behind three more conservative opponents: Adams, Yang and former Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia. Millennial leftists have moved on like Stringer never existed. However, the unions that backed him have remained in his corner.

"The basic work of why unions form is about workplace rules, and allegations are a major piece of workplace rules," teachers union president Michael Mulgrew told the *Times*. "Their thing when they see something like this is, what's the due process?"



LEIA DORAN

# ADAMS VS. YANG, WHO'S WORSE?

BY JOHN TARLETON

Andrew Yang and Eric Adams have topped the polls for most of the mayor's race. It's a depressing spectacle and good reason to use all five of your ranked choice votes on other candidates — Maya Wylie, Scott Stringer, Dianne Morales, Kathryn Garcia, Shaun Donovan, whoever! — and hope one of them breaks through and prevails in the end. As for Adams and Yang, you be the judge of who's worse.

## ERIC ADAMS

### Once a Cop Always a Cop

Eric Adams served in the NYPD for 22 years. Once a cop, always a cop. In a bizarre video Adams released while he was a state senator, he shows parents how to search their homes for illicit contraband their children might sneak in.

"You have to inspect what you expect," he intones as walks into his living room. In quick succession, he finds a handgun in a jewelry box, a crack pipe in the pocket of a book bag and a plastic bag full of drugs in the back of a baby doll. Go to YouTube and type in "Eric Adams" and "searches home for crack pipe" and see for yourself.

### Fighting Gentrification

Speaking at a MLK Day celebration in January 2020, Adams told recent arrivals to New York to "Go back to Iowa!" and

that New York City "belongs to the people that were here." Left unsaid was that the very real estate developers who are making bank off of building market-rate housing in New York City for well-to-do gentrifiers have donated millions of dollars to Adams during his political career.

### Charter Schools

A group of pro-charter school billionaire hedge fund managers led by Daniel Loeb and Kenneth Griffin are pumping a late infusion \$6 million into Strong Leadership NYC, a pro-Adams Super PAC. Charter schools receive public funds but are privately managed.

They have a non-unionized workforce and are notorious for shuttling emotionally and academically challenged children back to the public schools. Adams is a vocal supporter of having the state cap on charter schools increased.

### Corruption

Adams has been investigated by federal, state and local authorities for everything from helping steer state contracts to campaign contributors to using his power to aid donors to his nonprofit group, One Brooklyn Fund Inc.

### All in for Israel

"Israelis live under the constant threat of terrorism and war and New York City's bond with Israel remains unbreakable," Adams tweeted on May 10 at the beginning of the Israeli onslaught against the Gaza Strip.

## ANDREW YANG

### Tusk-Tusk

Yang was recruited to run for mayor by Bradley Tusk, a former Bloomberg campaign manager known as "Silicon Valley's favorite political fixer." Tusk Strategies is a fully integrated shop that runs both electoral and issue-based campaigns and lobbies elected officials. Its clients include the real estate industry, the charter school lob-

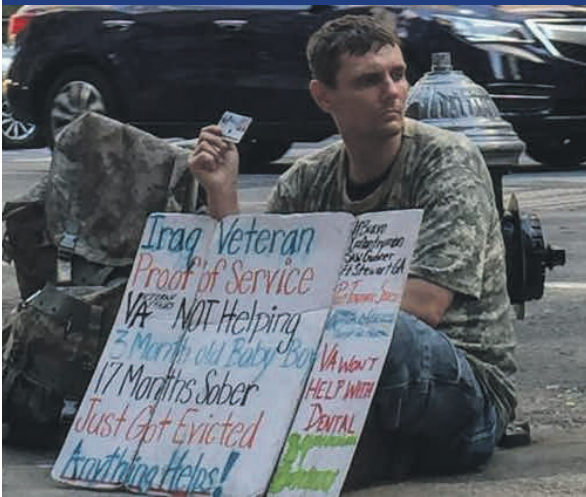
Continued on page 22



# Veterans want to know ...

## New York City Candidates for Citywide Office:

Below are the issues we hope you will address as you campaign and if you get elected. Where do you stand?



### “MOVE THE MONEY”

This year’s proposed Pentagon budget is \$753 billion—well over half the “discretionary” congressional budget. Additional billions are allocated for nuclear weapons in a separate Department of Energy budget. The rest of the budget provides approximately 7% for military veterans and from 2–5% each for education, transportation, environment, housing, etc. Cities and states are consistently short-changed and residents experience many forms of structural inequality. The Poor Peoples Campaign calls for a 50% cut to the military budget. Resolution 747-A in our NYC City Council calls for a “significant” reduction of the military budget.

- Do you believe that the Pentagon budget should be downsized?
- What percentage of the military budget would you cut?
- What human needs and municipal and state services would you prioritize?

### HOUSING

Affordable housing and homelessness are two of the most intractable problems in NYC; with a significant effect on many veterans.

- What is your plan regarding the end of the rent moratorium?
- Do you support the RAD/PACT privatization of NYCHA?
- What are your plans to finance and build affordable and supportive housing?
- Do you accept campaign contributions from real estate developers?



### NEW YORK POLICE DEPARTMENT

The NYPD is equivalent to one of the world’s largest militaries in terms of personnel, equipment and technology, with an annual budget of \$5.5 billion—more than most countries spend on their militaries. Many consider the NYPD an occupying force maintaining control, often violently, over 20% of the population, especially people of color and those who live below poverty level. Police killings of people of color is a long-standing systemic problem. Many major cities and 18 countries around the world have police forces that do not carry guns—with starkly lower homicide rates than places where police carry firearms.

- Will you demand that the police be de-militarized?
- Will you propose a significant reduction of the budget of the NYPD?
- Will you focus on community policing and spell out in detail how you would do that?

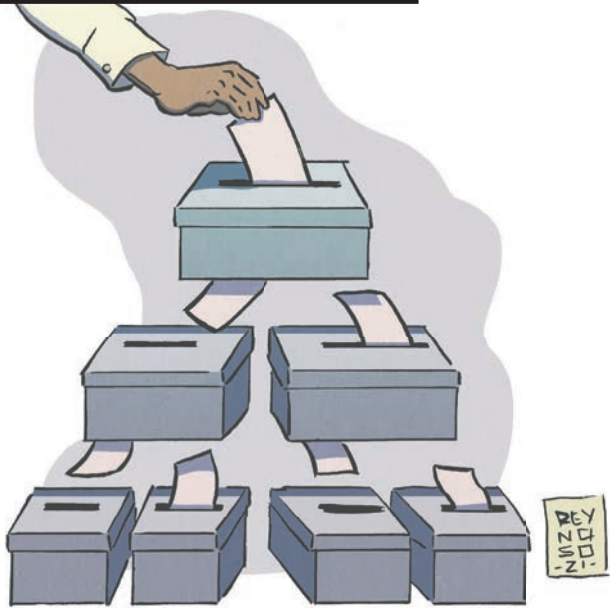
### EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

Articles 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explain the standard of education and healthcare every nation should provide its citizenry. New York City still has the most racially segregated schools in the United States and has consistently failed to fund our schools even when court-ordered to do so. Many schools have ROTC programs and have facilities that have themselves become militarized. The federal government and the New York State Legislature have yet to permit New York City the ability to meet the most basic educational and healthcare rights of our citizens. There are too many pressing and unresolved questions to ask in this area.

- What is your detailed plan for addressing the problems of education and healthcare?







FRANK REYNOSO

# RANKED CHOICE VOTING EXPLAINED

BY LUCAS SHAPIRO & JENNA ROSEN

New York City faces a historic primary on June 22: For the first time in almost a century, we'll be using the system known as Ranked Choice Voting. Voters will be able to pick up to five candidates per race, ranking them in order of preference.

While the left has scored major victories in New York in recent years, this election cycle we've largely failed to develop effective RCV strategies, coalesce around preferred candidates or coordinate our opposition to the most dangerous contenders.

Consider the damage that could be done by a mayor in bed with Wall Street, real-estate developers and the police — a mayor like Andrew Yang or Eric Adams. Now imagine what we could accomplish with a strong progressive mayor alongside a City Council dedicated to co-governance and transformative change.

The turn to RCV, approved by popular referendum in 2019, is forcing candidates, endorsing organizations and voters to reconsider how we engage in electoral politics.

For voters, this means navigating new and often confusing considerations about who to rank in what order and if we should fill all five slots in our primary ballots. Generally, it's good to rank as many candidates as you like in order of preference to ensure your ballot has maximum impact. That's because as votes are counted, the candidate who receives the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated, and their votes are added to their second-choice candidates' totals. This process repeats until a candidate has received at least 50% of the vote, ensuring that the victor has majoritarian support. If your top two ranked candidates are eliminated early, for example, then your 3rd, and then 4th and 5th ranked choices will be used for each round of redistributing votes to the remaining candidates. In short, you may want to fill your 4th and 5th ranked spots with more centrist candidates to block more rightwing candidates from coming out on top.

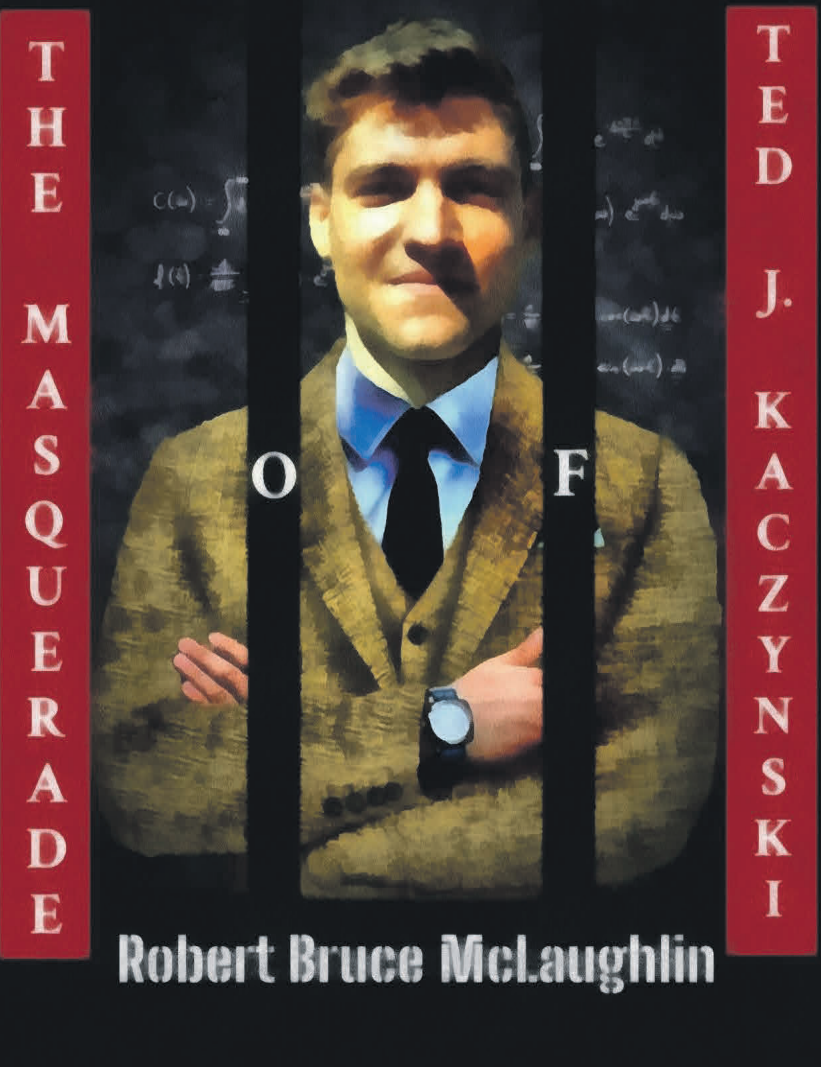
For 501(c)(4) organizations that can

endorse candidates, this has meant opting whether to support more than one candidate and whether to rank or co-endorse and allow voters to decide who to put at the top of their ballots. Our organization, The Jewish Vote, the electoral arm of Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, was the first group to make ranked endorsements in this election, backing more than one candidate in multiple races to establish a clear progressive lane of top contenders. Many of the city's political clubs and unions have only endorsed single candidates per race this cycle, eschewing this important strategy.

For candidates, RCV should compel them to tactfully seek allies and expand their base of potential support. In some city council races, we've been delighted to see candidates we endorsed for the same seat share space in a comradely fashion, often working together to ensure that one of them defeats a more conservative or machine candidate. But in others, candidates we've endorsed have regrettably opted against campaigning in tandem, sharing communication strategies or other tactics that would increase the likelihood their supporters will rank the two (or three) of them at the top of their ballot.

For our movements and the broad Left, this election cycle is full of promise and peril and the reintroduction of RCV adds a layer of unpredictability. Of the more than 300 candidates running for mostly open city council seats, there are dozens of genuine lefties with a real shot at winning. And despite the increasingly dismal mayoral race, polls still show that the majority of city voters embrace a progressive policy vision for our city. How we spend the remaining days of the race could tip the scales toward transformational change and overcome the right-wing, real-estate and corporate PAC money flooding the airwaves and our mailboxes. Deeper structural change historically comes from the bottom up, and the outcome of these races will be pivotal for the next decade of city politics. The choice is ours to make.

## Death Squads with Impunity



### 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.



# {CITY COUNCIL} RACES TO WATCH

BY JOHN TARLETON

THE MAYOR'S RACE DOMINATES THE HEADLINES, BUT EVERY CITY OFFICE IS ON THE BALLOT THIS YEAR INCLUDING ALL 51 CITY COUNCIL SEATS. THE WINNERS OF MOST OF THESE RACES WILL BE DETERMINED IN THE JUNE 22 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY. THANKS TO TERM LIMITS, THERE ARE 35 OPEN CITY COUNCIL SEATS. ALTOGETHER, HUNDREDS OF CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING INCLUDING A SIX-PERSON SLATE BACKED BY THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA. IF ELECTED, THEY HAVE VOWED TO ACT IN CONCERT AS A SQUAD WHICH WILL GREATLY INCREASE THEIR POWER TO SET AN AGENDA THAT MOVES THE REST OF THE COUNCIL TO THE LEFT.

BECAUSE NEW YORK IS A ONE-PARTY TOWN YOU GET ALL TYPES COMPETING IN THE PRIMARY — DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS, PROGRESSIVES, CONVENTIONAL MACHINE CANDIDATES AND A SPRINKLING OF CRANKY CONSERVATIVES WHO SOUND LIKE THEY WOULD BE MORE AT HOME AT A MAGA RALLY. IT'S A LOT TO KEEP TRACK OF. HERE'S A GUIDE TO SOME OF THE KEY RACES WITH ENDORSEMENTS TO CONSIDER WHEN FILLING OUT YOUR RANKED CHOICE BALLOT. FOR MORE OF OUR PRIMARY COVERAGE, VISIT [HTTPS://INDYPENDENT.ORG/SECTION/NYC-VOTES-2021](https://indypendent.org/section/nyc-votes-2021)

## DISTRICT 1 BATTERY PARK CITY • FINANCIAL DISTRICT TRIBECA • CHINATOWN • LOWER EAST SIDE SOHO • WASHINGTON SQUARE

Big Real Estate eyes this Lower Manhattan district like a wolf looks at a lamb chop. And it's helped itself to a feast over the past 12 years with an assist at every turn from Margaret Chin. Over frequently fierce community opposition, the former Maoist-turned-developer friendly councilmember has supported NYU's Mercer Street mega-redevelopment, mega-towers on the Two Bridges waterfront, the proposed destruction of the Elizabeth Street Community Garden, the SoHo rezoning and the Governor's Island rezoning. Chin also supports building a new jail in Chinatown as a part of a plan to close Rikers Island.

Chin's Chief of Staff **GIGI LI** is running as Chin's heir apparent. She has also been endorsed

by Andrew Yang. Li ran for Sheldon Silver's former Assembly seat in 2016 and lost.

Jenny Lam Low, an aide to Council Speaker Corey Johnson with a long history in Chinatown, has raked in more than 20 union endorsements and has the support of Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou (who defeated Li in that 2016 Assembly race), Congresswoman Nydia Valasquez and neighboring Councilmember Carlina Rivera.

"In the past our differences have always been used to pit us against each other," says Christopher Marte who narrowly missed capitalizing on Chin fatigue in 2017, losing to her in the Democratic primary by only 222 votes. He's back this time with support from a number of progressive downtown political clubs and the Chinatown Working Group, a fierce critic of Chin's pro-development stances. A victory for Marte would mark a clean break with the Chin era.

**Top Choices:**  
★ **CHRISTOPHER MARTE**  
2) **JENNY LAM LOW**



## DISTRICT 2 LOWER EAST SIDE • ALPHABET CITY EAST VILLAGE • UNION SQUARE GRAMERCY • MURRAY HILL • KIPS BAY

The battle over the future of East River Park is dominating this race. Incumbent **CARLINA RIVERA** carries the baggage of having backed Mayor de Blasio's plan to demolish the 58-acre park and its nearly 1,000 mature trees in order to build a new park atop 8 feet of landfill. Opponents of the park demolition are calling for an earlier plan to be revived that would keep 70% of the park intact but inconvenience motorists on the adjacent FDR Drive.

Erin Hussein, a longtime tenant association leader, belatedly jumped into the race in February. She's raised enough money to run a viable campaign and is willing to listen to her constituents, something Rivera has shown little interest in doing. Hussein is also keenly interested in helping her district's many pandemic-battered small businesses bounce back. Rivera has the money, the endorsements, the name recognition and is thought to be a frontrunner to be the next Council speaker. But as was the case with Margaret Chin in 2017 (See District 1), the betrayal felt by many of Rivera's constituents may make this race closer than expected.

**Top Choice:**  
★ **ERIN HUSSEIN**



## DISTRICT 9 CENTRAL HARLEM • EAST HARLEM

In 2017, **BILL PERKINS** regained his former City Council seat after a decade in the State Senate. He then pretty much vanished amid repeated rumors that his physical and mental health have declined. **KRISTIN RICHARDSON JORDAN** is the most exciting of the 15 candidates vying to succeed Perkins. A self-described "3rd gen Black LGBTQ revolutionary on a mission to disrupt district 9 with radical love," she is a poet, author and activist who founded an independent publishing house and was active in Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. KRJ is one of only two candidates to raise the maximum \$160,000 in public funding and has received endorsements from City Councilmember Brad Lander, the Black Women's March, the Sunrise Movement and the Stonewall Democrats of NYC. She would bring a fresh burst of movement energy to a seat that has been neglected for the past four years.

Other leading contenders of a more conventional bent are former Perkins Chief of Staff Cordell Cleare, Athena Moore, an aide to Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and Mario Rossler, a partnership manager at LinkedIn and former co-chair at the New York Young Leadership Board. Perkins unexpectedly entered the race in March and could win a chunk of votes on name recognition alone despite not actively campaigning.

## DISTRICT 14 MORRIS HEIGHTS • UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS • FORDHAM • KINGSBRIDGE

Pierina Sanchez and Adolfo Abreu both grew up in working class Bronx families that struggled to make ends meet, both excelled at an early age and then followed distinct paths that brought them to the present moment in which they are the leading contenders in a liberal vs. left battle for a council seat held by term-limited conservative Democrat Fernando Cabrera.

Sanchez graduated from Harvard on a full-ride scholarship and received a Masters in Public Administration at Princeton. She did casework as a District 14 City Council staffer. She interned at the Obama White House, returned to New York to work for the Regional Plan Association, was appointed to Bronx Community Board 5 and served on the board of the Bronx Young Democrats.

Where Sanchez was groomed by elite institutions, Abreu got his political education at the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition, a member-led grassroots organization with its origins in the mid-1970s struggle by Bronx residents to save their community from ruin. He joined NWBCCC's youth organizing arm at age 12 and his name repeatedly pops up in old news-

paper stories from the late 2000s as a teenager leading protests over the future of a local library and the redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Armory as well as a citywide campaign by public school students to preserve discounted Metro cards. He later became NWBCCC's organizing director and was deeply involved in 2019 in mobilizing Bronx tenants to participate in the coalition that won historic rent law reforms in Albany.

Both candidates have garnered a spate of endorsements though Sanchez has the support of more elected officials and some of the city's largest unions: SEIU1199, DC 37 and UFT. Abreu is endorsed by the DSA which has run circles around the Brooklyn and Queens party machines in recent years but is still looking for its first breakthrough in the Bronx. He also has the support of leftwing unions such as New York State Nurses Association, PSC-CUNY and LIUNA Local 79. Both candidates would be a significant upgrade over Cabrera. But only Abreu has a history of organizing the kind of people-powered movements whose voices are so often ignored by our city government.

**Top Choices:**  
★ **ADOLFO ABREU**  
2) **PIERINA SANCHEZ**

## DISTRICT 22 ASTORIA • ASTORIA HEIGHTS

Astoria has been at the heart of the left-wing electoral resurgence in NYC. It gave large majorities to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and dumped a five-term incumbent to elect a democratic socialist to the State Assembly last year. In 2019, former public defender Tiffany Cabán swept the vote in District 22 in her near-miss run for Queens DA.

Cabán, a democratic socialist, has been the overwhelming favorite since the day she entered the race for an open seat and has been showered with endorsements. Community activist and non-profit executive Evie Hantzopoulos has raised almost as much money as Cabán and has won a smattering of endorsements from liberal groups. In late May, the race received a jolt when it was learned that big real estate interests and police unions had thrown down \$325,000 to help conservative Democrat John Ciafone. Expect the campaign against Cabán to get ugly before all the votes have been cast.

**Top Choices:**  
★ **TIFFANY CABÁN**  
2) **EVIE HANTZOPOULOS**



## DISTRICT 7 MANHATTAN VALLEY • MANHATTANVILLE MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS HAMILTON HEIGHTS

Stretching along the west side of Manhattan from 96th to 162nd Street, this uptown district embodies the diversity and the disparities of the city at large. With outgoing councilmember Mark Levine running for Manhattan Borough President, 15 candidates are vying to replace him. Tenant lawyer Shaun Abreu is Levine's anointed successor. He also has the backing of local Congressman Adriano Espaillat and his Dominican machine.

Three progressive candidates are also in the race. Drag queen/community activist Marti-Allen Cummings has received three times as many donations as any other candi-

date and has been endorsed by State Senators Julia Salazar and Alessandra Biaggi among others. At 21, former Bernie organizer Maria Ordonez would be the youngest City Councilmember in NYC history and is eager to bring the "political revolution" to her corner of New York. She quickly qualified for the maximum \$160,000 in public matching funds available to qualifying candidates. Her endorsers include Our Revolution, Black Lives Caucus, The Jewish Vote, Progressive Women of CUNY and PSC-CUNY. Affordable housing advocate Dan Cohen has the backing of Zephyr Teachout and State Senator Robert Jackson. For any one of the three progressives to win, their supporters will need to support the other two via ranked choice voting.

**Top Choices:**  
★ **MARIA ORDONEZ**  
2) **MARTI-ALLEN CUMMINGS**  
3) **DAN COHEN**



## DISTRICT 24 JAMAICA • JAMAICA HILLS • HILLCREST ELECTCHESTER • FRESH MEADOWS POMONOK • KEW GARDEN HILLS

Moumita Ahmed doesn't give up. On Feb. 2, Ahmed, a Bangladeshi American community activist and former Bernie Sanders organizer, was soundly defeated by **JAMES GENNARO**, a conservative Democrat, in a special election to fill a District 24's vacant seat for the remainder of 2021. Gennaro benefitted from \$221,000 poured in at the end of the race by billionaire real estate moguls intent on stopping Ahmed and from Republicans being able to vote in a non-partisan race.

This time a full four-year term is at stake. Ahmed, who touts her status as the only tenant in the race, has qualified for the maximum \$160,000 in public funding. She hopes to win big in her working class Southeast Asian community while Gennaro looks to run up the score again in enclaves of well-to-do homeowners and among Jewish voters who value his vocal support for Israel. Ahmed is the only City Council candidate this year with an endorsement from Bernie Sanders. Endorsements from State Senators Jessica Ramos and Julia Salazar may help her class-based appeal land with working class Hispanic voters in the district who are in the same boat economically as the Southeast Asian community.

**Top Choice:**  
★ **MOUMITA AHMED**





**DISTRICT 37**  
**BUSHWICK • CYPRESS HILLS • OCEAN HILL**  
**BROWNSVILLE • EAST NEW YORK**

Ten years ago this fall, Sandy Nurse played a key role in organizing Occupy Wall Street's street protests. She later gravitated toward building alternative institutions in North Brooklyn — co-founding the May Day Space community center and founding BK Rot, a composting service that hires local youths. Nurse tried to run for a vacant City Council seat last year but the Brooklyn party machine used technicalities to bounce her off the ballot. She's back with a coalition of more than 30 labor unions and community organizations as well as endorsements from prominent progressives including Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, State Senator Julia Salazar and Zephyr Teachout.

Nurse's main opponent, **DARMA DIAZ**, won last year's special election after Nurse and other aspiring opponents were thrown off the ballot. This time she will have to earn it. In addition to the party machine, Diaz can expect to find support from older, middle class homeowners in the district who may be wary of defunding the police. She's also tried to make an issue of Nurse's dual Afro-Latinx identity, as if a person can't be both.

Last June, Nurse returned to her protest roots as one of the organizers of Occupy City Hall, a protest encampment demanding City Council cut \$1 billion from the NYPD's annual budget. The effort failed, but Nurse could soon be inside City Hall fighting for transformative change.

★ **SANDY NURSE**



**DISTRICT 38**  
**RED HOOK • SUNSET PARK**  
**GREENWOOD HEIGHTS • WINDSOR TERRACE**  
**DYKER HEIGHTS • BORO PARK**

Last year, voters in Sunset Park/Red Hook tossed out a 13-term Assemblyman in favor of Marcela Mitaynes, a DSA-backed tenant organizer. Now, Mitaynes's ally Alexa Avilés is running for City Council to replace term-limited incumbent Carlos Menchaca. In addition to DSA's backing, Avilés has been endorsed by more than a dozen unions and two dozen community organizations.

Avilés has served as a PTA president and community board member in South Brooklyn over the past decade. She will bring her background as an education organizer with her as NYC public schools seek to bounce back from the pandemic.

Also running a strong campaign from the left is Rodrigo Camarena, an economist, immigrant rights advocate and non-profit executive. Camarena formerly led the New York City Department of Small Business. He currently heads Immigration Advocates Network, a network of nonprofit legal advocates committed to defending immigrants. His top priority is regulating delivery apps and "stopping the Amazonification" of New York City.

Other leading candidates in the race include César Zúñiga, Chair of Community Board 7, Victor Swinton, a 37-year veteran of the NYPD, and businessman Yu Lin who wants more surveillance cameras to be installed, more parking lots to be built and fewer regulations for business.

★ **ALEXA AVILES**  
**2) RODRIGO CAMARENA**  
**3) CÉSAR ZÚNIGA**

**DISTRICT 39**  
**COBBLE HILL • CARROLL GARDENS • GOWANUS**  
**PARK SLOPE • KENSINGTON**

The most important thing City Council does every year is hammer out the nearly \$100 billion annual city budget with the mayor. If the police get defunded, that's when it happens. DSA-backed Brandon West has been there. He previously worked in the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget and the City Council Finance Division. If he wins the crowded race to succeed Brad Lander as the rep for this progressive bastion, he will play a key role in any socialist/progressive bloc that pulls City Council to the left.

Shahana Hanif, Lander's director of organizing and community engagement, would be the first Muslim elected to City Council. She has received more group endorsements than West, has raised more money and has a larger social media following.

Many progressive groups give out "letterhead endorsements" like candy on Halloween, but don't back it up with much. This race will be a rigorous test of the DSA's ground game and its strategy of mobilizing hundreds of members (inside and outside of New York) to canvas, phone bank, write postcards, etc. for the handful of candidates they decide to pour all their efforts into.

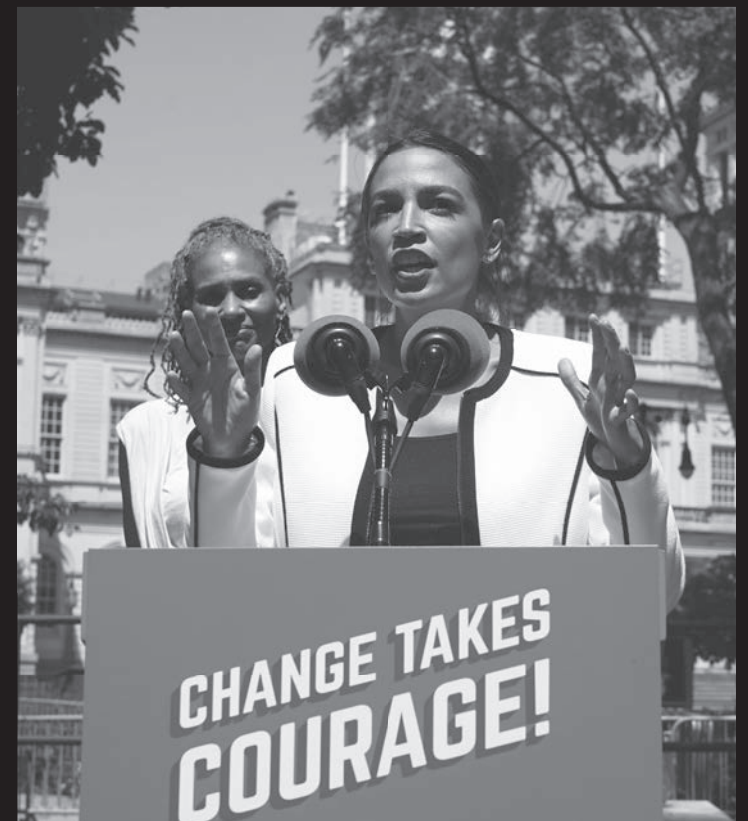
Other candidates of note in this progressive bastion include Justin Krebs, director of national campaigns for Move On and civil rights lawyer and local district leader Doug Schneider.

★ **BRANDON WEST**  
**2) SHAHANA HANIF**  
**3) JUSTIN KREBS**



**“WE CAN'T AFFORD TO NOT ENGAGE BECAUSE OF WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN,” OCASIO-CORTEZ SAID. “WE ENGAGE IN THE WORLD THAT WE HAVE. AND WE DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO MAKE THAT WORLD BETTER.”**

**MAJOR ENDORSEMENT:**  
*Hours before The Independent went to press, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez endorsed Maya Wiley (standing behind) as her first choice for mayor.*







# SHOWDOWN IN COUNCIL DISTRICT 35

## MICHAEL HOLLINGSWORTH AND CRYSTAL HUDSON BOTH HAVE LOTS OF POWERFUL BACKERS

MICHAEL HOLLINGSWORTH

CRYSTAL HUDSON

BY THEODORE HAMM

**A** former staffer seeks to distance herself from her divisive boss. Developer-friendly de Blasio allies square off with the city's leading tenant advocates. A powerful Democratic congressman continues his war with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

The race to succeed Laurie Cumbo for the city council seat that spans from Clinton Hill to Crown Heights indeed has many storylines.

Most observers agree that of the eight candidates on the primary ballot, the winner will be either Crystal Hudson, a former Cumbo staffer, or tenant activist Michael Hollingsworth. Neither was a household name entering the race—but there are plenty of high-profile figures in each camp.

Hollingsworth has the support of fellow DSA-backed candidates Jabari Brisport and Pharah Souffrant Forrest, each of whom won races for state offices covering parts of the district last year. Cynthia Nixon, Zephyr Teachout, Julia Salazar, and Marcela Mitaynes are also in his corner.

Hudson is backed by Hakeem Jeffries, who is eager to undercut the DSA in the wake of the losses experienced by his candidates to Brisport and Forrest. Jumaane Williams, for whom Hudson also previously worked, is expected to make his formal endorsement soon. While Yvette Clarke is Hudson's most influential other supporter, Jessica Ramos may be the most surprising.

The name missing here, of course, is Cumbo, who is hardly known for staying on the sidelines. Hudson is clearly trying to distance herself. "I think everybody has worked for somebody they don't agree with 100% of the time," Hudson recently told the *Gotham Gazette*.

Hudson also has renounced any past associations with Cumbo's positions on the Bedford Armory project, calling it "a bad deal that has only compounded since." Yet while Cumbo was doing election-year gymnastics regarding the deal—opposing it during the 2017 primary, then supporting it right after the general election—Hudson served as her campaign treasurer.

Hollingsworth, meanwhile, was an active member of the Crown Heights Tenants Union, which led the fight against the developer-friendly armory project. As noted on his campaign website, Hollingsworth and other local residents found themselves on the receiving end of "Cumbo's contempt and dismissal" amid the process.

That same experience fuels Hollingsworth's desire to replace Cumbo. "Old and new residents of the district understand that luxury development is a threat to poor and working-class people," he tells *The Independent*. "They know that gentrification doesn't happen in a vacuum. Instead it's the result of a set of decisions made by the political establishment working hand-in-hand with big real estate."

The late May campaign filings show that both candidates have solid amounts to spend in the final month, with Hollingsworth holding a nominal edge (\$156,000-\$138,000). The city's 8-1 matching funds program has enabled many candidates without deep pockets to run competitive races.

That same program has also allowed candidates to minimize their contributions from real estate interests. Hollingsworth, like all DSA candidates, takes no such funding—but Hudson's direct contributions from de-

velopers are not a substantial portion of her overall haul.

Nonetheless, there are clear indicators that Hudson is the real estate industry's candidate in the race. For starters, building trades unions including the NYC District Council of Carpenters have endorsed her and contributed to her campaign. The union also named Hudson as one of its top four "priority" council candidates in its first round of endorsements.

### FROM SOHO TO FORT GREENE

Leading proponents of the current SoHo rezoning plan (See Page 6) pushed by the de Blasio administration are also strong supporters of Hudson. Aaron Carr, executive director of the Housing Rights Initiative, gave Hudson the maximum donation of \$1,000.

HRI is a pro-tenant organization, and Carr views the SoHo upzoning as an opportunity to create affordable units in a wealthy area with good transit and schools. Other champions of the project see it as a way for luxury developers to build high-rise condos that are currently prevented by the area's historic district designation.

Ben Carlos Thypin of the pro-developer group Open New York is excited about both the SoHo plan and Hudson's candidacy. In early May, he tweeted that the race between Hudson and Hollingsworth is "the most consequential in the city." He referred to "multiple proposed rezonings in the affluent parts of the district" and insisted that "if you care about making development more equitable," Hudson is the "clear choice."

Thypin's comments might raise eyebrows in the Fort Greene area of the council district. Amid the blighted 1970s, local residents successfully fought to preserve the 19th-century character of the neighborhood, creating the historic district in 1978. As seen in the SoHo rezoning, the developers seeking luxury condos on the higher floors seek to overwhelm any current height restrictions.

Hollingsworth opposes the SoHo rezoning, telling *The Indy* that it's "a last-ditch effort of the de Blasio administration to paint their racist housing record as a success while ignoring the displacement they've caused." He's calling for next year's newly-elected city council to create a citywide plan "that protects tenants and builds truly affordable housing in wealthier neighborhoods."

Hudson's team did not respond to inquiries from *The Indy*, but the fervent support from Thypin and Carr strongly suggests that Hudson is on-board with the current SoHo plan.

### GROUND GAME

Like most of the council races, the battle between Hollingsworth and Hudson will boil down to which candidate has a better ground game. As demonstrated by its successes in the Brisport and Forrest races last year, the DSA clearly knows how to turn out votes.

While the DSA has proven that it can knock out long-time incumbents—e.g. Julia Salazar's 2018 defeat of Martin Dilan, or the 2020 successes of Souffrant Forrest versus Walter Mosley and Marcela Mitaynes against Felix Ortiz—this race is for an open seat.

And Hudson will have her share of enthusiastic supporters, too. If successful, she would be the first openly LGBTQ Black woman elected in the city.

Hudson is also expected to receive independent expenditure support in the weeks ahead. Spending from a real estate PAC was instrumental in Cumbo's successful campaign to succeed Tish James in 2013.

As the campaign reaches its final rounds, this one is definitely too close to call.





ERICA LANSNER

# ISRAEL, ZIONISM, APARTHEID

## HOW THE JEWISH STATE'S FOUNDING IDEOLOGY SHAPES IT TO THIS DAY

BY GERALD MEYER

**T**he facts are undeniable. In response to Israel's brutal treatment of Palestinians fighting to prevent evictions from their homes in East Jerusalem, Hamas, a spin-off from the Muslim Brotherhood, began firing short-range missiles manufactured from scrap metal into Israel. Within a few days, powerful American-made missile launchers, guided by the most sophisticated technology, began bombarding the Gaza Strip.

This latest violent outbreak was precipitated on April 17 by the imminent eviction of six Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem, the site of Palestine's capital in its state-to-be. These dwellings are close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, both located on a site of great importance to the three Abrahamic religions. The significance of their location and the threatened evictions during the final days of Ramadan ignited outrage. This emotion was further stoked when Israeli forces stormed the Al A-Qsa Mosque during prayers and fired stun grenades, rubber bullets and tear gas at the assembled celebrants. The projectiles landed in the prayer rooms of this glorious holy place, thereby endangering the lives of the many elderly men gathered there to pray.

A searing feature of the initial outbreaks was the Israeli police and members of the Israeli armed forces' widespread manhandling of Palestinian children and young teenagers, who are seen being pulled by their garments and corralled by soldiers in full riot gear. The children's faces show a remarkable range of emotions, including terror, defiance, bewilderment, and hatred. This same set of emotions has welled up on the faces of adults throughout the entire world. Hundreds of photographs document this outrage.

As awful as Israel's depredations against the men, women and children of East Jerusalem were, its massive attacks on Gaza led voices throughout the world to cry out, "Stop Israel's War Crimes!" The horrific hostilities, that raged from 1948 to

1949, which Israelis call the War for Independence and Palestinians call al-Nakba ("the Catastrophe"), had caused over 700,000 Arabs to flee in every direction. The largest contingent of Palestinian refugees settled in Gaza, which was under the protection of Egypt until Israel seized it during the Six-Day War in 1967.

Gaza has evolved into what many now call the world's largest open-air concentration camp. Its 2.05 million inhabitants subsist in 141 square miles, much of which has been made off-limits by Israeli decree. The Palestinians of Gaza are trapped, cheek by jowl, in a place with no economy, no arable land, no right to fish in the Mediterranean Sea and no exit.

Israel's 11-day bombing of Gaza from May 9 to May 20 accounted for almost all of the casualties: 12 Israelis and 240 Palestinians, including 63 children. These disproportionate outcomes speak to the David-and-Goliath nature of this struggle. While damage to Israeli structures and infrastructure was minimal, Gaza has been devastated. Seventy thousand of its residents have become refugees. American-made

bombs have destroyed many schools and seven medical facilities. Throughout much of Gaza, sewage systems have been wrecked, safe water has become unobtainable and electricity is shut off. What cannot be calculated is the tremendous damage to the psyches of Gaza's population, especially its children. Based on what we know from Israel's four previous incursions, Israel will likely place innumerable obstacles in the way of Gaza's reconstruction.

How did Israel, which at its birth announced its intention to become "a light to all nations," become an apartheid state? The answer can be found in its earliest origins. Theodore Herzl (1860–1904), an Austrian intellectual, laid out a "solution" to "The Jewish Question." He posited that Jews had no future as a diaspora whose fate would be either persecution or assimilation. He insisted they must have their own country. In 1896, he laid out the formula in *The Jewish State*, a short book that advocated the ingathering of the Jewish people where upon arrival they become citizens. Once set in motion, the rejection of the viability of the diaspora and the "right of return" were the concepts that began to create an apartheid state.

In July 2018, the Israeli parliament carried forward Herzl's vision when it adopted a new nation-state law stating, "The right to exercise national self-determination is unique to the Jewish people." It also proclaimed Hebrew as the state language while Arabic was demoted from an "official language" to a "language with a special status," whatever that means. The curricula of the Arab schools, whose budgets are woefully underfunded, are controlled by the state.

Palestinians cannot escape their inferior-caste status even through marriage to Jews. In Israel, there is no civil marriage, and conversions, which must be adjudicated by ultraorthodox rabbis, are unheard of. Everything in Israel is organized around the principle of "separate but unequal," which consigns Palestinians, who comprise 20% of Israel's population, to the hardest, dirtiest, lowest-paying, and least secure occupations. Include the Occupied Territories that Israel rules

over, and Palestinians are roughly 50% of the total population of Palestine/Israel.

**IN SOLIDARITY:**  
*With Palestine.*

Palestinians, including their children, know that Israeli government agencies and individual citizens, with the acquiescence of the United States, have everywhere been steadily encroaching on land intended for the basis of building the state of Palestine, whose capital would be East Jerusalem. The Israelis have confiscated land on the West Bank to construct housing for 400,000 Jewish Israelis. In addition, the Security Wall (referred to as the Apartheid Wall by critics) encroaches on huge amounts of Palestinian land, cutting straight through villages and, in one case, through a school playground. Most recently, Israeli individuals and agencies have been purchasing land and houses in Israel's few remaining integrated urban centers. Earlier, Israel formally annexed from Syria the Golan Heights, which contains the headwaters of the Jordan River.

The Jewish Agency holds much of Israel's land, "in perpetuity for Jewish people." The largest swaths of land (and whatever structures existed on these lands) were confiscated from Palestinians who fled the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Zionist militias during the 1947–1948 war. U.N. Resolution 194, which was passed in December 1948 (and subsequent resolutions) upheld two principles: the right of Palestinian refugees to return their houses and land or to be fairly compensated. These resolutions have been blocked by Israeli obfuscation. Recently, the Israeli government has started seizing undeeded land in the West Bank, where much of the land has been held since time immemorial by extended families whose ancestors possessed them based on the pre-capitalist principle of usufruct. Israel's encroachment on the land, which as I write and you read these words, is effectively shredding the possibility of a two-state solution, the supposed goal of decades of U.S.-backed "peace talks."

This conflict is driven by the Palestinians' belief in their right to return to what was taken from them; and the Jewish people's biblically inspired claim to a right to return under all circumstances and partake of full citizenship by putting one foot on Israeli soil — which is the basic tenet of Zionism. Consequently, what was intended to be a Palestinian state is becoming strings of barely contiguous bantustans. The Palestinians can't and won't stop fighting. More and more people have evidenced their willingness to help them achieve some measure of justice.

*Gerald Meyer is professor emeritus of history at CUNY-Hostos Community College and the author of Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician and co-editor of The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism. Raised Roman Catholic, he discovered as a teenager that his grandmother was Jewish. This realization and his adoption of socialism led him to enlist in a six-month kibbutz-based, work-study program. He now believes in the establishment of a single secular democratic state for all the people of Israel and Palestine.*





CHARLES WILSON

# PUT A WOMAN IN CHARGE

## AFTER TANZANIA'S COVID-DENIALIST PREZ DROPS DEAD, "MAMA SAMIA" TAKES THE HELM AND TURNS TO SCIENCE TO GUIDE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

BY SOPHIE NEIMAN

Wearing a somber black hijab and thin-rimmed glasses, Tanzania's Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan addressed the country late one night in March. "President Magufuli has died of heart failure," she said in mournful Swahili, as people across this East African nation of 58 million watched her speech on live television.

It was the conclusion to a mystery that had long gripped Tanzanians. For weeks John Pombe Magufuli, who was first elected in 2015, and again in a hotly disputed election last year, had been conspicuously absent from public life. Rumors spread that he had contracted COVID-19 and was in a coma in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi or somewhere in India.

Magufuli's political opponents fanned the flames of doubt about his whereabouts.

"His COVID denialism is in tatters and his prayer-over-science folly has turned into a deadly boomerang," opposition leader Tundu Lissu, who challenged Magufuli in Tanzania's October elections, wrote on Twitter from exile in Belgium, just days before Magufuli perished.

Lissu was referring to his rival's claim that "coronavirus cannot exist in the body of Christ." The devoutly religious Magufuli had encouraged his countrymen to gather in churches to pray sickness away.

His suspicious death made Suluhu Hassan, who hails from the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago, the first female leader of a nation where the controversial response to the coronavirus pandemic has raised international eyebrows. She is one of only a handful of women who've served as heads of state in modern, post-colonial Africa.

Questions about whether she will reverse the country's course when it comes to COVID-19 abound.

### THERE IS NO CORONAVIRUS HERE

As airplanes were grounded and international borders

shut in the spring of 2020, Tanzania's response to the coronavirus pandemic began well enough, with mask sewing and hand sanitizer use encouraged.

But Magufuli's early actions also drew ire. He bluntly refused to shutter places of worship. Just a few months into the pandemic, the late President cast doubt on international testing kits, saying that trick samples taken from a pawpaw and a goat had tested positive for COVID-19. He began instead to promote unverified herbal cures and rejected mask wearing.

By May, Magufuli stopped releasing data about the coronavirus entirely, saying the country had defeated it after three days of national prayer. Tanzanian truck drivers who reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 on jobs in neighboring Kenya and Uganda told a different story.

Coronavirus quickly became an almost taboo topic inside Tanzania. Journalists who challenged the official line were penalized, and in July the country's communications regulator suspended Kwanza Online TV for 11 months. The outlet was accused of "generating and disseminating biased, misleading and disruptive content," after it circulated a United States Embassy announcement about Tanzania's failure to publicly release figures about COVID-19.

"You couldn't even say the word COVID or corona," Kwanza's director and activist Maria Sarungi-Tshai told *The Independent* in an interview. "It was a shameful thing to do."

Tanzania's elections went forward in October as if coronavirus were a thing of the past, with opposition candidates and members of Magufuli's ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi, or CCM, alike drawing substantial crowds. Bars and markets in the port city and commercial hub of Dar es Salaam remained open, and sunbathers flocked to its beaches.

It was only later that government officials began to drop dead.

### A SERIES OF SUSPICIOUS FUNERALS

Among the dead was Seif Sharif Hamad, an opposition leader from Zanzibar, whose ACT-Wazalendo party told journalists that he'd contracted coronavirus before he perished on February 17. On the same day, Magufuli's Chief Permanent Secretary, John Kijazi, reportedly had a heart attack.

"Maybe we have wronged God somewhere," Magufuli pondered at Kijazi's funeral, finally alluding to an unnamed respiratory illness. "Let us all repent." His Health Minister, Dorothy Gwajima, also took to recommending steam showers and herbal smoothies.

Meanwhile, doctors in Dar es Salaam who spoke anonymously to the South African weekly *The Continent*, described treating patients with supplemental oxygen, but were forbidden from even writing coronavirus on death certificates. Officials made no efforts to import coronavirus vaccines.

Gender activist Mwanahamisi Singano draws a direct line between the controversial government response to the pandemic and the body count in Tanzania.

"Families didn't take precautions and lost not just one person but two or three, because of that lack of information and lack of support in following the procedure and protocol," Singano, whose cousin died of COVID-19 in the early stages of the pandemic, said.

"There are a lot of lives that have been lost that could have been saved," she added.

When Suluhu Hassan told the nation that Magufuli had succumbed to a long-standing heart condition that fateful March night, whispers that the president had actually caught COVID-19, along with musings about what Suluhu Hassan might do to tackle the pandemic, intensified.

### CHARTING A NEW PATH

Tanzania's first female leader was inaugurated two days after announcing the death of her predecessor. "Today I have taken an oath different from the rest that I have taken in my career," she said solemnly. "Those were taken in happiness. Today I took the highest oath of office in mourning."

Her calm and deliberative manner struck a clear contrast with Magufuli, who was nicknamed "The Bulldozer," in reference to his brash style. Suluhu Hassan, who has steadily risen through the ranks of CCM, is often affectionately called "Mama Samia."

Already, Suluhu Hassan has slowly begun to shift the discourse around the coronavirus, wearing a mask on official visits to Uganda and Kenya, and while meeting with Tanzanian elders in Dar es Salaam.

She's also pulled together a committee of experts to advise her on the coronavirus, who in May recommended that Tanzania join the COVAX vaccination program, follow World Health Organization and Regional Guidelines, and again begin to release data about the virus in Tanzania.

"I'm feeling happy and positive," Singano told me just hours after the committee made its recommendations.

It remains to be seen just how far Suluhu Hassan, a long-time member of the CCM cadre, will go in breaking with the politics that defined Magufuli's tenure. She so far appears hesitant to do so. "Samia and Magufuli are the same person. I have been following the debate and it is unhealthy for our nation," Suluhu Hassan recently told lawmakers bent on discussing Magufuli's legacy.

Suluhu Hassan has said that her government is checking to see if COVID-19 vaccines available in other countries could be brought to Tanzania, but has yet to actually enact a vaccination campaign. And the country has still not released new data about infection rates.

Some of the cabinet, including Gwajima, who under Magufuli promoted steam and smoothies, remains in positions of power. And while Suluhu Hassan is less averse to mask wearing than Magufuli was, her use of protective gear is inconsistent, and she neglected to wear a face covering on a recent trip to Zanzibar.

Sarungi, the Kwanza TV director, says confusion about basic safety measures endures. "[Magufuli] stigmatized the vaccine; he stigmatized the wearing of masks," she said. "There are people, even if it is just a small percent, who believe it and who trusted him, and continue to be very suspicious of the masks."

For now, however, many Tanzanians are simply relieved to see the seeming beginnings of a shift under Suluhu Hassan.

"She started with so much grace and so much promise," Chambi Chachage, a Tanzanian scholar of African politics at Princeton University, said. "People are just happy that it is better than it was."

**NEW LEADERSHIP:**  
Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania's first female president.





FRANK REYNOLDS

# HOW CRITICAL RACE THEORY BECAME THE NEW BOGEYMAN

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

When I was a student at Florida State University many moons ago, the state legislature took a surprising amount of interest in our course offerings. So much so that one of the advanced-level philosophy classes I took had been cleverly retitled as “Post-Hobbesian Materialism” although everyone knew it was a course on Karl Marx’s *Capital, Volume One*.

Today, several state legislatures around the country are considering banning the teaching of critical race theory. Proponents of the ban are arguing in every public venue they can find that CRT is grounded in “identity-based ideologies” that promote division and resentment. Trying to sound a wee bit woke, critics say we should avow pluralism, but not purism. Over the decades, targets shift, but the basic fear remains: Are they teaching our kids to hate this country, or, if white, to hate themselves?

I can sort of understand the concern. Raoul Peck’s incredible documentary on the history of European colonialism (*Exterminate All the Brutes* on HBO) is giving me nightmares. I am not showing it to my 10-year-old grandson, yet. But he has a need to know about the truth of the history that has affected his life. And he deserves to be respected enough to be taught the truth.

Critical race theory is not primarily about history. It is about the effects of history on institutions, policies, laws and, most importantly, ideas. Some ideas that appear to be good allies in the fight against racism have proven helpful for those who want to maintain the sad state of the status quo. The tools we currently have from the classical liberal lexicon of modern European philosophy — the ideals of neutrality, individual freedom, universalism, representative democracy — were created so that the bourgeoisie could fight off the aristocracy. This fight was primarily against the inherited rights of the nobility, which

thwarted entrepreneurial activity. The philosophical tools developed to unseat (or un-head) monarchies were quite useful in this struggle, but they have proved ineffective in redressing broader social injustices since the ostensible end of Jim Crow.

By 1970, civil-rights legislation had ended officially sanctioned racial segregation. Overtly racist practices in regard to employment, education and housing were no longer tolerated. Affirmative action worked to diversify the professional managerial class, law schools, medical schools, the top journalism schools and so on, with a predictable sea change in the public sphere. Imagine NY1 without Errol Louis! Or MSNBC without Ali Velshi!

But affirmative action policies have always had to tread lightly. They have to show that their practices are one-offs, merely temporary deviations of the ideals of neutrality and universality, ideals that the state must continue to take as the bedrock for defining what justice means (and for establishing its legitimacy). “Affirmative discrimination” policies that favor minority-owned businesses or minority applicants must continually operate on the defensive.

Infamously, the Supreme Court ruling that allowed the University of Michigan to continue to use demographic diversity as one of its criteria for selecting students approved it only because it could establish “universal effects.” The court let the university take demographics into account because diversity would contribute to the educational experiences of white students. Affirmative action could not be validated because of its effects on Black and Brown students, but because of its effects on improving the education of the majority, meaning whites, though this was cloaked under the concept of universality.

This example reveals why critical race theory was born. The goal of this loose and interdisciplinary collection of scholars was to take civil rights to the next level by rethinking the ideas and practices undergirding current conceptions of justice. This requires discerning and unraveling the material and ideological

with inviolable validity and value. Yet, there is no reason to take any concept as received wisdom, as sacred, or as untouchable. Concepts are simply ways we have of making sense of our world. I experience myself as being able to think differently than my parents; in this way I claim my individuality and my ability to think for myself. This was the banner of the Enlightenment: Think for yourselves! It was a prescription, or exhortation, but it was also predicated on a view about the reality of human beings. We each have brains, and we can each make full use of them and come to new and sometimes contrary ideas. Individualism is thus a value and a goal, wherein political (and educational) institutions should allow it and nurture it without trying to pummel it into mush. But individualism is also a description of human beings.

Here is where we can see the limitations of liberalism. The description of human life that individualism sometimes assumes can be way off. I am influenced by others; I am affected by the concepts I have readily available to me in my milieu; I am embedded within relationships that I did not freely choose but that incur significant obligations and duties; and so on. Individualism needs to be tempered with a heavy dose of social realism about the ways in which our lives work, as well as the way societies create the conditions for individual freedom, or not. Laws and policies structure the choices we have available to us. Individualism is not entirely false, but it is often interpreted in a way that is hugely false.

Critical race theory has endeavored to start with the facts, such as persistent racial disparities, and then move backward into the theories that are obviously inadequate in addressing them. Neutrality can harbor racism like a stealth bomber that flies below the radar. Jim Crow said “White men wanted”; neutral, color-blind policies say “Anyone can apply.” But how will “anyone” be judged if they have a criminal record, a spotty employment history, an accent? The word ‘felon’ is unraced, neutral, applicable to anyone, and thus an apparently fair and universal standard to apply.

Such neutral words ignore the effects of history, and in fact, make it impossible to factor in the effects of history. This is what some call the “dumb theory of equality” — as if all claim-

**CRITICAL RACE THEORY IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT HISTORY. IT IS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF HISTORY ON INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES, LAWS, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, IDEAS.**

effects of slavery, colonialism, land annexation and genocide that are still with us in our institutions, our ideas, and our lives.

To get to this next level, we need to do some theory to see what policy proposals might work better. Liberal norms may retain some utility, but let’s put them on the defensive for once, to explain how they continue to allow racial disparities in every major social sector to grow and fester, and sometimes worsen. Let’s be open to considering how they might need some revision.

Conservatives (the most ardent defenders of classical liberalism, ironically) have a religious zeal about the concepts of individualism, freedom and neutrality. These are taken as self-evident truths, as the Declaration of Independence puts it,

ants are equal, and all deviations from neutral norms suspect.

Opponents say that critical race theory is teaching our kids to see racism where it doesn’t exist. But in truth, it is simply an effort to see how racism may be working beyond what liberal concepts can reveal.

*Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at Hunter College. She is the author of *The Future of Whiteness* (Polity, 2015).*



# BLACK MOTHERS MATTER

BY NEELU SHRUTI

“Black Lives Matter!” was the cry of millions of people who took to the streets last spring following the police murder of George Floyd. Among the BLM rallies held were smaller marches for Amber Rose Isaac, Sha’Asia Washington, and Cordielle Street, three Black mothers who died during or right after giving birth. Black people in the United States suffer disproportionately when they give birth, due to centuries of racism and a medical system that over the past century has labored mightily to turn birth from a natural physiological process into an expensive medical procedure.

The U.S. has the highest healthcare spending per capita and the costliest births in the world, yet maternal mortality persists and is on the rise. In 2018, maternal mortality rates reached 17.4 per 100,000 births, more than twice the rate in the 1990s. Black people are more than three times as likely as white counterparts to die of complications from pregnancy or birth. In NYC, that disparity is even higher at 12 times more likely.

In 1900, the United States had 100,000 midwives, and they attended approximately half of all births. Many Black, immigrant and indigenous midwives had extensive training in their home countries or communities, whether in the form of apprenticeship or formal instruction. Today, it is estimated that there are just under 15,000 midwives in the U.S., fewer than 1,000 of whom are Black, and they attend only 8% of births.

In a concerted campaign based on the findings of the 1910 Carnegie Foundation-funded Flexner Report, the American Medical Association set out to move birth out of community settings and into hospitals, convincing people that birth required “medical interventions and management.” The new (mostly white) medical establishment of physicians and nurses disenfranchised community midwives through legislation — such as the federal Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, which painted them as dirty, ignorant and uneducated — and through a racist ad campaign masquerading as maternal and infant protection. The medical profession moved births out of communities and into hospital settings, even though a study by the New York Academy of Medicine in 1932 found that home births attended by midwives had the lowest maternal mortality rate of any setting, while two-thirds of maternal hospital deaths were preventable.

Evidence shows that 85% of pregnant people would safely qualify for out-of-hospital birth. People giving birth with midwives in community settings such as birth centers and home births have better outcomes, on average, including lower rates of cesarean sections and mortality. Nonetheless, 98% of births in the U.S. take place in hospitals, a far higher percentage than in other rich countries.

As the shift from largely at-home to in-hospital birth took place, the myth was that midwives rooted in communities and ancient traditions were not capable of adjusting to the changes brought on by germ theory and other advances in biomedicine and public health. Underlying this deception was the fact that moving birth into hospitals under the purview of physicians was a financial boon for the U.S. medical industry.

## NEW YORK STATE’S POLICY DYSFUNCTION

The Sheppard-Towner Act led to the decimation of community Black, immigrant, and indigenous midwifery and in its place created a new professional class of white nurse-midwives who largely served the maternity care needs of poor populations, primarily in hospitals. In New York, community midwives — who are trained in birth-center and home birth, and now formally known as Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) — continued to work alongside their nurse-midwife counterparts until the passage of the 1992 Midwifery Practice Act, which was meant to professionalize midwifery standards, but excluded CPMs. The act ensured that nurse-midwives and those with nursing-equivalent graduate degrees — only 7% of whom are of color in the U.S. — enjoyed the privilege to practice in the state, while practice

by CPMs — 21% of whom are of color — became a felony. As a result, while CPMs are currently licensed to practice in 37 other states, they are not able to practice in New York.

During the pandemic CPMs licensed in other states were allowed to practice in New York, but the state has continued to withhold permanent recognition and licensure to its own workforce of CPMs. It is imperative the midwifery workforce be expanded, especially in populations where midwives have been shut out of their ancestral profession. Fortunately, a bill should soon be introduced in the State Assembly to license CPMs. However, it will take a wave of public pressure to ensure the bill makes it through the gauntlet of Albany legislative procedures to be enacted.

As for out-of-hospital birth options, many birth centers in the state have closed over the last 20 years. Now, only three of the 400 birth centers in the U.S. are in New York State, with two of them in New York City. In contrast California has 56, Texas has 92 and Florida has 32 birth centers. Factors driving these closures include low insurance reimbursements, high malpractice insurance rates, and consolidation, cost-cutting, and profit-maximization in the healthcare industry, where revenue per square foot is more important than quality of care.

In 2016, New York State passed the Birth Center Act, allowing midwives — in theory — to open their own birth centers. Until then, only physicians could operate birth centers. However it took the Department of Health until 2019 to complete regulations, and the department had still not finalized the licensing process when the COVID-19 pandemic ripped through New York City in March 2020.

As ambulances carrying COVID patients to overcrowded emergency rooms screamed through abandoned streets, many birthing people were terrified of entering hospitals. The city’s two birth centers and 20 homebirth midwifery practices were inundated with requests, with some receiving as many inquiries in one day as they normally did in a year.

Birth-justice advocates put forward plans to create makeshift birth centers and put pressure on the governor to direct the Department of Health (DOH) to finalize its licensure process. After much outcry, it became evident that rather than follow nationally recognized birth center accreditation guidelines, the DOH had instead chosen to create burdensome regulations — chief among them, the onerous and expensive Certificate of Need (CON) process.

Originally intended to keep healthcare costs for patients low, CON laws now essentially serve to maintain hospital monopolies and have been shown to increase costs, reduce access, and increase disparities in care. The expensive and time-consuming process was designed to apply to large hospitals, not small, free-standing facilities and, in New York, is overseen by the Public Health and Health Planning Council, which is entirely appointed by the governor, represents large healthcare organizations, and includes no birth advocates and only two women on its board.

Several groups of midwives are ready to open birth centers in the state, including two in New York City, both led by women of color. But for most of them, bureaucratic and financial hurdles, exemplified by the CON process, appear insurmountable.

Owing to grassroots efforts, the New York Assembly and Senate recently passed a bill to make national accreditation sufficient for licensure of birth centers in NY, but the work continues to ensure that the Governor signs the bill and DOH regulations eliminate the CON process for birth centers.

In the name of birth justice, New York State must offer true choices for birthing people by making midwifery care and birthing centers accessible and affordable to all. Anything less would be justice denied.

*Neelu Shruti is a birth justice advocate, midwifery student, and the founder of Love Child, a support space for expecting and new parents located in Manhattan’s West Village.*



ESTEBAN JIMENEZ



# POLICE, WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

*We Do This 'Til We Free Us*

BY MARIAME KABA  
HAYMARKET BOOKS, 2021

By Matthew Wasserman

Last summer's protests put police and prison abolition on the progressive agenda. Yet it remains difficult to imagine a world without police and prisons. As a society, we have no institutional way to deal with violence or harm other than calling 911 and locking people in cages.

To be sure, most police work has little to do with responding to — let alone preventing — violent crime. We've all formed our ideas of what cops do from pro-carceral propaganda like Law and Order. But recent empirical studies have found that officers spend just four percent of their time dealing with violent crime. As anyone who's ever done a ride-along can attest, most of their shift is spent dealing with non-criminal matters such as noise complaints and traffic enforcement or simply driving around looking for something to do.

What's more, in many cases the police are the source of violence rather than its solution. From stop and frisks to the murders of Eric Garner and George Floyd, state violence is pervasive in certain neighborhoods. It's not hard to draw a straight line from policing's origins in slave patrols to the activity of plainclothes cops patrolling East New York.

Nonetheless, when police and prisons are the only solution on offer to street violence, people are understandably loath to abandon them. The current mayoral race illustrates the point. As shootings and homicides have risen during the pandemic, after 30 years of steady declines in the national and local crime rate, the issue of 'public safety' has become increasingly salient. And 'defund the police' does not appear to be the response a lot of voters are looking to hear. In the words of veteran abolitionist intellectual and organizer Mariame Kaba, "we have been so indoctrinated with the idea that we solve problems and caging people that many can't imagine anything other than prisons and the police as solutions to violence and harm."

In *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*, a new collection of essays and interviews, Kaba attempts to navigate out of this trap. Kaba compellingly argues that while police and prisons may slake our punitive impulses, they offer only the illusion of security, not real public safety. Putting someone in prison gets them off the streets, but it hardly rehabilitates them—indeed, even short stints in jail can make people more likely to commit future offenses. Nor does the criminal punishment system provide meaningful accountability or reparations to the victims of violence.

Kaba advocates instead for collective liberation and what she calls "transformative justice." By this she means com-

munity responses to violence that "build support and more safety for the person harmed, figure out how the broader context was set up for this harm to happen, and how that context can be changed so that this harm is less likely to happen again."

In so doing, she steadfastly refuses to conflate retribution with justice. While it's hard not to feel on some level that Harvey Weinstein — or Derek Chauvin — is getting his just deserts, Kaba doesn't think prison is the answer for anyone. This is not to say that she is indifferent to the experience of survivors or unsympathetic to the goals of #MeToo. But her focus is on uprooting the conditions that lead to violence and "complicating narratives that are too easy, these really

of them tomorrow without first creating alternative ways to address harm or redistributing resources. But there are still immediate steps we should take toward abolition. One of the most practical parts of her book is the taxonomy she sets up between non-reformist reforms and reforms that only reinforce the power of the police and surveillance state. She opposes body-worn cameras or hiring more cops to carry out so-called 'community policing.' But she supports immediate steps such as hiring social workers to respond to mental health crises in lieu of cops or diverting money from the police to social services.

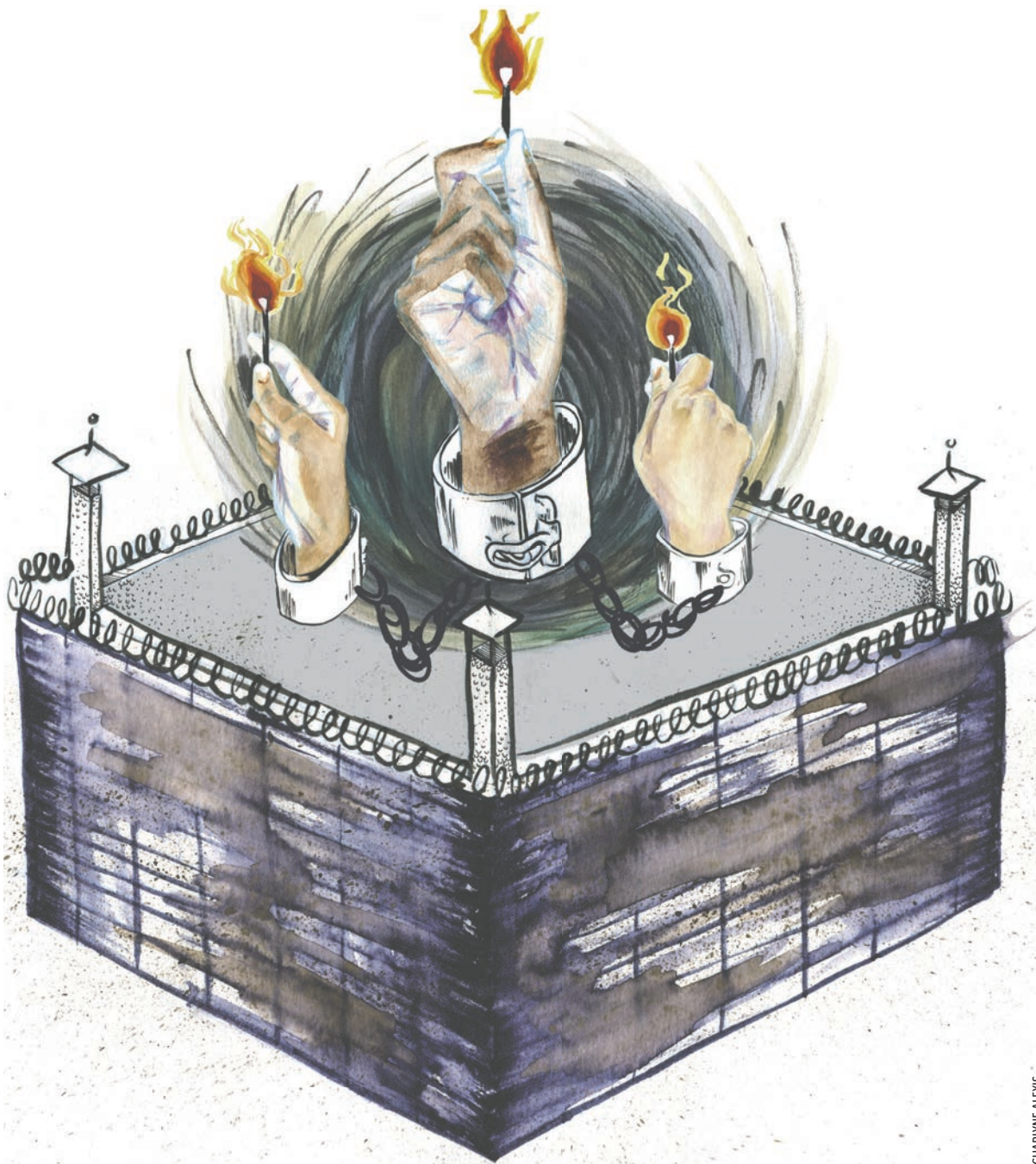
As the pushback to defund demonstrates, a left politics that doesn't take the reality of violent crime seriously is likely to flounder if and when crime rates rise again.

Indeed, there is a social justice argument for doing so as well as a practical one. The cost of both street violence and state violence is borne disproportionately by poor Black and Brown people.

But this needn't mean reflexively backing the blue. While criminologists disagree on why crime rates plummeted over the past 30 years, few think that policing or prisons are responsible for most of the drop. Sociologist Patrick Sharkey's work, for instance, suggests that the growth in community organizations played a significant role in making cities safer. And when the NYPD was hit by a "blue flu" in 2014, cutting back on "proactive policing" and arrests to protest de Blasio, crime continued to drop. It is unclear how far we can go toward abolition, at least absent fully automated luxury communism. Still, it seems evident that we can redirect some resources from the carceral state to communities without conceding the issue of public safety.

Ultimately, as Kaba freely admits, abolishing prisons and the police would require a wholesale sociopolitical transformation. It's a transformation that may not be possible. Even if we radically reduced inequality and provided for the material needs of everyone, some degree of interpersonal violence would likely remain a stubborn reality. But regardless of whether abolition is thought

of as a destination or a goal we can only asymptotically approach, Kaba's clear-eyed commitment to it is inspiring. Without resorting to sloganeering or downplaying the reality of interpersonal violence, she models in word and deed an abolitionist praxis.



CHARIVINE ALEXIS

simple narratives around perfect victims who are assaulted by evil monsters." As she points out, quoting Danielle Sered, "no one enters violence for the first time by committing it."

It's easy for all this to feel like pie in the sky. Kaba is right, of course, that putting people in prisons that concentrate the risk of sexual assault is a flawed answer to sexual violence and that the police serve as a system of social control for communities of color. But that does not address the issues of immediate harm and violence. If you are in danger, the only option the state provides us is to call the police. And when someone commits acts of violence, the only response we have on tap is warehousing them in prisons. While investment in community organizations and social services holds the promise of reducing future violence, it does not solve the issue of what to do with people who have already committed or are presently committing acts of harm.

What would we do without police or prisons? As Kaba acknowledges, it would be a disaster if we simply got rid



# BLACK LIVES MATTER INSPIRES THE WHITNEY

*Dave McKenzie: The Story I Tell Myself*  
THRU OCT. 4

*Dawoud Bey: An American Project*  
THRU OCT. 3

*Julie Mehretu*  
THRU AUG. 3

*David Hammons: Day's End*  
PERMANENT

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

By Mike Newton

What a way to go. For his 2003 video “Self-Portrait Piñata,” artist Dave McKenzie cast his image as a deliriously silly-looking piñata, filled this facsimile McKenzie with candy and glitter, then hoisted it above a group of kids (kids who were not about to ignore some potential free candy).

McKenzie’s video is naturally funny but also induces queasiness. It’s strange seeing a white child go up to McKenzie’s haplessly-smiling avatar — clearly meant to resemble a Black man — and bash at him with a baseball bat. The little boy here probably didn’t know that he was participating in a fraught, politicized spectacle, and that’s the tricky thing about any place, like the U.S., where large swaths of people are routinely marginalized: everything becomes political, whether you know it or not.

For better or worse, the Whitney, like other major museums, tends to respond to pressing social issues in a lightly-distanced, elliptical way. For example, their big pre-pandemic exhibit “Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945” demonstrated how Mexican artists had a heavy and direct influence on major American art movements of the 20th century: seemingly, a rejoinder to the Trump administration and its demonization of Mexican immigrants.

Last year, the Whitney tried to mount “Collective Actions: Artist Interventions In A Time of Change,” an exhibit that was intended to engage directly with the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, but which ended-up getting canceled when it came out that the museum had not properly paid many of the participating artists (this is also after a string of controversies around several of the museum’s popular Biennial exhibitions). The Whitney’s current slate of shows is maybe a sort of apology, or a lesson learned. It’s not necessarily clear exactly what the Whitney is trying to say right now, but by hosting four concurrent solo exhibits by Black artists — all of them working in America and concerned with issues of social justice and cultural change — the museum is certainly saying something. Whether this focus on Black American artists represents the start of a broader curatorial commitment or ends up being a momentary burst of tokenism is not yet known. What about the art itself? It’s good.

Queens-born Dawoud Bey started out in 1970s Harlem shooting 35mm social-realist street photography in the tradition of Roy DeCarava and Gordon Parks. Bey came into his own as a photographer when he embraced

a sort of direct, conflicted engagement with his subjects (mainly Black Americans). For example, “A Young Man Resting on an Exercise Bike, Amityville, NY” (1988) gives us an abundance from its somewhat stoic-seeming subject: his gentle but pointed gaze, his long fingers, the gleam of his bike’s steel handlebars. In what may be his best-known series, Bey worked with the rare, cumber-

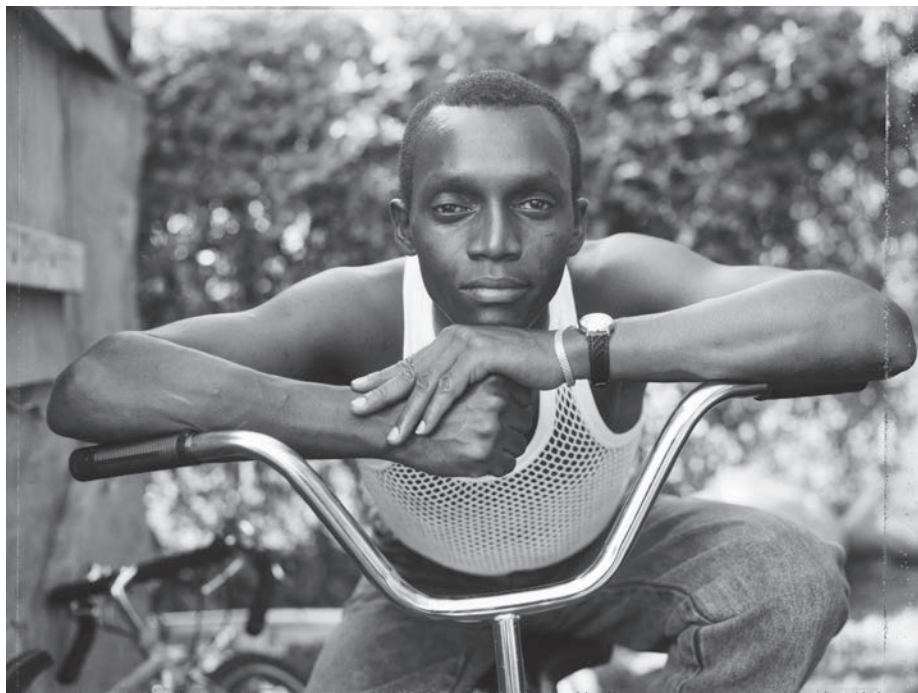
wouldn’t know that from looking at it, though. What does come through — with its uneasy juxtapositions of clashing color, its thick but wispy lines like errant construction-site spray paint — is a sense of unease, a sort

of seasick reckoning with a world in perpetual chaos. Mehretu seems to approach her work almost as seismograph, recording massive, global changes in endless, highly-deliberate strokes of ink and paint. The results are a wonder to see, but still, there’s a sense that some connective layer was stripped in the process.

The Dave McKenzie show is on the third floor, which people sometimes skip. Don’t be one of those people. McKenzie’s performance videos have an endearingly vivacious, youthful quality (most of the work here was made when he was in his 20s), with a whole world of politicized complexity sitting just beneath the often quite funny surface.

Finally, out by the water is a new, long-term installation by David Hammons. Called “Day’s End,” the piece uses metal poles to make a ghostly approximation of the demolished Pier 52 shed. Given its semi-anonymous reputation, this vanished building is almost impossibly loaded with meaning and history: legendary avant-garde sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark cut holes into its walls as part of a 1975 artwork (also called “Day’s End”); it served as a meeting-spot for the vital sub rosa queer community that formed on Manhattan’s West Side; it was once a sanitation facility. Hammons’s work (in sculpture, printmaking, or even video) tends to start with recognizable forms, then intervenes in the representation to create a phantasmic presence — something from memory. As the high-rise apartments and luxury shops (and, uh, art museums) continue to sprout by the Hudson, I do hope that Hammons’s piece can at least serve as a reminder that there’s a big history here: memories to be cultivated and not just paved-over.

Memory is key here, and it may be on us, the viewers, to remember the promises of the summer of 2020, when scores of cultural institutions pledged to inspect and address their potentially racist practices. Whichever way the Whitney chooses to go forward, it will certainly involve politics — it’s impossible for it not to.



some 20” x 24” Polaroid camera: the resultant portraits appear in segmented squares, suggesting a conflict with the limits and parameters of the photographic medium itself. Like the best street photography, this is all deeply humanistic work with the added tensions of complex relationships informed by difficult systems.

A few floors down from the Bey show, we have a mid-career retrospective of Julie Mehretu. Mehretu’s paintings are spectacularly ambitious, and deserve to be seen up-close. But there’s also an unfortunate vagueness that permeates here, especially given the implied social-justice contexts that these works emerged from. “Conjured Parts (eye), Ferguson” (2016), for example, is reportedly based on images of riot cops in Ferguson, Missouri after Michael Brown was murdered there by police in 2014. You

*Dawoud Bey, A Young Man Resting on an Exercise Bike, Amityville, NY, 1988. Pigmented inkjet print (printed 2019), 30 × 40 in. (76.2 × 101.6 cm). Collection of the artist.*

*Julie Mehretu, Conjured Parts (eye), Ferguson, 2016. Ink and acrylic on canvas, 84 × 96 in. (213.4 × 243.8 cm). The Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles. Photograph by Cathy CarverCMYK*



# MICHAEL RATNER, PRESENTE

*Moving The Bar: My Life As A Radical Lawyer*

BY MICHAEL RATNER  
O/R BOOKS, MAY 1, 2021

By Ann Schneider

Michael Ratner was one of the most accomplished radical lawyers of his generation, representing clients from Attica to Guantanamo. He served as president of the National Lawyers Guild and was legal director of the Center for Constitutional Rights for many years. Radicalized in the late 1960s, he had no illusions about the ruling-class bias of the law under capitalism. He believed political action outside the courtroom was as important as anything that happened inside it.

Ratner died all too soon of cancer in 2016, at the age of 72. His friends completed the memoir he began before his death. *Moving the Bar*, published on May Day, is concise and easy to read for all who care about justice — a class of people that is, happily, much larger than the number of judges and lawyers. In it, he recounts the epic legal battles he fought and the turbulent movements he struggled alongside. He also candidly offers a glimpse of the thoughtful soul behind the legal legend.

Ratner's tale spans his upbringing in Shaker Heights, at that time, a predominantly Jewish suburb of Cleveland. He was the son of a Polish father (Ratower became Ratner) who built a lumber-supply business despite failures and setbacks. His younger brother Bruce is the billionaire real-estate developer who brought the Brooklyn Nets basketball team to New York and spearheaded the Atlantic Yards mega-development. Like many young Jewish leftists of his era, Ratner took to heart the lessons of Nazi Germany. "Never again" meant speaking out and resisting the wrongdoing of one's own government before it slid into barbarism.

By his second year at Columbia Law School, uprisings had broken out in dozens of cities where Blacks were plagued by poor housing, police violence, unemployment and political powerlessness. He landed a job at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. By 1969, when he graduated, his friends included red-diaper babies like Margie Leinsdorf, whom he would marry, and members of the Weather Underground. His academic credentials won him a position in the ivory tower, a clerkship for federal Judge Constance Baker Motley.

Ratner fully embodied the mantra of the radical lawyer: "Educate, Demonstrate, Litigate." After the 9/11 attacks, the time of the Patriot Act, roundups of Muslim

immigrants, and the outsourcing of torture, he organized 600 lawyers to provide representation for accused "enemy combatants" detained in the prison camp at the U.S. Navy's Guantanamo base in Cuba. Those lawyers gave him a custom-made "Guantanamo Bar Association" hat, which he frequently wore when participating in demonstrations and giving talks and lectures.

He describes the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act as a "300-page hodgepodge of new laws that Congress rejected since the 1970s." Of President George W. Bush's Executive Order #1 establishing military commissions to try accused terrorists, Ratner said "I considered it then and I consider it now a coup-d'état."

He took part in many campaigns to end U.S. interven-

tion and ethnic background of the judge, the more likely a court would be to bend or ignore the law. Or give it lip service to it while denying relief."

His long career teaching and litigating gave him the satisfaction of seeing historical parallels in recurring David-and-Goliath fights. He also saw the ironies, such as that Guantanamo (stolen from Cuba in 1898) had previously been used as a prison camp for 15,000 Haitian refugees were held after the U.S.-sanctioned coup against the leftist government of Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1991. The Center argued that Haitian refugees, fleeing by boat, had the right to enter the U.S., instead of being picked up by the Coast Guard and imprisoned.

Ratner says the U.S. government used Guantanamo as "a legal black hole." Its ancestor was in 1679, when the British began using remote islands and military bases to hold dissidents in order to prevent any judicial inquiry into their imprisonment, in violation of the Magna Carta. The U.S. created military commissions and minted the term "enemy combatant," for similar reasons.

The epitome of the organizer-lawyer, he did not limit his contributions to the courtroom. His political wisdom made him anticipate who might become a collateral victim, and make sure they had protection. While representing Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, he realized that Wikileaks associate Sarah Harrison, who was accompanying Wikileaks source Edward Snowden in Moscow, would need a new passport to be able to return to the U.K., so he found someone who could handle the task. Ratner also generously shares credit with the other lawyers and organizers who were part of the campaign.

Only with brevity and excellent editing can all of his cases and campaigns fit into this 357-page book. Through family vignettes, he reveals the emotional development that made him such an effective fighter for justice. Endearingly, he includes some of the hate mail he received

after standing up for alleged terrorists before military commissions at Guantanamo. He astutely observes that the Authorization for Use of Military Force, the blank check Congress gave the President in 2001, has already been used to authorize offensive actions in 37 countries where al-Qaeda is claimed to be present.

Wherever there was injustice, Michael Ratner would be there to fight it.

*Ann Schneider is a member of the board of the NYC chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.*



COURTESY KAREN RANUCCI

tion in Central America and the Caribbean, including Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Costa Rica. "It was only after the attacks of 9/11 in 2001, when the U.S. was so preoccupied with the war on terror in the Middle East and Central Asia, that some of the countries in Latin America were able to establish governments that benefited their people," he observes.

A first-rate litigator, he recounts his heartbreaking losses as well as the wins. CCR's lawsuit against New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller for the violent retaking of the Attica prison on September 9, 1971, was dismissed without a hearing. It ultimately took 27 years of appeals to win damages for those killed and brutalized by state troopers.

Ratner came to learn, he writes, that "the more serious the charge and the less the defendants resembled the class,

## ADAMS VS. YANG

*Continued from page 9*

by, gig economy employers like Uber and the Police Benevolent Association. Yang's top campaign staff is made up almost entirely of Tusk employees. A Yang administration would likely be little more than a subsidiary of Bradley Tusk's empire.

### UBI As Trojan Horse

Andrew Yang popularized Universal Basic Income (UBI) when he campaigned for presi-

dent on the promise that every American would receive a \$1,000 per month check from the government. As Mayor, he wants to dish out a smaller version of that — \$2,000 per year for the 500,000 poorest New Yorkers. The difference is that, unlike the federal government, the City doesn't have its own printing presses. The money would likely come from other critical social programs — which is the point for the libertarian-leaning Yang and many of his wealthy backers.

### Charter Schools

A group of pro-charter school billionaire

hedge fund managers led by Daniel Loeb and Kenneth Griffinare are pumping a late infusion of \$6 million into Comeback PAC, a pro-Yang Super PAC. Comeback PAC is managed by Lis Smith, who also advised Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign. Yang is a vocal supporter of having the state cap on charter schools increased.

### No Woman Could Do This

Yang routinely tosses out half-baked policy ideas like building a casino on Governor's Island and is often unprepared to discuss other policy proposals. As a remedy, he's suggested

that he would hire fellow mayoral candidate Kathryn Garcia to manage the city government for him while he would focus on cheerleading for the Big Apple.

### All in for Israel

"The people of NYC will always stand with our brothers and sisters in Israel who face down terrorism and persevere," Yang tweeted on May 10 at the beginning of the Israeli onslaught against the Gaza Strip.





BRANDON O'NEILL

## REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

*Dear Billy, I'm opposed to the police abusing and killing Black people as much as the next person. I'm also against anyone else being a victim of violence. Yet, if I say "All Lives Matter" people get mad at me like I'm a terrible person. Why? I don't get it.*

TOM  
Bay Ridge

Dear Tom,  
I can't think of a more important question. Whites in this benighted country of ours must figure out the answer.

If you are willing to say "All Lives Matter" in response to a Black person saying "Black Lives Matter," then you are saying that the coming of that phrase after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014 is not particularly necessary. And the person who wants to say that "All Lives Matter" is also saying that the danger to Black descendants of slaves does not separate them from the rest of society.

But I understand, as a white person, that I will never know what the legacy of slavery really is. I will never know what the fear feels like to go out into public space where the police are. And we have seen with Eleanor Bumpurs, and Fred Hampton, and Ayana Stanley Jones, and Akai Gurley, and Stephen Clark, and Sandra Bland, and Breonna Taylor — we have seen so many people of color killed not in public space but in their own homes, where safety is also not assured. No, Tom, you don't get it, but there are as many reasons to say "Black Lives Matter" as people who have been harmed.

A leader of our "Church of Stop Shopping," John Sims, was roused from sleep on May 20 by three armed white males who turned out to be police, although at first he feared that they were vigilantes. This took place in Columbia, South Carolina, in an art gallery where John's ritualistic manipulations of the Confederate flag were the main exhibit. He was staying in an apartment on the second floor, which has housed artists-in-residence over the past 12 years.

John is a 6'5" African-American. The main thing he returns to in our talks is his awareness of how close he came to death. He tried to move in slow motion, polite,

studied, with hands in sight. Any wrong move, any anger incited in a hopped-up cop by his explanations of "You can see I'm living here, this is my computer, my clothes." and "Why don't you call the museum director?"

Well, that last statement was especially risky because it's the quick solution and John might have gotten excited and reached for his phone to get her number. That gesture may have been his last. There are hundreds of Black males shot each year with the "reaching for what appeared to be a gun" in the incident report.

This is one example of slavery's living legacy — to be deprived of the protection that should come from having a legally established domicile. A longtime art gallery and institution that hosted community events in Columbia was no protection for him.

This delicate act of survival is unknowable to even the most well-meaning ally. John couldn't assume that he was able to hold and defend the space around his body. He was in mortal danger sleeping in his bed. As we mark the anniversary of George Floyd's murder, the air reverberates with cries of "Black Lives Matter." When a white person hears the phrase, the righteous reply is to shout back those three words with the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmuad Arbery and keep their names going and going. That is what we did last summer until we lost our voices.

We must amplify this demand for safety and respect as long as Black Americans are victims of state-sanctioned violence. From climate change to racist wars to tail-light stops, that violence is designed into our unexamined, colonizing lives.

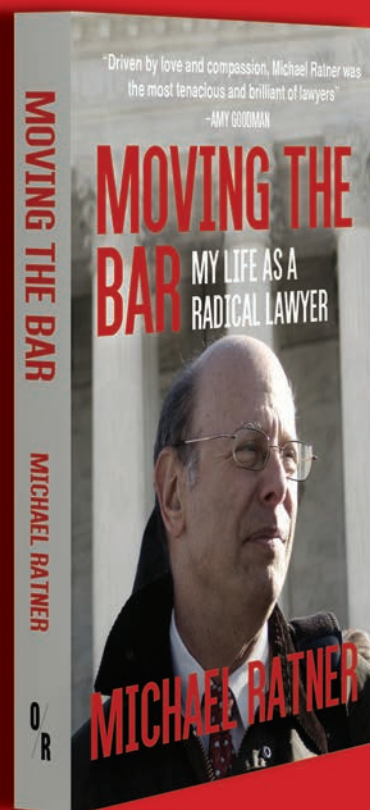
Tom, we need to keep shouting "Black Lives Matter!" until Black people tell us that they are safe.

— REV BILLY

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



## OUT NOW



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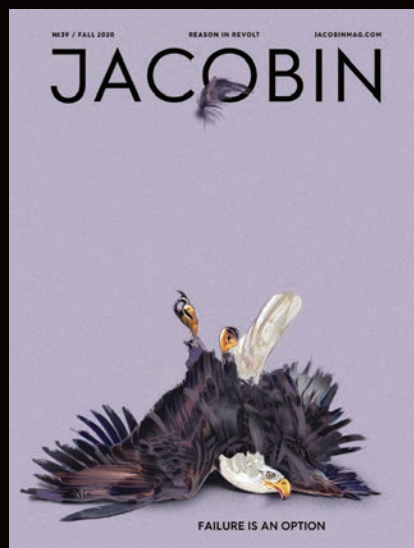


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