

THE

9-11/OCCUPY WALL STREET DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

THE INDYPENDENT

#266: OCTOBER 2021

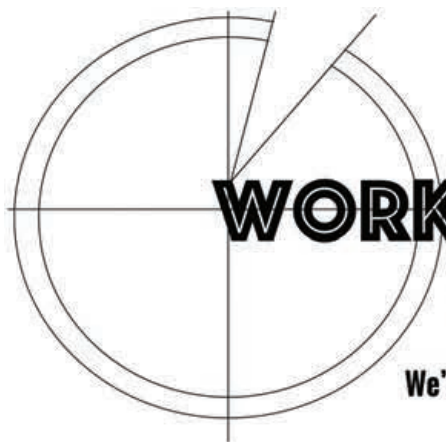


CONTESTED GROUND

9-11, OCCUPY WALL STREET & THE FUTURE OF AMERICA

COVERAGE STARTS PAGE 9

LEADORAN



WORKERS UNITE! FILM FESTIVAL 10

OCT 8-20 2021 © WORKERSUNITEFILMFESTIVAL.ORG

We're back at Cinema Village theater 10/8-10/14! Page 8 for highlights. Full passes: bit.ly/TixWUFF10



**THE INDEPENDENT, INC.**

388 Atlantic Avenue,
2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
212-904-1282
www.indydependent.org
Twitter: @TheIndydependent
facebook.com/TheIndydependent

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold,
Alina Mogilyanskaya, Ann
Schneider, John Tarleton

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

John Tarleton

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Ellen Davidson, Alina
Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas
Powers, Steven Wishnia

ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR

Frank Reynoso

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Mikael Tarkela

DESIGNERS

Leia Doran, Anna Gold,
Evan Sult

OFFICE MANAGER

Amba Guerguerian

INTERN

Zion DeCoteau

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

contact@indydependent.org

SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:

submissions@indydependent.org

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:

ads@indydependent.org

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS

Linda Martín Alcoff, Eleanor
J. Bader, Bennett Baumer, Sue
Brisk, Roman Broskowski,
Emlyn Cameron, Rico Cleffi,
Renée Feltz, Todd Fine,
Lynne Foster, Esteban Guerra,
Theodore Hamm, David
Hollenbach, Manvi Jalan,
Rob Katz, Kenneth Lopez,
Derek Ludovici, Gary Martin,
Farid Nassif, Teddy Ostrow,
Reverend Billy, Olivia Riggio,
Natasha Santos, Steven
Sherman, Maresi Starzman,
Julia Thomas, Tyrone Wallace,
and Matt Wasserman.

VOLUNTEER DISTRIBUTORS

Erik Anders-Nilssen, Eric
Brelsford, Chris & Pam
Brown, Hank Dombrowski,
Joseph Epstein, Lew Friedman,
Priscilla Grim, Laura Kaplan,
Michael Korn, Ashley
Marinaccio, Christine Miller,
Saul Nieves, Tom O'Keefe,
Caroline Rath, Norm Scott and
Carol Smith.

EVENT CALENDAR**SEPTEMBER****ANYTIME**

PAY-WHAT-YOU-WISH • THU-TUE: 10AM-5PM
MUSEUM: THE MET CLOISTERS
The Cloisters is a museum in what feels like an old abbey that specializes in European medieval art and architecture, with a focus on the Romanesque and Gothic periods. The design and ambiance of the building evoke a sense of medieval European monastic life. The museum is at the northernmost part of Manhattan, situated at the top of the romantically trellaced Fort Tryon Park and right below the sprawling Inwood Hill Park.
MET CLOISTERS
99 Margaret Corbin Drive
Manhattan

OPENING SEP 10

\$15
FILM: FIRE MUSIC
Although the free jazz movement of the 1960s and '70s was much maligned in some jazz circles, its pioneers – brilliant talents like Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, and John Coltrane – are today acknowledged as central to the evolution of jazz as America's most innovative art form. A rich trove of archival footage conjures the 1960s jazz scene along with incisive reflections by a number of the movement's key players.
FILM FORUM
209 W Houston St
Manhattan

SEP 18

FREE • 10AM-8PM
SOCIALIST FORUM: CHINA & THE LEFT

The Qiao Collective will host a one-day international convening of organizers, scholars, and journalists whose work grapples with questions of Chinese socialism, Western imperialism, Global South internationalism, and the renewed Cold War consensus taking hold in the West. The conference will provide a space for those who oppose a new Cold War with China to meet, strategize, and discuss. **RSVP:** bit.ly/3tu4Jxn.
THE PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W 37th St
Manhattan
Or online via [youtube.com/c/ThePeoplesForumNYC](https://www.youtube.com/c/ThePeoplesForumNYC)

SEP 19

FREE • 7PM / DOORS 5PM
SUMMERSTAGE: PATTY SMITH & HER BAND
One of the first acts to break out of the CBGB scene in the early 70s, Patti Smith pioneered a brand of hard-nosed rock and roll infused with the spirit of experimentation and free expression that made downtown Manhattan so exciting. Smith's latest projects include a trilogy of albums with the Soundwalk Collective, an exploration into the travels of three French writers comprising field recordings from waypoints along their journeys.
SUMMERSTAGE, CENTRAL PARK
Manhattan

SEP 20

FREE • 9PM
FORUM: WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MYANMAR?
Since February, an uprising has

been in progress against a military coup in Myanmar that overthrew a democratically-elected government and brought back to power the generals who have dominated the country for decades. A panel of women will discuss three specific aspects of this momentous upheaval: labor struggles, the feminist dynamic and the role of ethnic minorities.
HAYMARKET BOOKS
Online, registration via <https://bit.ly/3yYLnkT>

SEP 23

\$12 • 8PM-9:45PM
FILM: THIS IS NOT A BURIAL, IT'S A RESURRECTION
This Is Not a Burial marks the introduction of a major filmmaker and the final powerhouse performance of a remarkable actress. The late Mary Twala Mhlongo gives a career-capping performance as Mantoa, an 80-year-old woman who has lived in a small Lesotho village for her entire life. While preparing for her own death, she receives word of an accident that has killed her only son, leaving her entirely alone, with only the respect of her community, the traditions of her ancestors, and the courage of her convictions.
MAYSLES CINEMA
343 Malcolm X Boulevard
Manhattan

SEP 28

FREE • 7PM-8:15PM.
WEBINAR: THE JAPANESE GARDEN
The Japanese garden is not simply a place of beauty, serenity and contemplation grounded in a long tradition, but it is also a holistic art form functioning as a place of discovery and innovation. This talk explores the historical journey of one of the world's oldest land art forms

and examines its evolving relevance to the world. This is the first of the five-part Living Traditions webinar series.
JAPAN SOCIETY
Online, registration via bit.ly/3lf7fni

SEP 30

FREE • 7PM-8:30PM
CONVERSATION: DEEP SNIFF WITH ADAM ZMITH & HUGH RYAN
Since their popularization in the late nineteenth century, poppers have metabolized into the lifeblood of queer culture, and can be spotted across both mainstream and fringe LGBTQ+ literature, film, music, pornography and comics; wafting from Studio 54 and Soho, to our bedside tables. Deep Sniff is a potent history of poppers' marketization and co-option by neoliberal capitalism, which passionately argues in favor of radical queer futures and derestricted categories of love, sex and gender.
BLUESTOCKINGS
Online via bit.ly/2XdhpDs

OCT 4

\$20 SUGGESTED DONATION
9PM-12AM • **LIVE MUSIC: LA BANDA CHUSKA**
La Banda Chuska takes inspiration from the twangy surf music of 1960s Peru (Los Belkings, Los Siderals) as well as the more psychedelic flavors of chicha (Los Destellos, Los Shapis). Their post-punk energy has also drawn comparisons to a tropical version of the B-52s.
BARBÉS
376 9 St
Brooklyn

KNIGHT TIME: Visit the Cloisters this fall and enjoy the medieval art and architecture as well as a stroll through its gardens.

OCT 6-8

FREE • 10AM-6PM
CONFERENCE: PANDEMIC LEGACIES
Taking its cue from compelling new directions in slavery studies as well as our current health crisis, the virtual 2021 Lapidus Center Conference will explore a variety of critical issues in the history of health, healing, and medicine in the age of Atlantic slavery via a combination of keynote conversations and panel sessions.
SCHOMBURG CENTER
Online, registration via <https://bit.ly/38UHh2X>

OCT 8-14

\$9 PER SCREENING
WORKERS UNITE! FILM FESTIVAL
change The Workers Unite! Film Festival, now in its 10th season, is a celebration of global labor solidarity that showcases student and professional films from the United States and around the world which publicize and highlight the struggles, successes and daily lives of all workers in their efforts to unite and organize for better living conditions and social justice.
CINEMA VILLAGE
22 W 12th St
Manhattan.

ADVERTISE IN THE INDY

- GREAT RATES
- UNIQUE AUDIENCE
- PERSONAL ATTENTION FROM US
- FREE HIGH QUALITY DESIGN AT NO EXTRA CHARGE

212-904-1282 • ADS@INDYPENDENT.ORG

IN THIS ISSUE

RENT RELIEF, P4

Federal funds for tenants who lost income during Covid are finally reaching NYers in large numbers

NY'S NEW GOVERNOR, P5

How Kathy Hochul answers these five questions will go a long ways to determining what kind of governor she will be.

LESSONS LEARNED? P6

The de Blasio administration is taking a cavalier approach to school reopenings, say members of the Movement of Rank and File Educators.

ALL IN THE FAMILY, P7

Jean Montrevail's family is still fighting to bring home the Haitian father of four who was deported by Trump's ICE. And they recently got some good news.

HAUNTED HISTORY, P9

9/11 & Occupy Wall Street both occurred within a block of each other and that's not a coincidence.

WORLD TRADE CENTER REBUILD, P10

Since 9/11, billions of dollars have been poured into building a monument to power and greed that most NYers want nothing to do with.

IN THE SHADOW OF 9/11, P14

A CUNY professor reflects on his hometown's post-9/11 jingoism and what he learned from the soldiers who went off to fight the wars that followed.

PENTAGON FAIL, P15

Former Army Major Danny Sjursen looks back on how the military's failures in Afghanistan and the lies that ensued.

TRAPPED IN AFGHANISTAN, P16

For women in Kabul who experienced a measure of freedom, the return of Taliban rule is a nightmare they desperately want to escape.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE, P17

The 9/11 attacks kneecapped the global justice movement that was surging in the early 2000s. It took a decade for radical protest to re-emerge in the U.S.

OCCUPY, A SHORT HISTORY, P18

From its unlikely origins to its demise being involved with Occupy "was like watching a mystery reveal itself," one participant recalled.

OCCUPY'S SPRAWLING LEGACY, P20

Occupy Wall Street's impact has been far-reaching — from presidential politics to hyper-local neighborhood organizing.

HURRICANE SANDY, P22

An interview with Sandy Nurse, a former OWS protest leader who will join City Council on January 1.

DON'T CANCEL THIS MESSAGE, P24

America's younger generation has moved decisively to the left. But, to what ends will they put their desire to remake the world?

AN ELOQUENT VOICE, P26

Astra Taylor explores debt, what we owe each other and what we don't in her wide-ranging new collection of essays.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS, P27

How to talk with vaccine skeptics + dealing with fear and hope amid the 6th Mass Extinction.



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

DEMOCRACY



DEMOCRACYNOW.ORG

Tune In Live Every Weekday 8-9am ET

- Audio, Video, Transcripts, Podcasts
- Los titulares de Hoy (headlines in Spanish)
- Find your local broadcast station and schedule
- **Subscribe to the Daily News Digest**

Follow Us @ DEMOCRACYNOW



AFGHANISTAN

Twenty years of **failed U.S. Policy** has impoverished two countries—**Afghanistan and the United States!**

- We spent **\$2.26 trillion** since 9/11. Instead of solving urgent problems at home, we filled the coffers of American arms manufacturers.
- **Thousands of U.S. soldiers died or were wounded.** Tens of thousands of Afghans were killed, wounded and made homeless.
- A war to defeat the Taliban has ended with the Taliban once again in power!

President Biden was right to bring our troops home!

But a failed U.S. WAR POLICY was the real cause of the present crisis.

America's longest war should have ended long ago. Sending more troops or staying more years wouldn't have changed the situation. The future of Afghanistan must be left to the Afghan people, *not* to occupying armies.

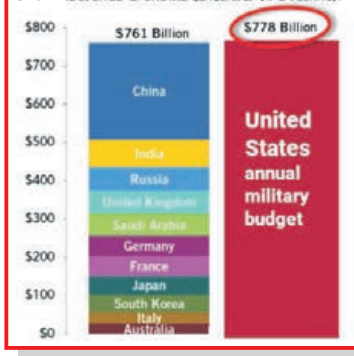
We must learn from our failures.

We must always use *diplomacy* rather than troops, bombs, drones and sanctions. We must stop funding the Pentagon and the military-industrial complex and end the diversion of money from the vital programs that Americans urgently need.

What You Can Do – Call Congress .. (877) 762-8762 and Demand -

- That the money from saved from ending these endless wars be used for jobs, housing, education, healthcare and to protect us from the real threat to our planet—the climate crisis.
- That the U.S. join the UN and other international efforts to help Afghanistan rebuild their country. **Our country has a moral obligation to help rebuild that war-shattered country.**
- **That the war really end!** No drone strikes that kill innocent civilians in great numbers. No sanctions which, are deadly for civilians. No undercover military activity by American private contractors and the CIA.
- That endangered Afghans be evacuated and that the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program be expanded so that refugees can enter the US immediately.
- That the 2001 and 2002 **Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMF)** be repealed, for these have allowed Presidents to wage unfettered and endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc.

The U.S. spends more on the military than the next 11 countries combined!



BROOKLYN FOR PEACE
brooklynpeace.org
facebook • instagram • twitter



We invite you to join us!
Help us **move the money**
from war to our communities!



AMBA GUERGUERIAN

THE MONEY IS GOING OUT THE DOOR (FINALLY)

TENANTS STILL HAVE TO NAVIGATE A COMPLEX ONLINE APPLICATION FORM TO RECEIVE RENTAL ASSISTANCE FUNDS, BUT COMMUNITY-BASED ORGS ARE HELPING OUT

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

After a series of protests by tenants and leftist legislators, New York State on Sept. 2 enacted a law extending its moratorium on evicting people financially afflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic until Jan. 15. After a very slow start, it's also beginning to distribute federally financed rental assistance.

As of Aug. 31, the state's Emergency Rental Assistance Program had paid back rent for more than 23,000 households, up from a mere 55 at the beginning of the month. It had paid out \$300 million to cover up to a year of back rent and three months of future rent for people who owe their landlords money because they lost jobs or income during the pandemic. Rebecca Yae, senior research analyst at the National Low Income Housing Coalition, calls that "pretty impressive" and "definitely progress."

New York still has a long way to go. Of its estimated more than 860,000 households behind in their rent, only about 182,500 had applied for the ERAP program as of Aug. 31, according to figures from the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, which administers it. It had approved about 71,000 applications.

That leaves 48,000 households whose applications have been approved, but haven't yet had their back rent paid to their landlord. Legal Aid Society staff attorney Ellen Davidson says the most common problems are that the landlords haven't completed their part of the application, or that OTDA has trouble connecting landlords with specific tenants — possibly because of the convoluted structures of real-estate ownership.

More than three-fourths of the people who have applied for rental aid are from New York City, primarily

the Bronx and Brooklyn. More than 60 percent are women, mostly black and Latina in the city, slightly more than half white in the rest of the state. They tend to be poor: 71 percent of the applicants in the city make less than 30 percent of the federal "area median income," or \$32,220 a year for a family of three.

They are most heavily concentrated in the Bronx. There are six ZIP codes in the borough where more than 3,000 people have applied.

On the third floor of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition's converted-house headquarters on East 196th Street, a Wednesday night workshop gives about 10 tenants instructions on how to fill out the complex online application form. A double-sided printout fills more than 20 sheets of paper.

"Most important, immigration status is not important," NWBCCC organizer Alvaro Franco tells the group, mostly Latinas. He goes through the numerous steps: whether your lease is rent-stabilized, month-to-month, or public housing; how to demonstrate financial hardship; how to fill out the tally of the back rent you owe; and the landlord's address.

To locate the exact owner, he says afterwards, NWBCCC encourages tenants to look up their building on the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development's website or on Just-Fix's WhoOwnsWhat page.

A 3-year-old girl, her hair pulled up, scribbles on a piece of paper with an orange marker while her mother checks boxes on her printout.

"Make sure all your documents are at hand," Franco warns. The form has to be completed in one sitting; you can't save it and come back to finish it later.

HOW OTHER STATES ARE DOING

Nationally, about one-third of the estimated 6.4 million people behind in their rent have applied for rental assistance. Texas has already distributed about 60 percent of the funds it received, says Rebecca Yae, and New Jersey and Virginia are also strong performers.

California and Illinois, however, have distributed only about 40 percent of their funding, and aided less than one-third of the tenants who applied. Several other states have done almost nothing: Arizona has paid out only 7% of its funds, and Montana, Nebraska and Wyoming even less.

The problem, Yae explains, is that while the federal government is providing "an unprecedented amount of funds," there was "very little infrastructure" to get the programs going. States had to hire staff and set up tech systems and intake-processing procedures. Texas, she says, started early, and fixed problems by hiring more staff and reducing the amount of documentation needed.

The situation became much more urgent on Aug. 26, when the Supreme Court, in a hastily rendered and unsigned 6-3 ruling, struck down the federal Centers for Disease Control's ban on evictions in areas with high rates of COVID-19 infections. The court's right-wing majority framed it in terms of landlords' property rights, and said it was stretching logic to argue that evicting people would increase the disease's spread.

The landlord groups suing "say they have lost 'thousands of dollars' in rental income," Justice Stephen

Breyer responded in dissent, but that injury has been lessened by the \$46.5 billion Congress appropriated to help pay rent and rental arrears. "Compare that injury to the irreparable harm from vacating the stay. COVID-19 transmission rates have spiked in recent weeks, reaching levels that the CDC puts as high as last winter: 150,000 new cases per day."

Several states and cities have declared their own moratoriums, including California, Illinois, New Jersey, Minnesota and the cities of Washington and Boston. In Philadelphia, landlords can't evict tenants for nonpayment unless they prove they've complied with the emergency rent application process, says Yae.

The long-feared eviction wave hasn't yet materialized in the rest of the country, she says, but she worries about what will happen in states like Arkansas, where landlords can start the eviction process if tenants are five days late with the rent, and tenants can be thrown out within 10 days after that.

The law extending New York's moratorium allows landlords to demand that tenants document COVID-inflicted financial hardship in court. But an approved application for ERAP would be "pretty good evidence of hardship," says Davidson.

In the Bronx, some landlords have failed to provide the information needed to receive back-rent payments, says Franco. One, David "David David" Kleiner, listed among the city's 15 "worst evictors" by Right to Counsel NYC in 2018 and 2019, "hasn't complied, period," he adds.

Meanwhile, as the Northwest Bronx tenants use the document scanner and computers in the first-floor offices to file their applications, another problem rears its head. The application must be completed in one session. But one woman loses hers when the ERAP Website crashes.

The 3-year-old girl's mother also loses hers, when her daughter, playing, pushes the button that turns the computer off.

An organizer tells her to come back on Monday, when she'll have time to help her try again.

For more on how to receive assistance applying for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, call the Met Council on Housing tenant hotline at 212-979-0611. Mon-Wed 1-8:30 pm, Tues 5:30-8 pm, Fri 1:30-5 pm.



COURTESY

5 QUESTIONS FOR NY'S NEW GOV

KATHY HOCHUL GETS A FRESH START AFTER LANGUISHING FOR YEARS AS CUOMO'S LT. GOV. HOW SHE WILL GOVERN REMAINS UNCLEAR.

BY THEODORE HAMM

Kathy Hochul has had a busy month since being sworn in on August 24th as New York's first female governor. She has presided over the response to Hurricane Ida, signed an extension to the statewide eviction moratorium and jumpstarted cannabis legalization by appointing members of the state board that will oversee the process, something her predecessor had neglected to do. But many questions remain about how the former Buffalo-area congresswoman will govern and in whose interest.

1) How does she handle Cuomo holdovers, especially those she can't fire? Hochul can replace commissioners (e.g., Dr. Howard Zucker, who presides over the Department of Health) but not the heads of state authorities (e.g., the MTA) and other entities with boards that choose their leadership (e.g., SUNY). Hochul can ask for resignations, but the Cuomo cronies can ignore the requests. If she wants to play hardball, she can threaten to cut funding for special projects, such as the MTA's wasteful AirTrain to LaGuardia.

2) How much public money does Hochul direct to the owners of the Buffalo Bills, who want to build a new stadium? Hochul, of course, is from Buffalo, and the Bills are extremely popular in Western New York.

PROMOTED: Kathy Hochul has already said she will run for re-election next year.

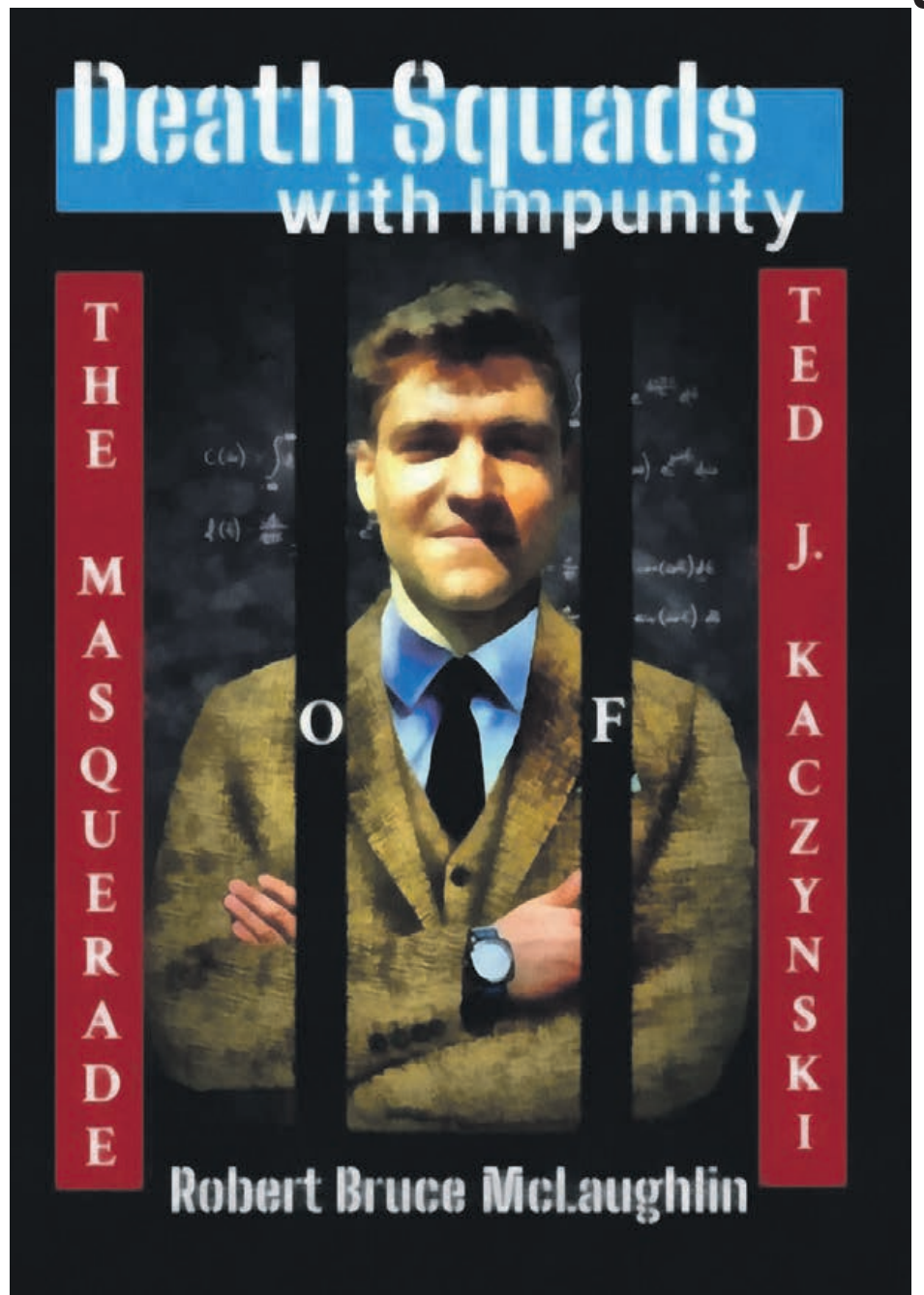
(India Walton, the socialist mayoral frontrunner in Buffalo, shows plenty of enthusiasm for the team.) The matter is complicated by the fact that Hochul's husband is counsel for Delaware North, a gaming and hospitality company that holds the concessions contract for the Bills.

3) Will Hochul follow through on Cuomo's promises regarding commuting sentences? In 2015, Cuomo declared that he was creating a "clemency project" that would review requests on a quarterly basis. After raising expectations, Cuomo proceeded cautiously, announcing only handfuls of commutations and clemencies at the end of the year (and on his way out of office). Hochul's selection of Harlem state senator Brian Benjamin to be her successor as lieutenant

governor suggests that she is sympathetic to criminal justice reform.

4) How will Hochul respond to calls to increase taxes on the 1%? Spurred by the Democratic Socialists of America, the Tax the Rich campaign produced significant gains during this year's budget battle. But those successes came amid the sexual harassment scandal, with the chief executive dealing from a position of weakness. Hochul's interest in winning the Democratic primary next year suggests that she'll respond favorably to the demands of the 99%. Whether Hochul retains Cuomo's budget director Robert Mujica, a Republican austerity proponent, will reveal her hand.

5) How will Hochul handle the demands of New York City's leading developers? These high-rollers loved Cuomo so much that they pumped nearly \$500,000 into his campaign coffers amid this year's scandal. But if Hochul supports increased taxes or ending the 421-A program that creates a large tax break for developers if they include affordable units, she will incur the enmity of Extell and company. Much will depend on who runs in the June 2022 Democratic primary against Hochul.

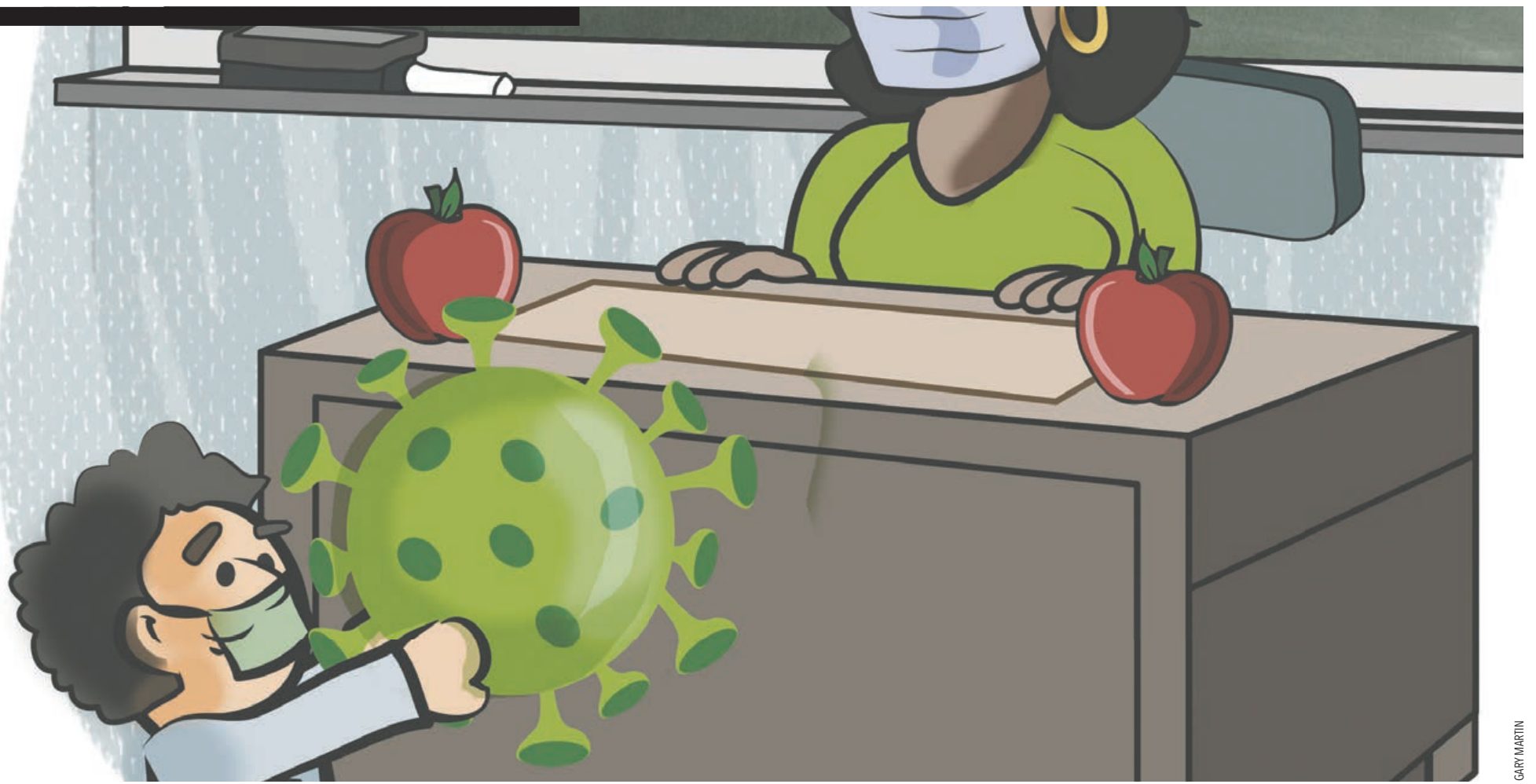


Peace & Planet News

Peace & Planet News is a website produced by veterans who are taking their commitment to serve and using it in the service of peace.

We present the voices and viewpoints of antiwar veterans, journalists and activists, bringing you news and analysis from the national and international movements for social justice. We expose the direct connections between war and climate crisis and show how militarism draws resources away from critical human needs here and around the world.

PeaceAndPlanetNews.org



GARY MARTIN

STUDENTS AT RISK

BY WILL JOHNSON & AMANDA VENDER

New York City's mayor and schools chancellor are sending public school children back to classes on Sept. 13 as COVID-19 surges across the city and state, and while children under the age of 12 remain ineligible for vaccination. Students will return to overcrowded school buildings without adequate ventilation to handle the airborne disease. They are heading back to schools that will conduct substantially less COVID testing than during the last school year. The city plans to test only 10% of unvaccinated students and staff twice per month, and continues to allow students and families to opt out of this testing.

To reiterate, the city is scaling back its mitigation measures even as the city's COVID-19 positivity and hospitalization rates are substantially higher than they were last fall. According to New York's Department of Health, the city's positivity rate, which fell to less than 1% in September 2020, was at 2.5% as of Aug. 29 of this year. Also as of Aug. 29, eight of the city's nine largest hospitals were already at 74-90% capacity. Community spread is more prevalent in the city than it's been for over a year, and the city plans to send students into thousands of unsafe classrooms while simultaneously reducing its testing and tracing programs.

Nearly as alarming as the city's reopening plan is the willingness of local officials to mislead and misinform the public about the safety of the city's schools. Recent news reports have noted that the city has begun altering its own safety standards so that it can certify classrooms as safe for occupancy. Writing for Gothamist, Caroline Lewis reported that the Department of Education has certified more than 4,000 classrooms as having "operational ventilation" even though their only forms of ventilation are open windows. She went on to note that "as recently as July 3rd, the DOE called for 'at least two' modes of ventilation for a classroom to be operable." DOE leaders seem to have decided that if the schools can't be made safe according to CDC or even DOE standards, they'll simply revise their standards and hope nobody notices.

Offering the public confusing, misleading or contradictory standards has been common practice for the mayor's office and the Department of Education since the pandemic began. While the city claims, for example, that classrooms

will follow CDC social-distancing guidelines of at least 3 feet between students, administrators report that the DOE has sent principals separate guidelines that would make violating these guidelines commonplace. One administrator, who requested anonymity for fear of retaliation from DOE management, reported that the DOE calculated that classrooms which in a normal year hold 25 students were deemed safe for up to 43 students. At a time when elected officials seem mystified about why vaccine-hesitant New Yorkers don't trust them, the city's refusal to be honest and transparent about school safety is inexcusable.

Unfortunately, rather than challenge an unpopular lame-duck mayor and a DOE leadership that few parents trust, President Michael Mulgrew of the United Federation of Teachers (the union representing most city teachers and school workers) has lined up behind them every step of the way. Mulgrew's response to the city's safety plan was simply to forward it to UFT members in an email that raised no concerns whatsoever about the city's plans to reduce testing capacity and allow principals to squeeze students into classrooms far more crowded than the CDC recommends. Indeed, Mulgrew's plan of action is to "train the COVID-19 building response team in every school" so that these teams can ensure that the city's woefully inadequate safety protocols are followed. The failure of Mulgrew and UFT's Unity leadership to organize a campaign for safe schools — like the ones recently waged by teacher unions in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago — may have disastrous consequences.

Communities across the country where schools have already reopened offer a glimpse of what is coming in New York. COVID-19 is now a disease of the unvaccinated. Hospital beds are filling with younger and healthier people than before. Children's Hospital New Orleans is full with COVID-19 patients. In Mississippi, more than 20,000 students were quarantined during the first week of school in August, with more than 20% of those reportedly being infected by the coronavirus.

Fortunately, New York City has mandated the vaccine for school staff. While this will provide substantial protection for school workers, vaccinated people are still able to carry and transmit the virus to the unvaccinated and vulnerable. A vaccine mandate thus offers little security for students too young to be vaccinated, as well as to vaccinated students and school workers who live with young children or people who are immunocompromised or otherwise particularly vulnerable to the virus. This is part of why the city's plan to eliminate testing for the vaccinated is so dangerous.

It is also unclear why the vaccine mandate does not apply to students for whom the vaccine has full approval: those over the age of 16. Students are mandated to get the chickenpox vaccine to enter schools, along with a host of other vaccines, yet will not be required to receive the CO-

VID-19 vaccine, even as community spread is increasing.

The FDA is facing growing pressure, including from parents, the American Academy of Pediatrics and members of Congress, to approve the COVID vaccines for children under 12. Until that approval happens, however, indoor school in much of the city's poorly ventilated and crowded schools will be unsafe.

Until the vaccine is available for children under 12, a remote learning option must be provided for families who don't want to send their children to school in person. To ensure that students can learn remotely, the city must provide free technology and internet access, along with support and tech training to families, so that we are all prepared for school quarantines and shut-downs.

To ensure that schools are safe, the city must adhere to ventilation standards in accordance with CDC recommendations. Schools should be encouraged to use both outdoor and indoor space creatively in ways that maximize student and worker safety. At an absolute minimum, all unvaccinated students should be tested weekly, along with a random sample of the vaccinated.

To support the city's vaccination efforts, the DOE should make vaccines widely available to all eligible students, as well as to family and community members. Beyond that, to counter the widespread misinformation about vaccines, the DOE should develop accessible curricula for students and families about COVID and vaccines, much like the HIV/AIDS curriculum that already exists.

Over the past 18 months, we have seen repeatedly that elected and appointed officials cannot be trusted to act in the best interests of this city or its public schools. This is why the failure of Mike Mulgrew and the UFT's Unity leadership to stand up for the health and safety of UFT members and our students has been so disheartening.

Last summer, as thousands of New Yorkers protested the brutal violence of police and the racist order they maintain, we returned again and again to a simple refrain: we keep us safe. As members of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), we know that the only way to create the safe, healthy schools our city deserves is to fight for them. We cannot wait for the leaders of the UFT or the DOE to protect us. We must organize and prepare to fight for our safety, and the safety of our students. We must fight to keep us safe.

The authors are teacher members of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), the social justice caucus of the UFT.



KEN LOPEZ

“I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE WITH MY KIDS”

HAITIAN FATHER OF FOUR ONE STEP CLOSER TO REVERSING TRUMP-ERA DEPORTATION

BY RENÉE FELTZ

Jean Montrevil, a father of four and longtime leader in New York City’s immigrant rights movement, never gave up trying to return home after ICE deported him to Haiti in 2018.

“I always want to be with my kids, watch them grow up,” he told *The Independent* in a phone call from Port-au-Prince.

Montrevil was overjoyed when his lawyer called on Aug. 18 with news that Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam had granted him a pardon for two 1990 drug convictions Immigration and Customs Enforcement had used as a pretext to deport him.

“Finally we are winning and someone with a good heart sees I deserve a second chance,” Montrevil said. “I didn’t sleep the whole night. That’s how happy I was. It is about time.”

Like many Black immigrants, Montrevil faced the double punishment of deportation after he served a harsh sentence decades ago at the height of the War On Drugs. He wasn’t deported immediately. Upon his release from prison in 2000, he reported to ICE check-ins while raising four children with his then-wife Janay and running a small business. A man of faith, he also helped found the New Sanctuary Coalition to engage churches in immigrant defense with another group he was part of called Families for Freedom.

“No one wants to listen to us,” Montrevil said. “We need these organizations to spread the news.”

When ICE threatened to deport him in 2005, Montrevil’s family and supporters began seeking a pardon so he could apply to restore his lawful permanent resident status. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detained him at the end of 2009, then released him after the Haiti’s devastating 2010 earthquake. He was told that he wouldn’t be bothered if he stayed out of advocacy work and was later deported after he spoke out against President Trump’s attacks on immigrants.

For the past three years, Montrevil has worked on the pardon remotely with his “team back home,” a defense committee anchored by members of Judson Memorial Church and Families for Freedom, with support from New York University School of Law’s Immigrant Rights Clinic.

“We submitted an updated set of materials to Gov. Northam’s office in 2020 and an incredible campaign has supported Jean, including numerous immigrant rights groups and members of Congress,” said Alina Das, co-director of the clinic. “We felt the power of that organizing would be heard, but getting the pardon granted was a huge relief.”

Das says the pardon makes Montrevil eligible to file a motion to reopen his case with the Board of Immigration Appeals. But that road can be long and winding, so his team’s more immediate focus is humanitarian parole.

“Humanitarian parole is a specific action the Department of Homeland Security can take when it

BRING HIM HOME: Jean Montrevil’s son Jahsiah at a recent vigil.

SEPARATED: Jean Montrevil and his daughter Jannah Heard in a 2017 photo.

TEAMWORK: At the office of Families for Freedom, which is leading the fight to bring Jean Montrevil back to his family.

seeks to give someone permission to come into the United States,” Das explained. “It is not safe for him to remain in Haiti separated from his four U.S. citizen children when the governor issued him a pardon for the very reason he faced deportation to begin with,” she added, alluding to the near dissolution of Haiti’s government after its president was assassinated in July, last month’s earthquake and long-standing social and economic instability.

Northam’s pardon comes as part of his work to advance racial equity since he survived a 2019 blackface scandal, in part with help from Black Democrats who as the *New York Times* put it, “saw a chance for policy concessions” as Virginia attempts to reckon more broadly with its history of enslaving and exploiting Africans and indigenous people when it was a colony as well as having been the heart of the Confederacy during the Civil War.

“We hope what is happening in Jean’s case and the momentum built by this pardon gives other Black immigrants hope the injustice in their case can also be corrected,” said Das.

“With faith and hard work anything is possible,” said Montrevil’s ex-wife Janay, who is the new executive director of Families For Freedom, one of the first groups she reached out to for help. Janay, who remained close to Jean to co-parent their children over the years, spoke to *The Indy* while preparing to head to Washington D.C. with their youngest daughter for the Make Good Trouble rally.

The same weekend, their oldest daughter, Jannah, and son, Jahsiah, joined members of Judson Memorial Church for a vigil in Washington Square Park. Led by two people carrying a banner that read “Bring Jean Home,” they helped pass out flyers with the same tagline followed by details on how to send a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas calling for humanitarian parole for Montrevil.

“We just want everybody to know what’s going on,” explained Jannah.

Like their mother, Jean and Janay’s children are active with Families for Freedom and wore the black T-shirts often donned by members, which feature white letters that spell out, “Deportee.”

“I’ve been in the organization since 2005, but I was two-years-old at that time so I didn’t really know what was going on,” laughed Jahsiah, who recently completed the group’s Leadership Development Program that teaches members organizing skills.

“He would tell us to not stop fighting,” Jahsiah said of his father. “Even though it looks like he is coming back, there are still a lot more immigrants out there going through this.”



ELIA GRAN



FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM



WORKERS UNITE! FILM FESTIVAL 10

WORKERSUNITEFILMFESTIVAL.ORG

OCT 8TH-20TH • LIVE @CINEMA VILLAGE

OPENING NIGHT (FRIDAY)

9to5: The Story of A Movement
Afghan Women: A History of Struggle
How to Form A Union
Without Women There Is No Revolution

SATURDAY 10/9

This Is Not A War Story
Veins of Resistance (Chile)
Anyway, Jeff Bezos Can Kiss Our Ass

SUNDAY 10/10

Backstreet to the American Dream
Haymarket: The Bomb, The Anarchists,
The Labor Struggle
Drills of Liberation (Puerto Rico)

MONDAY 10/11

TIED (Greece)
Town of Widows
Stormchaser
Bone Cage

TUESDAY 10/12

Last Call: The Shutdown
of NYC Bars (COVID-19)
SVA SocDoc Shorts
NEW/Frontline Films

WEDNESDAY 10/13

The Great Postal Heist
Digging for Weldon Irvine
+ Meet filmmakers presenting at
10/16 Activist Filmmakers Bootcamp

THURSDAY 10/14

Conversations Between Shifts
Company Town (Canada)
Yangzhen's Journey (China)

Full Schedule, Tickets, & Showtimes thru 10/20:

workersunitefilmfestival.org
+ bit.ly/TixWUFF10

CONTESTED GROUND

BY JOHN TARLETON

Ten years ago this month Occupy Wall Street burst to life in Zuccotti Park, a small patch of open space in the heart of New York's financial district. During the daytime, the area bustled with office workers and tourists as well as the protesters.

Late at night on the park's northwest end, when the camp was mostly quiet and the surrounding area desolate, you could look across Trinity Place and feel the floodlit presence of the World Trade Center site where the rust-colored skeletons of partially completed skyscrapers reached toward the sky, again.

Some observers noted the juxtaposition of Zuccotti and Ground Zero and the historic events that took place a decade apart within a stone's throw of each other. Was it a mere coincidence? Or, was there a deeper reason these two otherwise radically different events unfolded in such close proximity to each other?

A quick journey through history suggests there is. And how we respond to the history that has been made on this contested ground has everything to do with what kind of future we will make for ourselves, and perhaps in the long run whether we will have any future at all.

• • •

FROM THE FIRST MOMENT a Dutch caravel approached the mouth of the Hudson River in September 1609, New York was destined to be the center of a commercial empire.

The Muhheakantuck ("the river that flows both ways"), as it was known to the Lenape Indians, was the 17th century equivalent of a super-highway into the interior of the continent. New York Harbor was a spacious, deep-water port that offered shelter for seagoing vessels crisscrossing the North Atlantic.

A fur-trading post was established. New Amsterdam, a European-style town, emerged at the tip of Manahatta, an island dotted with hills and streams and spring-fed ponds that would be leveled and re-made over the next four centuries.

"Enslaved Africans were put to work building the fort, mill and new stone houses," writes historian Christopher Moore. "They cleared land for farms and shore areas for docks. Former Native American trails were broadened (Broad Way) to accommodate horse drawn wagons. Operating and working in the colony's sawmills, the enslaved laborers provided lumber for shipbuilding and export back to Europe."

It was African laborers who built the wall to keep out Native American tribes in the area that would lend its name to the street that has become synonymous with American capitalism.

In the early 1990s, a six-acre African burial ground was discovered 30 feet beneath the earth near the corner of Broadway and Chambers. It contained the skeletal remains of as many as 20,000 individuals who had been interred there from the mid-1630s to 1795. The remains of 419 Africans were later interred at the African Burial Ground Memorial site at 290 Broadway.

New Amsterdam was run by the Dutch West India Company. Desperate for settlers who would try to make a life in their desolate colonial outpost, the company welcomed a melting pot of peoples from the far corners of Europe, helping lay the groundwork for whiteness to emerge as a new pan-European identity.

Several decades after its founding, New Amsterdam fell to the English in a super-power skirmish of that era. The victors would accelerate the colonial project and renamed their new possession after the king's brother, the Duke of York.

New York would continue growing throughout the colonial era and during the early American republic. After the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, New York City became the entrepot for agricultural products from the Great Lakes region even as its merchants and manufacturers profited handsomely from trade ties with the slave South. From 1800 to 1850, the population of the great metropolis multiplied from 60,000 to 590,000 and then to 3.4 million by 1900.

As the United States ascended as a global power in the 20th century, New York ascended too, becoming a central node in global capitalism as well as a global center of media, arts and international diplomacy.

In the early 1970s, the Twin Towers rose near the tip of Lower Manhattan. The twin behemoths dominated the New York skyline. They were symbols of late 20th century America's unrivaled economic power and wealth. It was The End of History, and the United States had prevailed. Left unstated was that U.S. global dominance had been purchased in part with the blood of millions of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America who had been killed by U.S. bombs, U.S.-engineered proxy wars and U.S.-backed terror regimes, including one installed in Chile on September 11, 1973.

In the Middle East, the United States repeatedly made a Faustian bargain with Islamists who would target secular leftwing movements that threatened Western control of the Middle East and its vast oil reserves.

Then one clear blue September morning, the Towers were felled by jet airplanes hijacked by individuals wielding \$3 box cutters as weapons. The dust from the collapsing Twin Towers had barely settled before America's leaders were issuing blood-curdling calls for a new crusade to remake the Middle East in our image.

The 9/11 attacks were so extreme that it prompted many people to ask for the first time, "Why do they hate us?" The retort from politicians and the media was swift: "They hate us because of our freedom." Soon after, the U.S. government plunged into multi-trillion dollar wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and gave birth to a massive surveillance state in the name of "homeland security."

The disastrous decisions made by bipartisan elites after 9/11 were compounded by their presiding over the 2008 financial crash and then bailing out the Wall Street bankers who wrecked the economy and millions of peoples' lives.

In the third year of Barack Obama's presidency, Occupy Wall Street erupted and inspired hundreds of like-minded protest camps in cities and towns across the country. The movement didn't make precise policy demands. However, it did correctly diagnose a rigged system dominated by the 1% and offered a competing vision of a world based on mutual care and shared abundance.

That vision would be snuffed out for a time by the police raids that shut down Occupy encampments across the country, including the one at Zuccotti Park. Still, the choice embodied by the 9/11 and Occupy anniversaries remains the same: continue down the dystopian path of permanent war, racism and ecological collapse. Or, break with 400 years of a system based on extracted wealth hoarded and turn instead toward building a world of, by and for the many. We've only seen that world in glimpses, but it's always been within our reach.



LEIA DORAN



20 YEARS LATER

HOW THE NEW WORLD TRADE CENTER BECAME A MONUMENT TO GREED AND POWER THAT MOST NEW YORKERS WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH

BY TODD FINE

Twenty years after September 11, the World Trade Center redevelopment story encapsulates the political, economic, and cultural forces that rule New York City and even the United States. In the early months, there were broad hopes that the process would align with high ideals. Tens of billions of dollars of federal money were available, every major actor sought a say, and many paths could have been pursued. What emerged thus presents a naked reflection of what drives the city.

Seeking to privatize their real estate operations and lock in revenue, in July 2001, only six weeks before the attacks, the public owners of the World Trade Center complex, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, leased much of their commercial property to billionaire developer Larry Silverstein, who already built and operated 7 World Trade Center. Silverstein only put up a modest amount of his own money, just \$14 million, and was heavily leveraged in the deal, with General Motors' financing arm GMAC as his primary lender.

After the attacks destroyed the Twin Towers and surrounding properties, the lease agreement gave Silverstein Properties arguable legal grounds for redevelopment rights, provided that it kept paying "rent" for buildings that no longer existed. The lease contract had a provision that the towers could be redeveloped in the case of disaster, although the wording also implied that they should be rebuilt exactly as they were, an idea that few decision-makers took seriously.

Immediately after the attacks, Silverstein called around and spoke to the press, seeking to establish the premise that the same massive 10 million square feet of office space should be rebuilt with government support and his lease maintained. While the government probably could have immediately condemned the lease under eminent domain, an option that officials repeatedly contemplated over the years when Silverstein's escalating demands for subsidy became unbearable, the contract was not voided (as a powerful governor like Nelson Rockefeller or mayor like Fiorello La Guardia would have likely insisted). Instead, New York and New Jersey officials gave Silverstein and his lawyers a chance to seek large payouts from his insurance policies in order to supplement federal support for rebuilding. And, of course, officials feared any attempt to void Silverstein's lease would result in aggressive and long-lasting litigation (although perhaps underestimating the popular backlash Silverstein would have experienced).

To manage the billions of dollars of federal money that would come to New York, Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Gov. George Pataki created a new public entity, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, that could make decisions without any input from elected legislators. In a crucial move, while the number of board members was split evenly between the city and state, the governor was given the right to appoint the chairperson, giving the state a trump card on key issues. Pataki now brags that he and Giuliani intentionally set up the LMDC this way to prevent then Democratic mayoral candidate Mark Green from having control over funds were he to win. Selecting former Goldman Sachs Chairman John Whitehead, rather than a strict Pataki loyalist, to be board chairman did give the LMDC a measure of independence, but its overall structure as a subsidiary of the state's Empire State Development Corporation, combined with the Port Authority's control by the state, put city government at an inescapable disadvantage for the entirety of the redevelopment. At one point in 2003, the city explored establishing its own authority by trading its ownership of 5,610 acres of land at JFK and LaGuardia airports to the Port Authority for the 16 acres at the World Trade Center, but Pataki apparently nixed these negotiations for political reasons. Exasperated by limited ability to influence "Ground Zero," Mayor Bloomberg diverted his attention to the West Side development now known as Hudson Yards.

VISIONS OF A GREATER GOOD

In the months after the attacks, there was broad public interest in how the redevelopment should proceed. Across the country, people hoped that a rapid construction would embody national pride and send a proud and defiant "message to the terrorists." Equity was a critical consideration, given that a central element of the catastrophe was the self-sacrifice of working-class building staff and first responders. In

New York City, dozens of civic coalitions and organizations, like New York New Visions and the Labor Community Advocacy Network, were formed and had meetings to discuss core principles and organize. Invariably, public demands were much broader than the commercial interests of replacing hefty square footage of office space in Lower Manhattan. They included desires

for new transportation projects (such as a downtown connection to JFK, subway improvements, or an underground West Side Highway), affordable housing, hospitals, educational institutions, an open street grid at the Trade Center, historic preservation, and parks and open spaces. Some of these ideas expressed in an early report by the civic group New York New Visions, such as the desire for mixed-income housing, were copied almost word for word to become the core redevelopment guidelines promulgated by LMDC in April 2002.

In addition to giving billions of dollars of Housing and Urban Development money to LMDC (which Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer ensured could bypass traditional HUD rules about support for housing), the federal government also created \$8 billion of extremely favorable tax-free instruments called "Liberty Bonds," referencing the public campaign to support World War I. The beneficiaries of these bonds, determined by both the city and state, reveal a great deal about government priorities and how the New York elite conceived economic stimulus. No bonds went to support social projects like new affordable housing developments, public hospitals, or New York City Housing Authority repairs. Instead, they went to large corporate developments, like the Bank of America building in Midtown (\$650M) and a new headquarters for Goldman Sachs (\$1.65B). Alongside support for construction of many luxury residential buildings, Liberty Bonds also had some quite spurious recipients like a new museum for sports history on Broadway that received \$52 million, yet folded in one year and defaulted.

In July 2002, responding to civic interest in the redevelopment, government authorities, who were focused on how to replace the destroyed office space and preserve Lower Manhattan as a major commercial district, presented a series of planning options for the World Trade Center complex to a large public gathering called "Listening to the City" held at the Javits Center. Six blandly similar options, prepared chiefly by architectural firm Beyer Blinder Belle, of various configurations of blocky skyscrapers were shown on big screens. The public reaction was noisy and aghast, and the most famous, quotable comment in response was: "It looks like Albany." In their defense, these images represented general site plans, not actual skyscraper designs. But it didn't matter. The public sought something inspiring and transcendent in the redevelopment, perhaps longings that contemporary New York corporate architecture would never be able to assuage.

While LMDC had to go back to the drawing board to figure out how to produce a measure of consensus around a master plan for the site, key decisions were already being made. The Port Authority, on its own initiative, was already building vast underground infrastructure that would support a future transportation hub and an array of skyscrapers. These moves entailed enormous expenditures

and complex engineering, necessitating costs that even the hefty federal support would never be able to cover.

In late 2002, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation organized a new competitive process for a master plan (albeit with a reduced office space commitment of 6.5 million square feet). Out of 407 submissions, they chose six accomplished architectural teams to present their proposals. The final decision came down to the teams of Rafael Viñoly, who advocated latticework replacements for the towers that some described as "skeletons," and of Daniel Libeskind, who combined a memorial park with an array of towers, including a 1,776-foot tower whose design evoked the Statue of Liberty. Libeskind's patriotic showmanship in his public presentation, recalling his Polish immigrant background, combined with the support of Gov. Pataki, assured his victory. For a brief moment, the public reaction was quite enthusiastic. While Silverstein had some quibbles, for instance over the provision of open space and location of the centerpiece tower away from the planned transportation hub, both he and the Port Authority could take comfort that the process did validate the essential decision to rebuild. In turn, the Port Authority made its own move for architectural glory in July 2003, when it selected the famous Santiago Calatrava to design the transportation hub.

Libeskind's victory, though, was technically only for the master plan, which set the location of the towers and not their design. Silverstein had already engaged architect David Childs of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill to produce what Pataki would call the "Freedom Tower." Libeskind, who had never before designed a major skyscraper, was not taken seriously by Larry Silverstein, who compared him to a general practitioner attempting brain surgery. Despite the government compelling a design contract that required collaboration, Childs and Silverstein marginalized Libeskind and developed a tower that, while functional, did not produce the awe that many sought. Furthermore, once the design was complete and made public, the NYPD took a look and demanded its own revisions for security reasons, producing additional delays.

With Pataki always needing to make progress on the site to advance his national profile and presidential ambitions, Silverstein, a shrewd and fierce negotiator, was able to continually seek new subsidies and arrangements, albeit in the face of delays that were not necessarily his fault. Public frustration started to grow.

By late 2003, Silverstein compelled the Port Authority to pay off Silverstein's creditor GMAC, giving him access to insurance payments that had been held in escrow for GMAC. They further compensated Westfield, the site's former retail operator, while still giving it future options for a retail monopoly. The deal also repaid Silverstein's and his investors' equity, even while the billionaire was still able to maintain development rights and continually take various fees out of the insurance settlement money. Former city official Harvey Robins said, "Only in New York can a developer strike a deal with government to get his money back and still walk away with a prime piece of real estate." While the Port Authority and Silverstein would fight each

Continued on next page

TOWERING

PRICE TAG: 1 World Trade Center (aka the Freedom Tower) cost nearly \$4 billion to build.

PUBLIC SUPPORT, PRIVATE PROFIT

It sure pays to be rich. Here are 11 different kinds of public subsidy Silverstein Properties received while rebuilding the World Trade Center. Their total value is incalculable but surely extends into the billions of dollars.

- 1** Liberty Bonds for all towers (tax-exempt bonds reduce costs of financing)
- 2** Public-sector lease commitments (facilitates confidence for financing and assures returns)
- 3** Direct government investments (equity) in Tower 3 (public equity reduces debt required for construction)
- 4** Direct rent subsidies for Towers 3 and 4 (public subsidies for rent give market advantage)
- 5** Rent tax abatement for all towers (removal of 3.9% rent tax allows lower rents for all tenants)
- 6** Public "backstop" for bonds, fully for Tower 4 and partially for 3 (facilitates financing and protects developer from many risks such as cost overruns)
- 7** Deferred payments for substructure work at Towers 2 and 3 (functionally an interest-free loan)
- 8** Abatement of ground rent for Tower 2 (reduces costs before and during construction)
- 9** Modification of ground rent for Towers 3 and 4 (delays and phase-ins reduce costs)
- 10** Fixed payment for infrastructure for all towers (reduces uncertainty for a variable cost, and likely cuts costs under standard accounting)
- 11** Synthetic bond swap for Tower 3 (protects developer from interest rate variability)

Source: Power at Ground Zero by Lynne B. Sagalyn

LIBERTY BOND RECIPIENTS

Created by Congress in 2002 to promote investment in New York City, the Liberty Bond program authorized up to \$8 billion in tax-exempt bonds for both commercial and residential development. According to watchdog reports by Bettina Damiani of Good Jobs New York, beneficiaries included:

Silverstein Properties et al. (WTC): **\$3.1B**
 Goldman Sachs headquarters: **\$1.65B**
 Misc. market-rate rental buildings (including Related Companies): **\$1.6B**

WTC Retail and 1WTC (Port Authority/Westfield): **\$701.6M**
 Bank of America Tower in Midtown (Durst): **\$650M**
 Bank of New York Tower/Atlantic Terminal, Brooklyn (Ratner): **\$90.8M**
 IAC Building in Chelsea by Frank Gehry (Barry Diller): **\$80M**
 W Hotel in Condo Building (Moinian): **\$50M**
 National Sports Museum: **\$52M**

NYC'S NEXT REAL ESTATE MEGA-DEVELOPMENT?

Despite the challenges of the World Trade Center, New York State's appetite for public-private, monopoly megadevelopment continues. Purportedly to "finance" the redevelopment of Penn Station (the actual tracks and platforms, not only the fancy halls and entrances), former Gov. Cuomo's Empire State Development Corporation has proposed a plan for a massive campus of 10 skyscrapers comprising 20 million square feet of office space in Midtown.

Why does a train station require skyscrapers?

Well, rather than having taxes or transportation fees fund the project, the state's rather opaque economic development agency claims it can finance the station with junk bonds tied to proceeds from speculative real estate development around the station. This development would be almost entirely directed and owned by Vornado Realty, whose CEO Steven Roth was one of Cuomo's top all-time donors.

After the state uses eminent domain to seize and demolish blocks of property around the station, between Sixth and Ninth Avenues from West 30th to 34th – including St. John the Baptist Church, the last structure of the original Penn Station, the famed Hotel Pennsylvania, and many small businesses – Vornado would be given development rights to a large area. Since the land would no longer be under city jurisdiction, the buildings would not have to pay normal city taxes, even though this revenue would be desperately needed to support such huge new demands on local infrastructure. Instead, so-called PILOTs, payments in lieu of taxes, would pay off the bondholders.

In theory, Vornado could build an array of skyscrapers that would challenge and overshadow the Empire State Building and have many other congestion effects on Midtown, yet, given the continued uncertainty about the future of office work, it is unclear if the company would ever build at all. In that case, if the PILOT revenue never materialized in full, New York taxpayers would be on the hook to pay off the bonds at a premium. Given the lessons of the World Trade Center, that outcome seems highly likely.

Continued from previous page

other tooth and nail for years over details, in another sense, they relied on each other. Both were committed to a commercial development program that required large outside government subsidies, and they defended this prerogative against Mayor Bloomberg, who advocated for more flexible possibilities.

BRINGING THE CULTURE WAR TO GROUND ZERO

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation was made responsible for the cultural features of the site, including selecting the memorial design. A memorial competition begun in 2003, and completed in January 2004, attracted thousands of proposals, and deliberation was done by a 13-member jury that notably included Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The winning design, of waterfalls flowing into two "voids" at the tower footprints, was by Michael Arad, a young architect who worked for the city designing government buildings. Despite the design's Lin-influenced minimalism, it became technically very challenging to implement, as it envisioned visitors descending on ramps along the waterfalls. Rather than the victims' names being placed on above-ground parapets, as they are now, Arad had sought them placed below ground alongside the waterfalls. By June 2006, the design had to be rethought.

When anticipated costs for the memorial's construction escalated toward \$1 billion and fundraising slowed, the nonprofit board that LMDC had seeded identified a dramatic solution. In late 2006, they invited Michael Bloomberg, as mayor and as philanthropist, to become chair of the private organization. This decision accelerated their fundraising and gave Bloomberg a point of authority over the rebuilding. This choice has also meant that at times of difficulty, Bloomberg could personally fund the memorial organization with near-zero-interest loans, credit lines, and direct gifts of tens of millions of dollars.

A major controversy involved additional cultural activities at the site. The original Libeskind plan called not for a massive "Memorial Museum" at the site as we see today, but a public center that would house a set of artistic and educational institutions. Chosen by LMDC, these included the Drawing Center, the established New York museum focused on drawings; the Signature Theater; the Joyce International Dance Center; and, most provocatively, a new museum called the International Freedom Center that would contextualize September 11 within a global arc of progress toward freedom. Even though the center had an American exceptionalist theme and was sponsored by businessmen linked to George Bush, a right-wing member of the September 11 Memorial nonprofit board named Debra Burlingame (whose brother died at the Pentagon) initiated a public campaign arguing that the Freedom Center, as well as other cultural programming, would dishonor the victims and promote leftist politics. After months of op-eds and protests, Burlingame and a small group of activists under the banner "Take Back the Memorial" were able to force Pataki to pull the plug. Thus, she created conditions for the entirety of the cultural building at the center of the memorial to be devoted to a museum focused solely on the attacks. With her power at the institution as a board member retained, she said, perhaps a little tongue in cheek, that she, a Republican political operative linked to anti-Muslim groups, would be able to control its agenda. "The victors write the history, right?"

SUBSIDIES GALORE

In September 2006, after another hard-fought negotiation over funding, Silverstein left the development of what he considered the less lucrative "Freedom Tower" to the Port Authority, but maintained rights to 2, 3, and 4 World Trade Center on the eastern portion along Greenwich Street, which the Port Authority was supposed to make construction-ready by 2008. Ultimately costing \$4 billion dollars, and with its fiscal impact contributing to a near doubling in 2011 of Port Authority tolls from \$8 to \$15 for drivers entering the City at a half-dozen bridges and tun-

nels, including the Holland Tunnel, Lincoln Tunnel and the lower level of the George Washington Bridge. One World Trade Center, which opened in 2014, cost multiples more than its peer, the \$1.5B, 2,717-foot Burj Dubai.

With the Port Authority having enormous trouble maintaining deadlines and fiscal discipline for an extremely complex and ambitious campus, eventually Governor David Paterson's executive director Chris Ward, nominated in 2008, became widely credited for shifting toward a practical focus on construction and the art of the possible, putting the memorial and 1 World Trade Center back on track. Yet the 2008 financial crisis and the unclear financing for 2, 3, 4 World Trade Center caused further uncertainty about the achievable extent of commercial development. Ward, with Governor David Paterson's remarkably steady support in 2010, withstood heavy political and legal pressure from Mayor Bloomberg and Silverstein for the Port Authority to act as Silverstein's banker and devote billions of additional public funds out of its transportation priorities. While Silverstein had some right to complain that his insurance payouts had been sent to the Port Authority as rent without the construction progress that previous negotiations required, Silverstein had essentially been treating the insurance money as his own, removing hundreds of millions of dollars in management and development fees. The ultimate deal in August 2010 forced the city (\$130M), Silverstein (\$300M), and the state (\$80M) to all put up equity, yet it still dedicated over \$2 billion of the remaining Liberty Bond allocation to the Silverstein towers. Two more buildings have now been built. 4 World Trade Center opened in 2013; 3 World Trade Center opened in 2018; 2 World Trade Center is indefinitely suspended (alongside Silverstein's obligations toward ground rent).

Ward also brought progress to the Port Authority's elaborate, dove-shaped transportation hub designed by Santiago Calatrava and now known as the Oculus. With Calatrava forced to comply, designers scaled back its complex engineering of retractable wings and instituted other examples of "value engineering" throughout the site. While many decry its \$4.6 billion cost that perhaps makes it the most expensive train station in history — remarkable considering the relatively low ridership numbers on the PATH — it is important to note that much of this cost included connecting infrastructure that improves the entire site.

Even though the new World Trade Center buildings did obtain some important leases such as Spotify and Condé Nast (whose rent was priced below cost), the amount of government subsidy in this flavor of capitalism is mind-blowing and perhaps incalculable. Scholar Lynne Sagalyn, whose narrative book *Power at Ground Zero* anchors our understanding of the redevelopment, counts at least 11 forms of financial assistance for the Silverstein towers: heavy commitments from government agencies as tenants; tax-exempt Liberty Bonds; pledged government "backstop" on project debt; direct subsidies for tenant rents; public sector equity in the towers; commercial rent tax breaks; abatement of ground rent at Tower 2; modifications in ground rent payments; fixed payments for supporting infrastructure; interest-free loans in the form of early substructure work; and interest rate protection in the form of synthetic bond swaps. Even if we accept that the World Trade Center was a uniquely challenging project that government on its own wouldn't have done any more responsibly, the Silverstein arrangements will forever stand out as examples of extreme government support of private profit.

Increasingly, many are tempted to look on the bright side and say that people shouldn't have put such high expectations on the World Trade Center, knowing that large public-private projects are typically delayed and overbudget. But, still, if there was ever a time to overcome defeatism and figure out how to get it done to meet public desire, this was the time. And government's failure to meet broader societal demands for a more equitable redevelopment — especially when trapped by a billionaire private developer — does reveal something fundamental.

Perhaps most discouraging, it is obvious to everyone but real estate boosters that the new World Trade Center "campus" is not built for New Yorkers. The public is prohibited from entering and touring the new towers that they financed at such a high price in taxes and in sacrifice, and 1 World Trade Center charges \$32 for an individual to take an elevator to the top. The Oculus mall run by Westfield has largely high-end, luxury stores, making the opulent

structure feel mostly like a cathedral to commerce. The Memorial Museum charges \$26 dollars a ticket to enter a building holding human remains, has a tacky gift shop, pays executives half-a-million-dollar annual salaries, and delivers a voyeuristic experiential exhibition that many locals find disturbing. Despite a fair amount of public appreciation for Michael Arad's memorial design, the park itself does not have a welcoming, natural, or communal feel and mostly attracts tourists. The plaza -- on government land -- prohibits the most basic exercise of free speech and congregation, including even small gatherings. We also don't know whether the public benefit of the unfinished Performing Arts Center, now named "The Perelman" after Trump-supporting billionaire banker Ronald Perelman, will be worthy of the large public investment of hundreds of millions of dollars and prime real estate when it opens in 2023, twenty years after being envisioned.

INSIDE THE OCULUS: *The world's most expensive subway station.*

CATHEDRAL OF COMMERCE: *Luxury shopping options abound inside the Oculus.*

MEMORIAL: *The site of the WTC's original North Tower.*



SUE BRISK

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In the case of the early public demand for affordable housing, the record is horrendous, and middle-class and working-class families of Lower Manhattan may forever be displaced. Due in part to Liberty Bonds for luxury construction and various tax incentives for office conversions, since 2001, the population of Lower Manhattan below Chambers Street has tripled from around 20,000 to 64,000, but the absolute number of affordable housing units has declined, perhaps to less than 1,000 units. The dozens of civic groups that made affordable housing production one of their core demands after September 11 were ignored and in face of the long delays in the reconstruction, they mostly gave up, disbanded, and moved on. Not a single, new affordable complex was built in all of the district.

The last unaccounted World Trade Center lot — 5 World Trade Center at the site of the former Deutsche Bank building at 130 Liberty Street — still could be an opportunity for over 1,000 units of affordable housing, but the responsible government entities appear committed to the luxury residential boom in Lower Manhattan. Heavily damaged in the September 11 attacks, the LMDC purchased the building with federal funds after Deutsche Bank failed to reach an agreement with its insurers. Even though LMDC, as an ad-hoc entity, had no experience administering a demolition, it spent hundreds of millions to dismantle the building in a disastrously-managed process that led to the deaths of two firefighters in a 2007 fire due to gross negligence. Astoundingly, the demolition was not completed until 2011.

Led by the late affordable housing advocate Tom Goodkind, who died of 9/11-related cancer, residents of Lower Manhattan have long advocated that Tower 5 become an affordable housing development, ideally with preference for 9/11 survivors and first responders. Yet officials appointed by former Governor Andrew Cuomo's have claimed, citing a convoluted LMDC land swap with the Port Authority that gave the option to privatize the Memorial and Performing Arts Center sites for \$1 dollar each, that they now, in turn, need to privatize 5 World Trade Center to achieve some magic number of revenue to compensate the Port Authority. And, after Cuomo initiated an inadequate bidding process in 2019, who did the LMDC and Port Authority choose in February 2021 to develop the site as a luxury residential skyscraper? Their one-time antagonist Larry Silverstein, in a joint venture with Brookfield Properties. If the World Trade Center's General Project Plan is changed to allow for residential development and the project moves forward, the partnership would operate at least 10 properties in the vicinity. In other words, after billions and billions of dollars of public resources supported the billionaire developer, Silverstein now seeks to turn the entire district into a Hudson Yards-style monopoly, mixed-use megacampus.

The grassroots movement to compel a 100% affordable building at Tower 5 offers one last opportunity to redeem the World Trade Center in small measure. Otherwise, the triumphant societal forces of the redevelopment will be forever clear.

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



SUE BRISK



JOHN TARTAGLIA



WHAT I LEARNED DURING THE FOREVER WARS

MANY PEOPLE MY AGE WENT OFF TO FIGHT IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ. OUR PATHS WOULD CROSS AGAIN WHEN THEY RETURNED.

BY DEREK LUDOVICI

Cheers would flood my school bus as these opening lines to this parody of “Banana Boat Song” came on the radio every morning, right before the bus arrived at the high school. The song continued:

*Day O, Day O,
The first Afghan royal air show.
Hey Mister Taliban hand over bin Laden.
Daylight comes and we bomb your home*

This was the fall of 2001, as the opening salvos of the Afghanistan war were taking place. I was 15 and a freshman. I felt connected to these kids; in class a month earlier, we had witnessed together the broadcasts of the Twin Towers falling. We were students in small-town Pennsylvania connected by a global war in which we were on the same side. I felt that way despite not really knowing the

world. I had only crossed the state line a handful of times in my life, mostly to New Jersey.

Freshman year of high school I was bombarded with the casual racism of teachers’ jingoistic statements, in particular, those of my social studies teacher about how the Taliban will be “shooting their little peashooters” as we are dropping bombs from 30,000 feet. He chuckled every time he made this joke.

A year later, I would quickly find myself becoming antiwar, a leftist, and going with a friend to my first protest in Philadelphia to oppose the Iraq War. The green night-vision videos of the invasion were broadcast on network television a week after I turned 17, and soon I would see army recruiters, often older brothers of my peers, tabling in the cafeteria during lunch. Yellow ribbons clung to trees for these young soldiers. This was the early infrastructure of America’s forever wars.

I crossed the state line for Rutgers University to major in Middle East Studies and eventually moved to Egypt. At the age of 25 I entered a master’s program at the American University in Cairo amid a revolution. This was the most hopeful time in my life. I was living in one of many countries that brought down an autocrat and witnessed public space taken away from the police state and repurposed for and by ordinary people in an outpouring of hope. It felt like the world was remaking itself, and not due to a policy of regime change carried out by U.S. war machines. The revolution was hopeful until it wasn’t. In 2013 I left for a PhD program in New York as tanks rolled back into Cairo, demonstrating the Egyptian military was once again firmly in charge.

Arriving at CUNY with no fellowship and no income I, ironically, found an adjunct job teaching international studies in the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership, at City College. A few weeks later, six CUNY students were arrested for opposing David Petraeus’s appointment at Macaulay Honor College that semester. He had been hired to teach two classes for \$150,000. I earned \$2,918 for the only class I could find that semester.

While warmongers attempted to sculpt their legacy at CUNY, some of those they led into war were now trying to figure out their lives as civilians. During my first two years of teaching in international studies, I noticed how many veterans were in the department and taking my classes. They were mostly white men in their 20s, like me, but our lives had diverged. All of us had gone halfway around the globe, but for very different purposes.

In the lounge of the International Studies program, we would chat about our experiences, and I found that many of these veterans had left their deployments disillusioned

about the military. One day I asked a group of Army vets I had gotten to know well what their feelings were toward the Army. The resounding response was basically, “The Army sucks!”

What I found most defined of these students was the lack of purpose they felt upon leaving the military, an institution that they really had not enjoyed being part of — not that they were necessarily finding their purpose at CUNY. During a lecture one summer where we discussed readings that critiqued NGOs and the notion of “development,” one vet yelled out in a flabbergasted tone, “We were sold on international studies and were told we could have all these international careers, and then all of you professors tell us everything we can do with this degree is evil.” This vet had been in the military marching band. A few months later, while walking across campus together, he confided that he had no idea what he wanted to do. He just wanted to play in ska bands.

Of course, there were also some gung-ho students who took my class. These were students I could never really form a relationship with, never sure why they were taking my course on social movements in the Middle East. One of them instigated shouting matches with jingoistic statements, especially when we talked about current events. He would have learned just as much, and enjoyed much more, listening to that shitty parody of “Banana Boat Song” that played on the radio when I was a teen in 2001.

In one instance, an Egyptian-American student, with a very different experience of post-9/11 New York, lost her patience and got into a yelling match with one of these veterans. At this point I don’t remember what the argument was over, just that she was done listening to his misinformed ideas, while he failed to listen to folks with religious, cultural, national, or familial ties to the region.

As the 20-year-long occupation of Afghanistan comes to a sudden end, most of my students today have no living memory of 9/11 and its aftermath. For them 9/11 is history. An event with consequences they did not directly experience. Too young to remember the political debates that led us into wars unleashing so much death and destruction on the peoples we have bombed and invaded. I hope as a nation we don’t forget how quickly our nation set down that course and we can come to truly reckon with the consequences America unleashed on the world.

GABRIEL SPUNT



WHY THE U.S. LOST IN AFGHANISTAN

BY DANNY SJURSEN

Almost 20 years ago, Uncle Sam sauntered up to the Afghan roulette table and placed a huge war wager on the taxpayer credit card — with the Afghan people on the hook as unconsulted co-signers. When Kabul fell to the Taliban on Aug. 15, U.S. bluffs were called and all debts came due. Washington’s interventionist addicts again learned the hardest of lessons: bet big, lose big. The fallout of all this has a rather ugly aesthetic, as videos show that the Taliban bank has repossessed American HMMWVs, drones, and small arms aplenty.

The four key lies U.S. military and civilian leaders told themselves these past two decades and the delusions they allowed themselves were these:

The Pentagon (publicly, at least) underestimated the skill, will and popularity of the Taliban, while (also publicly) overestimating the same factors for the security forces of the U.S.-installed and -backed Kabul government. While even such a skeptic as I was wrong about the likely speed, scale and scope of enemy victory — what’s clear from the nearly combat-free recent conquests is that Taliban success turned on mostly morale and psychological factors. Many local elders and power-brokers feared a return to 1990s-era chaotic civil war more than a Taliban takeover (and the semblance of at least order they hoped the latter would bring). Then, as Afghan security forces faced a recent string of defeats, often went unpaid, and lacked proper air or logistical support — they read the way the wind was blowing, decided not to die needlessly, and thus the Taliban tidal wave became unstoppable. Ka-

bul’s soldiers aren’t all cowards — most Afghans are able and willing fighters — but neither are they stupid or suicidal.

Washington never really admitted the extent to which America’s very invasion — and especially its prolonged military occupation — bolstered the Taliban narrative, somewhat understandably, if uncomfortably, legitimizing these oft pitiless Islamists as the only true nationalist resistance in town. That the recognized Afghan government remained so reliant, after two decades, on U.S. trainers, contracted-logisticians, and cold-hard-cash (Kabul still lacked enough tax revenue to even pay its own security forces) only magnified the perception that President Ashraf Ghani and company were little more than corrupt foreign lackeys (which they were).

Establishment elites—politicians and pundits alike—ignored the advice of actual nonpartisan experts, as well as centuries of history and even basic reason, believing (as they’re apt to do) that America-the-exceptional would prove the exception when wading into the “graveyard of empires.” Deep down, even the U.S. military knew the score and the long odds. In my mandatory military history course at Fort Leavenworth’s Command and General Staff College (the Army’s school for new majors), we were all taught about the all-but-unconquerable challenges of what’s called “fortified compound warfare” (FCW). In such a situation, one’s enemies possess four main elements and advantages: 1) a regular or main force (massed Taliban foot soldiers), 2) an irregular or guerrilla force (dispersed Taliban fighters, as well as informants, urban terrorists and assassins), 3) a safe haven for the regular force (just over the Pakistani border), and 4) a major-power ally (Pakistan, and much later, and to a much lesser extent, maybe Russia and Iran). An official U.S. Army University Press publication dubbed compound warfare “the fatal knot,” and admitted that “[an enemy possessed of these advantages] nearly always defeated its opponents because the adversary’s necessary first step to victory, destroying the FCW defender’s main force, is almost impossible.” Yet into the inferno America’s moral-coward generals and civilian chickenhawks gleefully leaped — replete with 20 years worth of sunny promises of progress. That is, until the Taliban called in their illusionary chips.

Overall, and perhaps most profoundly, American leaders — enabled by an apathetic, deceived, and cowed

citizenry — exaggerated the utility of foreign-imposed force in transforming far-flung complex societies. Even after countless (at best) indecisive draws, and (should-have-been) obvious Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan losses — not to mention abject failure in Vietnam — these criminally inept clowns never learned the limits of American military power. And why not? No one (at the top) is held accountable; no one fails to profit from even losing ventures, and none of the policymakers were betting their own sons and daughters at the Afghan roulette table. These venal incompetents really believed they were playing with the house’s (blood) money. Hence their careless actions.

That may sound like a stinging indictment, but I’m pretty sure I’m underselling it. What has happened is a collective exposure of America’s — and Americans’ — collective guilt. False promises, unconscionable hubris, and the gap between grandiose U.S. rhetoric and the ugly reality of ground-level failure and futility have all been exposed.

Danny Sjurjen is a retired U.S. Army officer who served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and later taught history at West Point. A longer version of this article first appeared at Peace & Planet News.

THAT DIDN’T WORK: U.S. and Afghan forces train together in 2007.

NYC Veterans For Peace has a mission to end war and to resist all forms of racial, sexist, economic and environmental oppression.

We recognize that the violence of war has been epidemic in this country since its founding, including the 500-year war on the indigenous peoples, the ongoing war and racism against black and brown communities beginning with slavery, the ongoing racist immigration policies, and economic war against the poor of all colors.

We see the connection between police militarization and violence here in the United States and wars abroad. We are aware that the U.S. military is a primary cause of climate chaos and the devastation of our natural planet.

We call for a massive defunding of the Pentagon and an end the two greatest threats to life on earth—nuclear war and the destruction of the environment and climate. We stand with our indigenous brothers and sisters in their struggle to protect the water, earth and air.

Please join us for
Rising Together
A day of engagement and coalition building
Sunday, Sept. 19, 11 am–5 pm
Thomas Paine Park (Foley Square), Manhattan

For more on NYC Veterans For Peace, go to peaceandplanetnews.org/nycvfp.

VeteransForPeace.org

“SISTER, PLEASE HURRY...”

AFGHAN WOMEN JOURNALISTS FEAR TIME IS RUNNING OUT TO ESCAPE TALIBAN RULE

BY MADI WILLIAMSON

“Lots of journalists were kidnapped by the Taliban and still, no one knows what has happened or if they are alive. It seems like chaos. I can’t go to work anymore. When I went, they told me I didn’t have the right to go anymore,” my friend Halima,* an Afghan journalist, told me in a series of voice messages sent from Kabul, Afghanistan’s metropolitan capital. “There is no challenge or meaning in our everyday lives anymore. We lost our jobs and we are stuck at home. We can’t defend women’s rights. Our lives are under threat. I don’t know how long this situation will go on. I hope that the UN, the U.S. and those who have responsibility over us will hear our voice and not forget about us.”

“After five days, I went to my office and there were two Talibs standing there,” said Zahra,* another Kabul journalist. “I even went there with Islamic dress, and they told me I must not come to the office anymore. They asked me what I was doing there, and I said I worked there. They said you must not come anymore. They directly threatened me.”

Before the Taliban invaded Kabul and took control of the government in late August, Halima and Zahra worked as daily television news presenters with Radio Television Afghanistan, a public-broadcasting channel funded by the Afghan government. They are two of five women journalists that my friend Shakib and I are trying to evacuate out of the country. The Taliban knows most of their addresses and has searched their homes, sending these women into hiding.

Shakib’s team successfully evacuated over 100 female students from Kabul in the days leading up to the Aug. 31 deadline for the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, but we still await answers on what to do about the five women who remain trapped. They send me WhatsApp messages from their refuges.

“We have to do something or my family will die in front of our eyes.”

“I was a human-rights defender and women’s-rights activist. The Taliban stopped me in the street and threatened me and my mother. If we are left here, we will die.”

“Sister, please hurry. I fled my house and am staying with my relatives. They already searched my house. They are looking for me.”

“Sister, please, my [niece and nephew] called me and they are crying, asking me to come be with them.”

Unlike many of their counterparts in the countryside — more than 70% of the Afghan population live in rural areas that bore the brunt of the U.S. occupation — Halima and Zahra, as cosmopolitan women, were able to experience a media web that was growing until the U.S.-backed government collapsed and the Taliban regained power.

The Afghan media had progressed dramatically in the 20 years since the Taliban was ousted in 2001. It made space for brilliant young journalists, photographers and advocates who covered human-rights issues and global issues. There were dozens of television channels that provided cultural programming, a combination of Afghan news and political programs, original reality television shows, Bollywood movies, American programs and foreign news networks including CNN, the BBC, Sky News, India’s DD News, and Al-Jazeera.

“I was so happy because I could show and improve democracy in the young generation, especially to the girls and women in our society,” Zahra told me. “As a journalist, I could be a useful person and make a difference, helping people by letting them know about the news. It was a holy goal to me. And it gave me self-confidence that I can be a positive person in society. I could help as a minority by sharing the news to my people. When I recorded a program with someone, I could ask him or her the questions that I knew my people had on their minds. And so, I was sharing what the people actually wanted.”

Zahra is Hazara, a Persian-speaking ethnic group native to the mountainous region of central Afghanistan. The Hazaras, like other ethnic minorities who previously experienced persecution and ethnic cleansing, have already been targeted over the past few weeks as the Taliban rushed towards Kabul.

Since the Taliban took over, it has been telling women they are no longer allowed to work. It has also named leaders of the 1990s Islamic fundamentalist movement to top posts in its government, including heading the Council of Ministers, the Defense Ministry and the Interior Ministry. Women and men in Kabul protested in the streets, decrying the all-male appointments. The Taliban responded by beating protesters with rifle butts and sticks and firing into the air, witnesses say.

Reporters from Kabul say the Taliban arrested at least 14 journalists and photographers from TOLONews, Reuters, Kabulnews TV, Nor TV, and Keled Group who covered a Sept. 6 protest. Taqi Daryabi and Nemat Naqdi, from the Kabul-based media outlet Etilaat Roz, have been released and say they were severely beaten while in custody. Photographs of their backs and faces covered by swaths of red whip-welts were released on Sept. 9.

“Freedom of speech is completely destroyed. No one — especially no woman — can talk against the Taliban,” says Halima.

Having lived under Taliban rule as a child in the 1990s, my colleague Shakib is skeptical of the sudden shift in their public pronouncements. “The Taliban is very good at [public relations],” he says. “Right before capturing Kabul and other major cities, there were killings and executions of soldiers, prisoners of war ... then [the story] changed within a week. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Shakib is particularly concerned about younger Afghans, who have little to no recollection of the Taliban regime of the 1990s.

“I went through this 25 years ago. It’s really, really tough,” he says. “Especially for a younger generation that was born in the ‘90s, they have grown up in a relatively open society. Relatively accepting [of] women’s and human rights. They were socially connected to the world. They traveled. They built a life for themselves.”

“It’s not just about Afghans at this point, it’s about everyone. We feel the pain for the Syrians, the Palestinians, Lebanon ... everywhere in the world. Anyone who is going through this — losing your home is as dear as losing a part of your family. It is painful. The fact that you can’t go there and the things you have and made memories with and called home ... that is taken away from you. The pain is more difficult than any other pain.”

For those who remain in their country, the media are already far different from a couple months ago. Reporters Without Borders says there are now only 76 women journalists still working for media outlets in Kabul, down from an estimated 700 last year.

“Now there are three or four [television channels] left and two of them are controlled outside of the country,” says Zahra. “It shows that we don’t have freedom of speech anymore. We have seen lots of programs being canceled and lots of movies, shows and festivals were cancelled, too.”

No music or artistic expression is allowed and women are no longer permitted to be seen on television.

During the last five years, Madi Williamson has been working as a migratory health nurse with Afghan communities in refugee camps and urban contexts. Madi and her colleague Shakib have been working tirelessly for the past several weeks to evacuate as many people from Afghanistan as possible. Madi currently lives in Istanbul, Turkey.

**Halima and Zahra have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect the safety of our sources.*

Amba Guerguerian contributed to this report.



GARY MARTIN

9/11 KNEECAPPED A MOVEMENT

RADICAL PROTEST WENT DORMANT FOR A DECADE BEFORE OCCUPY MIRACULOUSLY BROKE THROUGH

BY RICO CLEFFI

As part of its official 20th anniversary remembrance, the 9/11 Memorial has launched a “Never Forget Fund,” which promises a “new way to never forget.” As if anyone who was in New York on that day could forget. Of course, the 9/11 Memorial, with all its never forgetting, has a very selective memory. The 9/11 Memorial would probably like the public to forget its own controversial history, a story of top-heavy executive salaries, pissing off families of 9/11 survivors and a very limited, often Islamophobic reading of history. And much as there are valid reasons to remember 9/11, I’d be content forgetting a lot of what has stuck with me. The smell of the “Pile,” the media elevation of Rudy Giuliani to near-sainthood — things like that I’d gladly erase from my memory bank in an instant.

I knew the area around the towers well enough; I worked at a nonprofit down on Broadway and Leonard at the time. I had joined in “shut down Wall Street” marches that never shut down much of anything. They were often tepid affairs with more than a few sectarian front groups involved. Down in the sound canyons created by all the imposing towers, the chanted slogans tended to evaporate up into the stratosphere unheard. Manhattan’s stark, indifferent skyline always seemed completely impenetrable.

There are a few famous pictures of New York City newsstands the day after 9/11, every publication’s cover with the image of the burning towers. No one talks about the headlines on the morning of the attack. Both *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times* carried major stories on the “anti-globalization” movement (though no one in the movement used that sobriquet, we generally considered ourselves broadly anti-capitalist). *The Financial Times*’ story carried a headline announcing “Capitalism Under Siege.” The ruling class was still shook after 30,000 protesters had encircled a World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in November 1999 and shut it down, catalyzing a series of mass protests wherever the heads of major global institutions tried to meet. Momentum had been building for major actions against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in late September. Plans were in the works to shut down Wall Street for real later that fall as a part of a global day of action targeting the world’s major stock exchanges. This was unnerving to the elites who run society and exhilarating for those of us who were active in these efforts.

Nine-Eleven took most of the momentum out of the movement. Everyone knew the U.S. response was going to be a war on Afghanistan and that Bush/Cheney would use the tragedy to get their Iraq War. The Left turned its energies toward figuring out how to respond to the near-inevitable carnage before it happened.

So many bad takes were proffered in the media that if you stacked them all on top of each other you could dwarf the actual Twin Towers. More than one elite intellectual used 9/11 as an excuse to finally pivot rightward. Liberals responded the way they usually do, with wishy-washy navel gazing. A *New Yorker* writer claimed the attacks “reinstated a conceptual category of New York life that has, in recent years, become almost entirely meaningless: the uptown-downtown divide.” “Inside job” theories (often anti-Semitic, always unsubstantiated) spread faster than COVID at spring break. One popular leftist writer claimed the victims were “little Eichmanns,” ignoring the fact that the majority of people who keep capitalism going are not the ones running it. Activists probably spent too much time arguing over to what degree chickens were coming home to roost and not enough figuring out what to do next.

Some on the Left felt it was too soon to protest in the weeks after 9/11. There was at least one antiwar demonstration for which the event’s organizers urged everyone to wear all white

and march in total silence. Everyone was just reeling, trying to figure out how to regain some of the momentum that was sapped by 9/11.

I vaguely remember the first big demo against the war on Afghanistan. Thousands turned out and it felt good to be protesting again, but like most of the demonstrations I attended during the Bush/Cheney years, there was that recurrent feeling of futility. Bush famously commented in the run-up to the Iraq War that he didn’t care that millions had protested because he didn’t take direction from “focus groups.”

One 9/11 memory I would like to never forget is seeing Mos Def on lower Broadway, on a BMX bike. He was talking to a group of young Black and Brown men, arguing passionately against signing up for the military to avenge the attack. Another great memory I have is of thousands of people taking to Union Square. The crowd spontaneously turned the steps into a soapbox. The vibe was mostly (but not entirely) antiwar. That was the first time I saw anything nearing that level of direct democratic communication. I wouldn’t witness anything similar until Occupy Wall Street came around.

When Occupy erupted a decade later, I felt a sense that things could really change. It was the first time in my life that I witnessed an actual mass movement. The rage we had felt against our plutocratic system that was quieted by 9/11 finally seemed to be shared by the larger public.

It was a profound period when millions of people opened up spaces that had been previously unbreachable. There were some real glimpses of what life could look like beyond the grip of capital/money/work/the state. It wasn’t just leftist activism that resurfaced, though. Many of the worst reactionary strains given succor by 9/11 were also present from the first days at Zuccotti Park. I encountered anti-vaxxers, anti-Semitic conspiracy loons and all the rest. They weren’t the majority, but they had enough of a presence that they were able to recruit others and infect the general discourse. I was there when Michael Moore first came down to Zuccotti and was accosted by a group of Ron Paul libertarians who surrounded him, screaming, “Die, socialist scum!” Great as it was to see the emphasis on non-hierarchical forms of organization, Occupy fetishized anti-authoritarian process to the point where actual authoritarians were allowed to make inroads. That’s not the reason OWS failed, though it was a significant failure of the movement.

These are the bits of history we keep lodged somewhere deep within us, the stuff we sometimes dredge up in too vivid, sleepless hours. The chroniclers of the official narrative can keep their gift-shop-gloss version of history and the newest ways of never forgetting. I’m sticking with the memories I’ve got until old age or the creditors come and eventually take it all away.



GARY MARTIN

Law and Disorder radio

Listen to the show each week
and download podcasts at

Lawanddisorder.org

Airing on over 125 stations
around the nation

“Our basic constitutional rights are in jeopardy. “Law and Disorder” is an excellent magazine format radio show, hosted by progressive lawyers who analyze the state of civil rights in this post-9/11 period. From attacks on Muslims at home to torture abroad, “Law and Disorder” puts these constitutional attacks into perspective”

- AMY GOODMAN
HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!

Co-founded by:

Michael Ratner (1943-2016)

President, Center for Constitutional Rights;

and hosted by movement lawyers:

Heidi Boghosian,

Executive Director, A. Muste Memorial Institute;

and **Michael Steven Smith,**

New York City attorney and author.

NOW ON FACEBOOK.COM

**TUNE
IN &
TURN
ON**

**NEWS,
INTERVIEWS &
MORE!**

**TUESDAYS
5-6 PM
WBAI
99.5 FM
WBAL.ORG**

**THE INDEPENDENT
NEWS HOUR**

October 2021 **THE INDEPENDENT**

THE RISE OF OCCUPY

10 YEARS AGO THIS FALL

BY JOHN TARLETON

It was the summer of 2011 and millions of Americans were still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis. Home foreclosure rates were at an all-time high. The unemployment rate was hovering near 9 percent. Many recent college graduates couldn't find a good job, or any job at all, to begin paying off their student loans and building lives as independent adults.

Lorenzo Serna was one of them. Serna had graduated from the University of North Dakota but was now jobless. When a friend from their student activism days at UND invited Serna to crash at his Brooklyn apartment, they hopped on a Greyhound bus. After arriving at the Port Authority bus terminal, Serna went straight to a meeting of local activists that their friend was involved with. The meeting participants were debating whether to “occupy Wall Street.”

The idea — that 20,000 people would set up a round-the-clock protest encampment at the foot of Wall Street — had been proposed by Micah White of the Canadian magazine *Adbusters* without consulting anyone in New York. It seemed far-fetched. Who was going to organize that many people to show up? How would they be fed and cared for? How would the NYPD respond?

“Everyone was like, what is this guy doing?” Serna recalled. “He’s not even from New York City. He’s telling people to do stuff, and he’s not going to do it.”

Still, “difficult” is not the same as “impossible.” Similar, politically charged occupations of public squares had taken place earlier that year in Egypt, Spain, Greece and the Wisconsin state capitol building. The same disconnect between ruling elites and everyone else existed here as well.

Now in its third year, the Obama administration was obsessed with “deficit reduction.” Wall Street had been bailed out three years earlier and now it demanded that the working class foot the bill. Obama offered congressional Republicans four dollars in cuts to Social Security and Medicare spending for every one dollar in tax increases but was rebuffed.

“There was a sense among the general public that the government really wasn’t coming to help them post-2008 financial crisis,” said Michael Pellagotti, a young activist from New Jersey who threw himself into the movement.

• • •

THE ANARCHISTS at the New York City General Assembly took the lead on organizing Occupy Wall Street, holding in-person meetings in August and early September in a local park while doing outreach online to drum up interest. The protest kicked off on Sept. 17 when as many as 2,000 people marched from the bottom of Broadway past Wall Street to Zuccotti Park, a privately owned public space controlled by Brookfield Properties. They held assemblies that allowed people to face each other and share their struggles and how they might address them.

“Assemblies are where we really listen to one another and build relationships as humans,” said Marina Sitrin, one of the lead facilitators that day who has participated in “horizontalist” movements around the world over the past quarter century.

Fewer than 100 people stayed through the night and kept the occupation going into the next day. It was the beginning of a fervent, 59-day experiment in public dissent. Occupy Wall Street would shake up American politics like few protests in history (see page 20) and inspire other Occupy camps to form in more than 600 cities and towns across the country

in an outpouring of discontent. The meaning and the legacy of the movement is still debated by its participants, but a sense of wonder that they had been a part of such an event remains widespread.

“Every day felt like a week. It was like living in a time warp,” said Sandy Nurse, who slept over the first night and soon became a leading figure in the direct action working group that planned OWS’s street protests.

“It was like watching a mystery reveal itself,” said Gary Roland, a member of the OWS tactical team who insisted that the group set up camp at Zuccotti Park and not attempt to enter the plaza outside the One Chase Manhattan Building that was surrounded by police.

Zuccotti Park is a three-quarter acre slab of granite nestled amid skyscrapers with in-ground lights and a sprinkling of young honey locust trees planted after 9/11. It is a privately owned public space controlled by Brookfield Properties, which is required by city law to keep it open 24 hours a day.

I worked at a nearby office building. When the workweek resumed on Monday Sept. 19, only a few dozen, mostly bedraggled Occupiers could be found at the park during the day. At first glance, it looked like another hopeless protest. However, more was going on than met the eye.

The small daytime contingent would be supplemented with people coming by after work. Evening meetings of the General Assembly — OWS’s official decision-making body — were growing in size and found the perfect work-around to NYPD restrictions on the use of amplified sound in the park — the “people’s microphone,” a communal process by which members of a crowd would repeat what a speaker said to those standing further away. The group had a catchy battle cry — “We are the 99%!” — and Nurse and the direct action working group were keeping their fellow Occupiers from becoming too sedentary by leading twice-a-day marches on Wall Street to greet the opening and closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange chanting “All day! All night! All week! Occupy Wall Street!” Their every action was broadcast by livestreamers like Lorenzo Serna who were determined to do an in-run around the corporate media.

Occupy’s existence was tenuous but it persevered and slowly gained strength. The NYPD loomed in the background but did not move against what was still a small, rag-tag protest.

New York’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, liked to refer to the NYPD as “my private army,” and not without reason. At his behest, the police had repeatedly crushed dissent from Iraq War protests to the 2004 Republican National Convention to Critical Mass bike rides. But this time the NYPD found itself ill-prepared to confront a nimble foe that had mastered revolutionary new developments in communications technologies.

On September 24, OWS celebrated its one-week anniversary by marching to Union Square. Near the end of the march, some of the protesters were kettled behind orange nets in advance of being arrested. Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna casually walked up and with no apparent reason blasted two young white women in the face with pepper spray, causing them to cry out in agony. Video of the beefy cop assaulting the two young women was captured by cell phone, went viral on social media and was then picked up and amplified a second time by conventional media outlets. The incident boosted the visibility of OWS and swung public sympathy toward it.

One week later, the NYPD surrounded and arrested 700 Occupy protesters as they tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. The stand-off made national headlines and the movement exploded. Donations and new volunteers poured into OWS and new encampments opened daily in cities and towns across the country.



ERIK MCGREGOR

“When the media coverage really kicked off, it became just an influx of people who wanted to participate,” Nurse said.

Several days later, New York’s labor unions convened a mass demonstration in support of Occupy that drew an estimated 30,000 people to Foley Square and the surrounding streets and courthouse steps.

After years of investing in conventional messaging campaigns that failed to move the needle on economic inequality as a political issue, a bunch of scrappy kids sleeping out in a park had broken through.

Labor was eager to be seen with its popular new friend. It provided space for holding meetings and storing supplies, bodies in the streets for protests, messaging credibility with working-class New Yorkers who might be wary of Occupy’s countercultural musk and funding for special projects like *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, a brilliantly designed, four-page, full-color broadsheet that captured the Occupy moment and was distributed to tens of thousands of readers. An early sign of Occupy’s ability to reshape the political narrative came when a labor-led coalition pressured Gov. Andrew Cuomo to drop his plans to eliminate a “millionaires tax” on high earners that brought in \$2-3 billion a year in revenue. Wary of being tagged as “Governor 1 Percent,” the image-conscious Cuomo backed down.

“It was an instantly profound and very rare intervention at the level of meaning in society and its dominant narrative,” said author and organizer Jonathan Smucker. The standard up-by-the-bootstraps narrative that people are fed was for tens of millions of people supplanted by a new narrative of a rigged system that only served the interests of the rich, said Smucker, who credited Occupy for fueling the growth of a radical left wing of the Democratic Party that didn’t exist at the time. It wasn’t what Occupy Wall Street’s original organizers intended, but OWS had become too big for any one group or faction to control.

• • •

ZUCCOTTI PARK HUMMED WITH ACTIVITY throughout the day and late at night you had to tiptoe around dozing Occupiers in their sleeping bags. According to Marisa Holmes of New York City General Assembly, 100 working groups formed during OWS with an average of 40 members each. While many working groups focused on

Occupy’s internal workings — food, sanitation, public safety, health care, finance, communications, meeting facilitation, etc. — others sought to channel some of the movement’s energy to other causes: supporting striking museum workers, aiding embattled homeowners, stopping a controversial fracked natural gas pipeline from being built in Manhattan’s West Village.

The fracktivists lost the battle to stop the Spectra Pipeline from being allowed to cross under the Hudson River and enter the West Village. But, SANE Energy emerged from Occupy with more volunteers and momentum and would play a leading role in stopping several major fossil fuel infrastructure projects in New York City and State in the following years.

Occupy’s rapid growth also meant it experienced many growing pains. A draft of the “Declaration of the Occupation of Wall Street” included a passage that described the Occupiers as “being one race, the human race, formerly divided by race, class ...”

Manissa Maharawal was stunned. Like the “All Lives Matter” rhetoric of recent vintage, this awkward appeal to common humanity erased the unique ways people of color experience life under racialized capitalism. Using the people’s microphone, she appealed to the General Assembly to change the passage. She received some pushback, but her request won overwhelming support and was accepted. Maharawal would go on to participate in the people of color caucus that worked to introduce the movement to a more nuanced analysis of race and class that didn’t exclude one at the expense of another, work that would help prepare countless Occupiers to embrace the rise of Black Lives Matter a few years later.

“The energy of people thinking together and being curious and trying to learn made me feel like ‘Hey, I have something to contribute here,’ ” Maharawal said. “We were trying to contribute something, not to tear the movement down but to make it stronger.”

• • •

THE SHEER SIZE of OWS eventually made the consensus-oriented General Assembly unworkable. Key working groups began making decisions on their own because it was the only way to get anything done. Prominent leaders were denounced. After weeks of dysfunction, OWS belatedly switched to a “Spokescouncil” model of decision-making that empowered representatives from working groups to meet and make decisions.

Occupy Wall Street was not separate from the world and over time the camp became a refuge to more people seeking food and shelter, including some of whom had

mental health and substance abuse issues. Undercover cops stirred up trouble. The police were also reported to be sending newly released inmates from Rikers Island straight to Zuccotti Park. As October turned to November, the encampments in New York and other big cities were not only facing greater internal challenges but were also being targeted by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies that were collaborating closely with local police departments that carried out raids in one city after another to shut down Occupy encampments. Zuccotti Park finally fell after midnight on November 15. The NYPD destroyed everything people could not hastily carry away, including the People’s Library and its thousands of books that ended up in the trash.

The loss of a central hub was shattering for OWS. At the same time, it freed up the energy that was going into maintaining the camp to flow into myriad forms of long-term movement building work that could change the world outside Zuccotti Park. Two days after the raid, another labor-backed march of 30,000 people gathered in the dark and marched over the Brooklyn Bridge toward an uncertain future. The grief and the anger over the loss of Zuccotti was palpable. As the crowd began heading over the bridge, Mark Read was waiting high up in a nearby apartment building. He aimed his “bat signal” at the side of the Verizon Building that stands next to the bridge and a series of messages danced on the wall: “99%...Mic Check!...Look around you...You are a part of a global uprising...We are a cry...from the heart...of the world...We are unstoppable...”

The crowd roared its approval. Read, a professor of media studies at NYU, had offered the leaseholder on the apartment he was using \$250 for her trouble. She declined upon learning he was with Occupy. The police figured out where the bat signal was coming from, Read said, and soon they were pounding on the apartment door, demanding to be allowed in.

The woman’s sister took her two children aside to speak with them. “I remember her telling them ‘We need to be brave. And you know, sometimes you need to take a risk to do the right thing.’ ”

THIS IS READER-SUPPORTED NEWS

THE INDYPENDENT COVERS THE MOVEMENTS THAT MATTER AND THE ISSUES THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR LIKE NO OTHER PUBLICATION IN NEW YORK CITY.

INDYPENDENT.ORG/SUBSCRIBE

\$30 — 12 ISSUES

INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE

MAKE A GENEROUS ONE-TIME DONATION OR BECOME A MONTHLY SUSTAINER OR SEND A CHECK TO

THE INDYPENDENT

388 ATLANTIC AVE., 2ND FL.//BROOKLYN, NY 11217

THE INDYPENDENT



OCCUPY'S IMPACT

10 YEARS LATER ITS LEGACY CONTINUES GROWING

By JOHN TARLETON

Occupy Wall Street was an inconsequential failure, even worse a “fad” — at least according to the *New York Times*. As Occupy’s first anniversary approached, *Times* columnist Joe Nocera delivered its obituary: “For all intents and purposes, the Occupy movement is dead,” he intoned. Occupy “will be an asterisk in the history books, if it gets a mention at all,” added the *Times*’ star business writer Andrew Ross Sorkin.

In fact, the impact of radical social movements tends to unfold unevenly over time. New organizations are launched. The public discourse gradually shifts. Long-term personal commitments to do the work are forged or deepened. The countless personal relationships formed during a peak movement moment nourish future efforts that build off of each other. Savvy political candidates embrace once-marginal ideas that turn out to have a large following.

Ten years out, the ledger on Occupy looks a little different. Here is a small sampling of the movement’s impact at both the national and local level.

MEET THE 1%

We are constantly told the United States is a middle class nation. In reality it's a capitalist oligarchy with deep class divisions. With its populist framing of the 1% vs. the 99%, Occupy managed to smuggle class back into mainstream political discourse for the first time in decades and gave us a simple vocabulary for naming the 1-percenters – or more accurately the .01-percenters – who run this country for their own enrichment, an invaluable first step for someday challenging and dismantling their power.

NATIONAL

THE FIGHT FOR 15

Emboldened by Occupy's economic message and attention-grabbing tactics, the Fight for \$15 began in 2012 when 200 fast-food workers in New York City walked off the job to demand \$15/hr and union rights. With backing from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the campaign grew to encompass fast-food workers, home health aides, child care workers, airport workers, adjunct professors, retail employees and underpaid employees everywhere. To date, Fight for \$15 has won raises for 26 million people across the country with 10 states at or on their way to a \$15 minimum wage.

THE DEBT COLLECTIVE

Inspired by the late anthropologist and Occupy organizer David Graeber who wrote a best-selling book on the history of debt, The Debt Collective has retired \$2.8 billion in student debt, medical debt, payday loans, probation debt and credit card debt – often by raising funds to purchase debts on secondary debt markets for pennies on the dollar and then ripping up the debts they have acquired. The group's student debt campaign has put student debt cancellation and free public college on the political map.

BERNIE SANDERS

Bernie Sanders had been inveighing against a rigged economic and political system for 40 years but was barely known outside his home state of Vermont when Occupy Wall Street came along. Occupy's easily understood class analysis (99 vs 1%) and the concerns it raised around economic inequality would provide the soundtrack for Sanders' two spirited presidential runs. Sanders failed to win the White House but his campaigns largely won the battle of ideas around moving the Democratic Party back toward its New Deal roots. He also revived the Left as an electoral force in America for the first time in decades. Now Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Sanders is pushing to enact substantial parts of his program – expanding Medicare to cover dental, vision and hearing, federally subsidized child care, free community college, investments in renewable energy and a Climate Conservation Corps that would employ hundreds of thousands of young people – via a \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation package that still has to pass through a gauntlet of congressional committees and overcome unanimous opposition from Republicans.

PEOPLE FOR BERNIE

Bernie Sanders benefited from more than the change in the zeitgeist that Occupy inspired. His 2016 campaign was boosted by OWS

OCCUPY THE SEC

Occupy made room for all kinds of people including finance nerds who want the Securities and Exchange Commission to more closely regulate Wall Street. In the years following Occupy, OSEC would go on to become a leading critic of the SEC and nudge the agency to become more aggressive in exercising its powers.

RACE & CLASS

During Occupy, white participants were pushed by people of color to develop a deeper understanding of how racialized capitalism works and the relative privileges it confers on members of the 99%. Many white Occupiers were also on the receiving end of police violence for the first time in their lives, all of which prepared them to take the streets in support of the Movement for Black Lives following the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner at the hands of the police.

CATALYZING OTHER SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Just as Occupy was boosted by movements that preceded it, threads from Occupy have run through some of the past decade's most dynamic grassroots social movements including Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and an anti-oil pipeline protest encampment at Standing Rock, North Dakota that drew more than 10,000 participants in the fall of 2016.

OUR REVOLUTION, JUSTICE DEMOCRATS, DSA

The Occupy-inflected 2016 Sanders campaign in turn helped seed a new generation of organizations on the electoral Left. This includes Our Revolution, with hundreds of state and local chapters that have worked to elect progressive candidates in recent years, and the Justice Democrats, which played a key role in electing several members of the Squad, most notably Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It was a group of AOC campaign alums who started the Movement School, which is training the next generation of electoral organizers and campaign staffers to build a diverse progressive movement.

The Sanders campaigns also supercharged the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, which is now the largest socialist party in the US since the 1940s. Here in New York City, the DSA has elected one Congressman, six state legislators and two incoming City Councilmembers.

activists Winnie Wong and Charles Lenchner, who launched the People for Bernie Facebook page. The site gained 1.4 million followers and served as the mother ship for the roughly 200 independently managed pro-Sanders Facebook pages Wong and Lenchner estab-

lished in the spring of 2015 and then turned over to Sanders supporters across the country to use as they saw fit. Wong, who coined the phrase "Feel the Bern," helped organize the 2017 Women's March and was a senior advisor to the 2020 Sanders campaign.

SOLIDAIRE

In the wake of Occupy, Solidaire was formed by 1-percenters who have since redistributed tens of millions of dollars of their wealth to bring much-needed resources to frontline social justice movements with a special emphasis on Black liberation and indigenous sovereignty. Solidairenetwork.org.

THE WILDFIRE PROJECT

After exploding into national prominence within a matter of weeks, Occupy was riven by internal disputes that weakened the movement. Afterwards, a number of organizers with ties to Occupy helped launch the Wildfire Project, which has worked with more than 50 leftist organizations on how to create healthy internal cultures and organizing practices that set them up for long-term success. Sunrise Movement, Dream Defenders and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) are among the groups that have been mentored by Wildfire. Wildfireproject.org.

ELIZABETH WARREN

Elizabeth Warren had already made a name for herself as a critic of the financial industry when she ran for a Massachusetts Senate seat in 2012. Still, Occupy helped turbocharge her relevance as a crusader against abusive business practices. While her 2020 presidential run did not succeed, Warren proteges are leading the Biden administration's campaign to enforce anti-trust laws for the first time in decades.

KSHAMA SAWANT

Before Bernie and the Squad, Occupy Seattle organizer Kshama Sawant was elected to Seattle City Council in 2013. She was the first Socialist elected to public office in Seattle in almost a century. She quickly became the driving force in the successful campaign to make Seattle the first major city to enact a \$15 per hour minimum wage. She also played a key role in passing a tax on Seattle's largest corporations to address the city's homelessness crisis. Sawant has been re-elected twice and is now embroiled in a recall race bankrolled by big business interests that want to drive her out of office.

LOCAL

OCCUPY SANDY

Superstorm Sandy swamped areas of New York when it swept ashore on October 29, 2012. With both federal and local government disaster relief agencies paralyzed and large NGOs like the Red Cross missing in action, Occupy Sandy filled the void. With its motto of "mutual aid, not charity," it swiftly mobilized a decentralized network of thousands of volunteers who visited New Yorkers trapped in their unlit apartments, gathered food and other supplies, established medical clinics and later helped people gut their mold-infested homes and begin rebuilding their lives. In Far Rockaway, it helped incubate several worker-owned businesses.

"Occupy Sandy did not save the day," Resilience.org wrote afterwards. "But Occupy did save countless people hungry nights, desperate days, panicked sweats over finding places for the kids to sleep, cold conversations about next month's rent. It brought people together."

SANE ENERGY

Opponents of fracking received an infusion of new volunteers while leading an anti-pipeline fight in the West Village during Occupy. SANE Energy was in the thick of the West Village battle and would see its ranks swell. In the following years, the group would play a leading role in successfully rallying public opposition to several major natural gas infrastructure projects including the Williams Pipeline, which would have traversed beneath the New York Harbor, and Port Ambrose, a proposed liquified natural gas port that would have been located off of Long Beach, Long Island. The same offshore area will be the site of a future wind farm that will power hundreds of thousands of New York homes.

MAYDAY SPACE

Opened in 2014 by veterans of Occupy, Mayday Space is a multi-story organizing center and social hub in Bushwick that works in tandem with its sister space Starr Bar a short walk away. Mayday is both a neighborhood resource and a citywide destination for engaging programming, a home for radical ideas and debate, and a welcoming gathering place for people and movements to work, learn, celebrate and build together. Mayday co-founder Sandy Nurse (See Page 22) won a City Council seat in June and will take office January 1.

ELECTORAL



LYNNE FOSTER

SANDY NURSE'S JOURNEY FROM OCCUPY WALL STREET TO CITY COUNCIL

By JOHN TARLETON

What's the best way to make change? Disruptive street protests? Build alternative institutions? Get elected in hopes of changing government from the inside? Sandy Nurse has done it all over the past decade.

Nurse let protests at Occupy Wall Street. She later turned her focus to her community in Bushwick, a working-class, predominantly people of color neighborhood in North Brooklyn, where she co-founded Mayday Space, a community center and grassroots organizing hub. She also launched BK Rot, New York City's first bike-powered food waste hauling and composting service. Last year, she helped organize Occupy City Hall. The week-long protest encampment outside the seat of city government drew hundreds of participants who demanded that their representatives cut \$1 billion from the NYPD's budget and use the money to fund community services. The measure failed.

Next year, Nurse will be voting on the City's nearly \$100 billion annual budget as the new representative for Council District 37, where she trounced a machine-backed incumbent by 30 points in the June Democratic primary with the support of dozens of progressive politicians, labor unions and community based organizations. Her district covers Bushwick, Cypress Hills, East New York and Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

"It's kind of crazy," she chuckled as we began to discuss her journey over the past 10 years and how she plans to co-govern with her constituents when she takes office.

THE INDEPENDENT: *What drew you to Occupy Wall Street? How did you get involved?*

SANDY NURSE: I followed Occupy on Facebook that summer after returning from Haiti, where I was working with the World Food Program. There was a lot of very potent, powerful energy happening around the world where people were just at their end and were congregating in public spaces like Tahrir Square in Egypt. I was feeling pretty depressed about the political culture in the United States. On top of outright corruption, there was the existential threat of climate change and our inability to take meaningful action around that because of all the special interests in our political system.

A friend and I went down to Zuccotti Park on the first day and there were assemblies in the park with hundreds of people. It was incredible to watch and participate in. They were looking for people to stay the night. My friend got some blankets from home, and that kicked it off for me.

What was it like being an organizer with the Direct Action Working Group?

Within a day or so of starting to camp at the park, someone said, "Hey, we're going to have this huddle for anybody who wants to do direct action." I went over and was like, "Yeah, I'm here to do stuff. I don't want to sit in the park all day." So we went over to a corner and started planning marches. Then it became the Direct Action Working Group. We met twice a day. We would do marches to Wall Street coinciding with the opening and closing bell of the stock market to get people up and moving and to give people something to participate in when they got off work.

Things really took off when we planned the march across the Brooklyn Bridge and 700 people got arrested on the bridge. When the media coverage really kicked off, it became just an influx of people who wanted to participate. So much was happening. Every day felt like a week.

It must have been both exhilarating and exhausting.

Occupy required a tremendous amount of energy, mental and physical energy. And the space was hard to manage. It became a place where people who needed food and shelter were seeking refuge. Also, there were real needs with mental health and people struggling with drug use that couldn't be met by people in the park. We were also infiltrated by undercover cops who sought to create chaos, which took its toll on people. People got exhausted and were no longer interested in pushing the broader message about the 99% vs. the 1%.

What are the memories from Occupy that stand out for you?

There were all sorts of bizarre little moments. At one point we were threatened with being kicked out of the park for being "unclean" and there was this massive cleaning effort. I remember one of the ringleaders of the Sanitation Working Group furiously sweeping the park while shirtless in the rain. For quirky moments, I'm also thinking of the Direct Action Working Group meeting in the graveyard next to Trinity Church twice a day to plan protests.

Also, it was just the haphazard way everything came together. You would wake up and there's a library that wasn't there the night before. One of the weirdest moments for me was when Rev. Jesse Jackson came through the park and we gave him a tour. It was really late at night and we walked to a nearby office. And there was this roundtable conversation about how the energy of this movement could be captured for broader electoral movements. A bunch of us pushed back saying this movement isn't about getting people elected.

Why did you shift to community organizing?

I wanted to do stuff at the hyper-local level and focus on long-term institution building. I'm deeply concerned

about the climate crisis. I wanted to experiment at the neighborhood level with how we could actually impact that while creating systems that allow people to take action. With BK Rot, we put into practice some of the thinking of environmental justice movements about using mitigation and adaptation projects as opportunities to create direct benefits for the people who've been living in communities that have environmental racism.

We created Mayday because we need space for our movements. I see Mayday as like Zuccotti Park in a building. It's all of the same types of activities — cooking and big events, big assemblies, celebrations. It's art making, political education and all of the things that were happening at Zuccotti but in a space that's clean and safe for people.

How did you gravitate toward local politics?

With the Mayday Space, we don't get public funding. Our model was built on being sustained by the groups who use it. With BK Rot, we have teenagers on bikes collecting trash and processing raw waste. For many years we engaged around trying to have access to public land to house this project. That involved our community board and different land use advocates and the strong support and participation of Councilmember Antonio Reynoso and his staff who made calls to different city agencies to help us get access to public land. That opened my mind to opportunities to work with the state.

I continue to be a street activist and do direct actions and train folks who want to do that. I also like building positive spaces for people to work together and improve our neighborhood. This jump is a part of a longer, unexpected trajectory, but at this time we really need people who are highly energized, proactive, who want to be out there thinking about how we move New York City into the 21st century.

How will you strike a balance between being an outsider aligned with social movements and an insider who will have to work with 50 other City Council members and the mayor?

There's always going to be an inherent tension in this. The way I'm thinking about it is to not navigate it alone. We have to build alliances among the Left. There are movement groups focused on pushing agendas in our local government. There are groups who don't believe in electoral politics, but they are out there all the time pushing everybody to look at the problem. We all have a role to play. The best I can do is be as transparent as possible and create as many opportunities for participatory decision making as possible. We need people to come with solutions, with ideas, with the energy to think it through because that's what is required at this moment to address the challenges we face.



**MAY
DAY**

176 ST. NICHOLAS AVE,
BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN

BOOK YOUR EVENT:
MAYDAYSPACE.ORG

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM:
@MAYDAYSPACE



CONSPIRE CREATE CELEBRATE

STARR BAR AND MAYDAY CELEBRATE
AND SUPPORT MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

STARR BAR

176 ST. NICHOLAS AVE,
BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN 11237

BOOK YOUR EVENT: STARRBAR.COM

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM
@STARRBARBK



Starr Bar and Mayday are allied spaces in Bushwick. We share resources, community, and a political vision. 10% of profits from Starr Bar go to support the work at Mayday.

TEAR DOWN THE SYSTEM NOT EACH OTHER

CANCEL CULTURE IS OVER. ONLY LEADING WITH LOVE WILL TAKE US WHERE WE NEED TO GO.

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Independence Day — Fireworks explode. Our faces glow red, white, blue. Neighbors aim Roman candles and flinch at booms. My son tugs me and I lift him. Tiny hands reach for the sky painted like the American flag.

4th of July feels like a practice revolution. Citizens light firecrackers so big they're really bombs. Cops circle the street, helpless as too many of us break the law. We blow off fingers. We Instagram it.

I want my son to know you. I want him to see Millennials and Gen Z-ers being free. It's why I took him to the George Floyd protests. He heard you shake the street with chants. On TV, you torched police stations. You had the establishment in their feels. Politicians gawked at the marches, "How far will this go?"

Not far enough. You, Millennials and Gen Z, are creating the world he'll live in. And that's why I need to say this loud and clear. You need to burn this shit down. Pulling statues to the ground is great. Next is the ruling class. If you do not, Republicans will steal elections. If they lose, centrist Democrats will make tiny reforms that leave us in the same place. Either way, in 10 years we blow past climate crisis tipping points and lock in disaster.

Alarms are spinning! So, here is my open letter. You have one historical responsibility. Start the 21st Century American Revolution. Use the weapon more dangerous than fire or bullets. Use love. Bury the old America. Give birth to the new one, kicking inside you.

THE BETRAYAL

Millennials and Gen Z-ers are so brilliant. Before you came to my class, I taught Brokeback Mountain and asked who thought gays were doomed to Hell. Half raised their hands and stared with Jesus-Hate or street machismo. So many hard, spiteful eyes. I saw those eyes in high school when gay kids were outed, teased and beaten.

When younger Millennials came, I asked the question and just a few hands went up. One day, none. In class, you had deep insights about love and society. You cared about the literature of minorities. When gay and transgender students came out, you welcomed them.

You, Millennials (born 1981-1996) and Gen Z'ers (born 1997 onward), are more tolerant and intelligent than those before. You're also more anxious and bitter, arrogant and yet more insecure.

You are defined by betrayal. Millennials were sold a bankrupt American Dream and took out student loans to buy it. I remember graduation in 2009, you posed for photos in blue robes, smiled and wore caps with gold tassels. But dread hung like a dark cloud. The 2008 Great Recession stole your future.

For years, I chatted baristas and learned of talented minds using expensive diplomas

to stir coffee. Oh, you're an engineer? Wow, yes, oat milk please. The cafe was filled with young adults scraping by on part-time jobs.

You, Gen Z, were betrayed by corporations experimenting on you like guinea pigs. How is it that no one, no commission, no regulatory agency tested the effect of putting smartphones into the hands of children?

In an interview with *London Real*, author Jonathan Haidt said, "The cutoff seems to be Gen Z, if you were born in 1996, you might have gotten social media in middle school. Imagine kids growing up and ... we switch up the input so that everyone is hyper-connected to their peers, massively sharing information and evaluating each other, clicking likes."

The constant evaluation of one's self-image online caused, he said, "high rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide." Is that why I see many of you run from yourselves toward chimeras of love? Or run from the fear of shame? Or feel your social media "self" is the "real" you, and if it's insulted or ghosted or bread-crumbed then you are too?

You chase new friends, new likes, new tags and posts that seem real, but dissolve when touched. The ground vanishes. The falling begins. What endless vertigo.

THE BROKEN GYROSCOPE

To get a handle on your crisis, I pulled *The Lonely Crowd*, published in 1950, from the shelf. The main author, David Riesman, used the metaphor of a psychological "gyroscope" that maintains one's balance during life.

He posed a simple question: How does each generation build that internal gyroscope? In pre-modern societies, where people farmed tough land and lived isolated from authority, tradition was their gyroscope. It directed them. Church. Authority. Holy books. Prayer.

Modernity broke tradition. The Industrial Revolution's steam-powered machines sped up the economy. Aristocrats seized land and drove peasants to cities. Science ripped culture like a dishrag. Testimony comes from Karl Marx in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, where he wrote, "All that's solid melts to air." He witnessed European revolutions and police crackdowns. The engine of global capitalism churned whole peoples and continents and left "no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest." Out of capitalism emerged the inner-directed character type, who sought their own goals, their own careers. Work. Money. Status.

In late capitalism, we are constantly connected by new tech like cellphones. The inner-directed gave way to the other-directed. Riesman defined this type as a "shallow" American "uncertain of himself and his values, and more demanding of approval." The internal gyroscope is not balanced on tradition or an internal self but bobs on the oceanic, ever fluid currents of Instagram hearts.

One's image is at the mercy of others.



DAVID HOLLENBACH

TEM,

Here a “like” is an endorphin boost. Here being “unfollowed” or “blocked” is a scarlet letter. Flesh and blood humans are trapped in digital limbo entered via cellphones like portals to the Matrix.

You are in *The Society of the Spectacle*. Guy Debord’s 1967 book analyzed this epoch, “The whole life of those societies ... presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.”

What is it like to be other-directed? Life is a spectacle. Intimacies like a first kiss or drinks at a bar are frozen in a camera flash and posted. Others see it and post, in turn, sexy “thirst trap” photos. Others see that and post their new boyfriend photos. On and on, I watch you yank and pull others to get approval. It’s as if the cellphone is a handcuff and you’re all chained.

The defining aha moment of Millennial and more specifically Gen Z adolescence is the nagging sense that none of this is real. The Facebook, Instagram and Twitter highlight reels hide a lot of mistakes, a lot of weird, a lot of pain.

The broken gyroscope has left whole generations growing up inside an illusion.

PLATO’S CAVE

It always surprised me how a 2,400-year-old myth takes your breath away. I teach Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in which chained slaves count shadows on the wall. A philosopher frees one and drags him “by force” to the light. He emerges, blinks painfully in the sun and realizes his life was an illusion.

At first, you fidget in your seats. Then I show the Red Pill scene in *The Matrix* and point out its recycling of Plato’s imagery. In follow-up exercises I ask, “What’s your cave?” Pen in hand, you think hard. Plato’s “light” shines on your faces.

The lesson works because you felt trapped in a social media cave, chained to strangers, yanked and pulled constantly. Told this. Sold that.

Plato’s “light” makes it possible to see the scars those chains left. The unpayable debt and unbreakable depression, the self-cutting and suicide. It was caused by patriotic and patriarchal myths. Think Corporate America. Think Jesus. Think hetero-normativity. Pain is a truth that can balance you. The broken gyroscope inside your heart works again.

Reborn, you stampede out of the cave with pierced septums, hair dyed red, men in dresses or fro-hawks, dragging the head of a Founding Father. You love transgender and gay people. You try polyamory. You look at student loans and say democratic socialism is better than capitalism. You see Trayvon Martin or George Floyd and say that racism is everywhere, it is in our laws, cereal boxes and statues.

The price of truth is being blinded by its light. When pain is interpreted through leftist ideology, it makes suffering the most valuable part of your identity. It is why your social justice has a puritanical quality and can be so ... toxic.

When personal trauma caused by oppression guarantees one’s political value, the result is toxic activism. Some of which is petty, like identifying with the oppressed by wearing all black anarchist gear as if medieval sackcloth. Another comedy is middle class people of color affecting hood manners. Or speakers checking boxes of victimhood from gay to neurodivergent as if showing a trauma resume.

It leads to medium-sized “Oops!” like a war on language. If hurtful words and images are gone, minorities will feel safe. So “masterwork” is banned, Aunt Jemima lost her job selling pancakes, Kim Kardashian can’t wear cornrows, native war bonnets and Hindi bindi at festivals are a no-no. But we’re more complicated than that. Language was never just an index of power but also a subversion of it. Worse, the call-outs hide an awkward truth. Cultural appropriation is the price we paid for integration, and integration is why whites, in huge numbers, came out to protest the murder of George Floyd.

The Puritanical Left’s major blind-spot is one Malcolm X, Alice Walker, James Baldwin and Assata Shakur wrote about it: “Not all skin folk are kin folk.” Victims of the system can be so brutalized that they victimize others. Or they’re not victims but grifters and opportunists. They use the language of social justice to weasel money or attention. Troubled souls and borderline personalities go to meetings and transform them into therapy sessions or crusades against minor slights. You need to stop that shit, stand up and say, “This is toxic activism and it hurts the Movement.”

Or, The Light is so intoxicating that it destroys shades of grey, leaving only contrasts — the oppressor and the oppressed — which makes forging unity in ever-changing coalitions near impossible.

Toxic activism is the result of seeing too much pain, and too little possibility. Figures from Emma Goldman to Angela Davis always said ideology is meant to analyze power, not be a secular religion or a hazing ritual for white, straight or male allies.

Yet this new, pure, woke self is how a generation whose internal gyroscope was broken in childhood found itself. The tragedy is if you hold on to it, you’ll lose this one chance to rescue the rest of us.

Sometimes, I wonder if you do want justice? You were betrayed and maybe this is your revenge? Cancelling *Saturday Night Live* comedians while the Earth burns.

STREET-SMART SOCIALISM

Do you want to get out of this mess? First, stop going down dead ends. I see you in the cafes reading hot-take theory. I hear you repeat points from *Jacobin*. You follow so many types of socialism; Bernie’s democratic socialism, green and Queer socialism.

I never hear “street-smart socialism.” A type of politics that takes the lessons from the street into the halls of power. Which is odd. You live in cities and know how quick shit goes down. Hustlers, hustle. Never listen to a stranger fronting like a long-lost friend. Walk slow by men on the corner because fear triggers contempt. Code-switch. Look behind you when you walk at night.

You are perfectly posed to start the next American Revolution. Instead, you have this odd tic where you beat everyday people over the head with your useless degrees. You live with the working poor, gentrify their neighborhoods, and talk about them on podcasts in graduate school idiom. You don’t see how they see you.

The People know you mean well but don’t know what you’re saying half the time. And don’t trust you because you don’t win power. Real power.

The People know they’re being fucked. Shoving essays on intersectionality or capitalism down their throat isn’t novel. The question they ask is if you can defend them against reactionary violence that comes with revolutionary change

The People know they live in the Cave. Hell, they make jokes about how big their chains are, all the time. The truth is they knew about the exit but have family too scared to leave. They can’t abandon those they love.

“Street-smart socialism” is not demanding purity as the price for freedom. It’s not holding someone’s past against them. It’s not becoming addicted to your own ideology. Or expecting to show up for the Revolution in your Sunday best. It’s not going down a dark street at night, alone, because Google Maps says it’s the quickest way home.

THE LOVE TRADITION

“Welcome little man.” The activist lifted my son on his shoulders. Last summer I took him to Occupy City Hall where hundreds slept outside, cooked and organized, made art, danced and demanded the city cut \$1 billion from the police budget and invest it in their communities. Love crackled in the air.

Ten years ago, I was at Occupy Wall Street. In some inscrutable way, the post-9/11 fear that clamped protest evaporated. Maybe it was Obama. Maybe for us New Yorkers, the Freedom Tower healed the empty skyline. We poured into Zuccotti Park and our open-air protest carnival bloomed like roses from concrete in cities across the world.

Walking my son through Occupy City Hall, standing at a mural of George Floyd, I felt your generation’s power. It comes in waves. Black Lives Matters flooding the streets, smashing against cop’s shields. Me Too and the Women’s March with pink pussy hats surrounding men abusing power. Water protectors protesting deadly pipelines. Bernie organizers phone banking and doing old school, door-to-door canvassing that made that campaign an agonizingly close almost-win.

You did all that. You amaze me. You are more intelligent than Americans before. You were betrayed and experimented on, and somehow care more about the least among us, the transgendered, the gay, the poor, the very Earth itself.

You also are more bitter and anxious, more arrogant and yet insecure than any generation I have seen. You are torn between seeking justice and exacting revenge, opening space for the invisible and cancelling transgressors.

The gyroscope in your heart can be a knife in your hand. People are scared of you. They don’t always see you as “woke” liberators but the 21st-Century Thought Police. If the Millennial Left had an Only Fans page, it would be losing followers.

Which is a wild state of affairs because we need you to bail us out. We’re in a bad place. The sky is an oven. Earth cracks like a dry puzzle. Storms toss homes like dice. Dust fills the bellies of the poor. Millions flee failed crops. On top of that, you live in a time when Christian, white supremacist fascists attack democracy.

What you do or don’t do will determine our fate. None of this is fair. None of this is your fault, but is now your responsibility. I don’t mean you owe the U.S. ruling class, with its college entry scandals, or the Boomers or Gen X-ers a goddamn thing. Too many of them make a sweet living in a machine lubricated by the blood of innocent people.

But you owe us more than your rage. You owe us more than cancel culture. Or burned police stations.

You must love the world as much as it didn’t love you. You have to love it like you loved my son, when you hoisted him on your shoulders at Occupy City Hall and showed him the power of solidarity.

You are creating, every day, in every action, the world he will live in. You create the very language he’ll think in. You’ll be his teachers and doctors, the strangers he meets, the storytellers he hears.

Give him what was not given you. Tradition. Reset that gyroscope to the New Testament verse, “Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself,” or Che Guevara’s quote, “The true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love”, and MLK Jr., who said, “Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

You have to love the world enough to leave your jobs, your lives, your dating apps and march. Block roads again. Block airport runways. Create more Occupy sites. Make illegal art. Jam financial systems. Hack databases and erase debt. Vote. Knock on doors. Talk to people. Vote. Tell them the truth. Say the climate crisis is here and yes, you hate their MAGA hats or apathy or QAnon theories but you want their kids to live.

You’ll be arrested. Shot at. Killed.

You’ll win.

You’ll be blood-stained.

You’ll walk out of the cave, smiling because we followed you, finally, into the light.

EPILOGUE

I saw your best selves again, last night at the Mirage in Brooklyn. Thousands of you danced in the rain as a DJ hit us with a giant bone-shaking beat. You raised hands, a whole crowd, and it looked like hairs on an arm, standing up when charged with electricity. And you were. Charged with joy. Like church.

The kids are alright. You know how to dance. You know how to love. Invite us to the party. I see you, arms up, moving in eyes-closed bliss, rain swinging from your hair. This is your America. This is your Independence Day.

OWE, NO YOU DON'T

Remake The World: Essays, Reflections, Rebellions

BY ASTRA TAYLOR

HAYMARKET BOOKS, MAY 2021

By Teddy Ostrow

“Give me a break,” Joe Biden told the *Los Angeles Times* in 2018.

Break: a noun derived from the Old English verb *brecan* of Germanic origin, meaning to separate or cause to separate solid matter into pieces. Fast forward some centuries to the 1860s and we find an English noun that refers to an interval, or a pause in work, between lessons in school.

Biden’s use acquired its meaning in the early 20th century: “a stroke of mercy,” according to Online Etymology Dictionary.

“I have no empathy for it,” Biden continued, referring to the whiny political complaints of the “younger generation.” The soon-to-be presidential candidate asserted that he won’t hear of the struggles of today’s young. “Give me a break,” he repeated. They aren’t real struggles, like those experienced in the turbulent 1960s. “We decided we were going to change the world. And we did.”

Take the crippling student debt crisis. Forty-five million members of the younger generation would like a break from that \$1.7 trillion foot on the neck. The Biden administration recently canceled \$9.5 billion of student debt. That figure represents a mere 0.6% of the total debt — and far short of the \$10,000 jubilee he promised to all student debtors on the 2020 campaign trail. Insufficiency aside, as Astra Taylor reminds us in one essay from her new book, *Remake the World: Essays, Reflections, Rebellions*, it was Biden who, from his perch on the Senate Judiciary Committee, championed a 2005 law that robbed student debtors of bankruptcy protections. It was Biden who saw an unprecedented ballooning crisis and decided it wasn’t students’ time to catch a break.

Remake the World is a trenchant collection of Taylor’s previously published essays that span from 2014 to the present. Ruminative and philosophical, Taylor explores a wide range of topics, from the political disenfranchisement of youth to the political necessity of listening, from the meaning of democracy and the rise of socialism to the false promises of “automation” and temporality of the climate crisis.

Debt, however, has a special place in the book. In the essay “Wipe the Slate Clean,” Taylor writes, “Debt is a power relationship built on the pretense of equality. In theory, a debtor and creditor enter into a contract on a level playing field and with fair terms; in reality, debts are often incurred under conditions of duress.”

As Taylor points out, not all debtors have to pay back their debts, yet the deck is stacked against most of us. While the Fed bought billions in corporate bond debt in 2020, household debt has been allowed to swell to nearly \$15 trillion, strangling families, who in the face of compounding financial crises created by those very bailed-out companies, are unable to pay their mortgages or rent, their medical bills or college tuition, or their payday loans or probation fees.

The distribution of this debt has naturally skewed toward the working class and poor, and given the history of racist predatory lending and the racial wealth gap, Taylor explains that “Black and Latinx communities tend to be more economically precarious and indebted than their

white counterparts.”

The perfectly reasonable solution Taylor offers, which is backed by significant historical precedent: abolish the debts. A tall demand, but Taylor is no stranger to the political will and organizing it would take to achieve the debt absolution needed to break Americans’ financial chains.

In “Against Activism,” Taylor traces the emergence of the “activist” alongside the decline in movement organizing. For Taylor, activism needs organizing, which “sustain[s] and advance[s] our causes when the galvanizing intensity of occupations or street protests subsides. It is what the left needs in order to roll back the conservative resurgence and cut down plutocracy.”

Taylor learned this firsthand as an organizer at Occupy Wall Street, whose legacy echoes throughout Taylor’s writing. For her, Occupy was “a welcome sign that the control mechanism was breaking down.” In one essay, Taylor reflects on its organizers’ fatal unwillingness to “exercise or take power,” a political attitude many American radicals have left behind in favor of joining groups such as Democratic Socialists of America, who have made winning and exercising power central to their political program. Meanwhile in another essay, she notes that the

plies a blameworthy borrower and a beneficent creditor.”

“Break” in the context of mercy, as in “give me a break,” or “catch a break,” similarly suggests fault on the side of the breaker. Perhaps then, the younger generation doesn’t actually need a “break.” Rather, we need a reclamation: of our dignity, our livelihoods and our futures. We need to reclaim what is ours that the capitalists have held in their pockets for far too long.



TYRONE WALLACE

Occupy’s seeds may have “scattered to unexpected places and lie dormant for long spells only to suddenly sprout and flourish.”

Indeed, two such seeds were Rolling Jubilee and the Debt Collective, two groups co-founded by Taylor and inspired by the late activist-scholar and catalyzer of Occupy, David Graeber. The former group, a mutual aid initiative that purchases and cancels people’s debts, directly abolished over \$32 million in monetary debt, while the campaigns of the latter, a debtor’s union that uses its collective power to push for widespread debt cancellation, has helped relieve over \$2 billion.

Graeber, Taylor tells us, pushed her to reimagine debt as something that does not have to be tainted by the soulless logic and burdens of capitalism. Rather, debt in a socialist world could be our collective obligations to one other, which can never be paid back in cash.

Taylor’s ideas are enough to inspire, submerging the reader in grave realities while uplifting their will to change them. But her writing itself is also a delight. Nearly all Taylor’s essays utilize curious etymologies like the one at the top of this review, but far more skillfully, to weave her use of history, reporting and analysis together into a coherent picture of a diversity of contemporary issues — and the outlooks we need to solve them. After the first couple of uses, one might sniff gimmickry, but her prowess as a writer quickly dispels such judgment.

Taylor is careful with her words. The reason the Debt Collective uses “abolition” and “cancellation” as their aims is to reject the language of “forgiveness,” which “im-



REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Hey Billy,

What's up with all these people who don't want to wear a mask or get vaxxed under any circumstances, especially in places where the Delta variant is out of control? Besides the health risks, the craziest thing is they think they are some kind of freedom fighters for not covering their face in a pandemic. And in Texas, many of these same people who cry "freedom" over wearing a mask have now eliminated a woman's right to choose. WTF?!

MICHELLE
Upper West Side

Dear Michelle,

Ooh ... watch out now. We're verging on puritanism here. You're putting together an evil stereotype for "these people." Your WTF?! is enforcing separation from the persons you are wondering about that IS ALREADY BAFFLINGLY WIDE ... And so very soon it won't be two others with the same mother, it will be two mutually flaming creeps falling through space. Judgment is very yesterday. Common-ness, what we share, is the intriguing frontier.

I'm not just slinging some turn-the-other-cheek Xtianity ... I believe that judgment shuts us off from the unexpected information of difference. So we look for connection in the commons because it gives us doorways into the souls of these fearful folks ruled by fundamentalism. And then we might learn something about ourselves.

The decades of superiority by corporate liberals over your WTF?! people became a habit of judgment that fed Trumpism. At the same time we never quite grokked how corporate marketing with its bullshit ideas of status, wealth, looks ... compromised our ability to think and feel in an original way. 10,000 advertising events every day leaves us isolated, racist, sexist and just plain fearful of every Other, all the way to the fear of life itself, the fear of nature. And we aren't the WTF?! people ... ?

Having said all that, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is a pervert who needs to be taken into a rehab farm in Vermont where patients pull on the teats of grass-fed happy cows and Bernie Sanders comes by in the afternoon and sings socialist summer camp songs.

Love-a-lujah!

Dear Reverend Billy,

These big rainstorms and the flooding they cause in the city are freaking me out. And then there's the wildfires and the hurricanes and the droughts in other parts of the country. It feels like we're living inside a horror movie, and it's only going to get worse. I'm scared.

SID
Park Slope

Dear Sid,

The Sixth Extinction is here! The Earth is flipping the culture over. We caused this extinction now under way, and no one is glad we did, and yet every day the big banks invest in fossil fuels and our planet's death. But Sid, this extinction is how the Earth will guarantee that life in some form will continue. So let's relax into reality.

You and I are walking around with the genetic material directing our bodies that we inherited from the evolution through the five previous mass extinctions of the last 450 million years, and that gift involved great flowerings of life and masses of mortality. We hastened this with our corrupt governments, which seem more criminal with every super storm and wildfire. We made an America based on converting nature into wealth, enslaving and slaughtering the indigenous souls ... We did this under the sway of the chosen peopleism of the hard right apocalyptic religions of church and capital.

This may seem like I'm offering a hopeless sort of hope, Sid, but this is where we are. Our lives are in the Earth's hands but how bad things ultimately become depends on what we do (or don't do) in the here and now. We will go to this year's annual U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland. Millions of others will be at COP26 as well, in the flesh or remotely, and we will simultaneously declare revolution and say our goodbyes.

—REV

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

Curious and searching, these historically informed and hopeful essays are as engaging Taylor's unique philosophical style has a political edge that speaks directly to the growing conviction that a radical transformation of our economy and society is required.

"Whenever I read Astra Taylor, I never want to stop. Affable and curious, she invites readers with her on a relentless exploration of the most crucial questions facing the left—and, really, humanity today. But don't let the congeniality fool you, Taylor is a radical working to remake our world. She writes for us, the ordinary and hungry public, searching for ideas that make sense of our desires for a better world. Rooted in rigorous study, deep questioning and powerful and persuasive argument, Taylor latest, *Remake the World*, is further evidence that she is the people's public intellectual."

—Keeanga-Yamahita Taylor

"Beautifully written in a warm, humorous, autobiographical style, . . . questioning whether anticapitalists can work within the state without compromising their political integrity and whether reform is always necessarily opposed to revolution." —Silvia Federici



HaymarketBooks

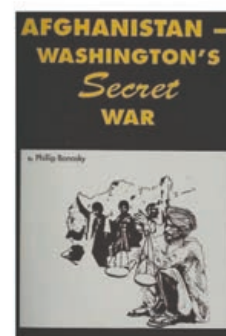
International Publishers

International Publishers offers a truly timely book by the celebrated progressive author. Philip Bonosky;

Afghanistan:

Washington's Secret War

A book that is of great immediate importance and which is essential reading for anyone wishing to gain an understanding of the background for today's headlines—how things got the way they are today and who is responsible for that.



Visit our website
www.intpubnyc.com
or call:
212-366-9816



Free Speech Community Radio

For Program descriptions, see: wbai.org/programlist.php

Listen online: wbai.org/listen-live/

DAILY

Good Morning Nueva York 6AM - 7PM join King for a fresh early morning take on news, music, arts, culture	Arts Express 4AM - 5AM weekly, in-depth coverage of film; arts news, scoops w/ a hard political edge; art alerts & Best Of The Net Hotspots	Sounds Like Work 7PM - 8PM "work" with Rebecca - why we work, what we do, why we do it - call-ins	Advocating For Justice 12PM - 1PM Arthur focuses on grassroots activism in elections, health, police, education.
What's Going On 7AM - 8AM WBAI's new morning with a fabulous set of revolving hosts!	Law of the Land 9AM - 10AM legal & SCOTUS analysis & coverage with Gloria - a constitutional law professor & civil rights attorney	Education At The Xroads 8PM - 9PM Basir explores alternative ed, high stakes testing, African centered ed, home schooling and mis-education.	Talk Out of School 1PM - 2PM Leonie & Daniel look at local NYC education issues with of NYC's best activists, critics & experts
Democracy Now 8AM - 9AM Amy and Juan deliver the morning news nobody else is covering	Arab Voices 10AM - 11AM Said brings you the real scoop on the Arab world, history, culture, US foreign policy, & media coverage	Backstage Stories 9PM - 10PM join Marcia in conversations with guests - the behind-the-scenes in NYC arts, culture, and entertainment	Latin Roots 2PM - 4PM an exploration with Felipe from Afro-Cuban music in the 40's to Latin music & salsa today - NYC artists!
Gary Null Show 12PM - 1PM takes the CDC & FDA apart one show at a time - happy & healthful life	Black Star News 3PM - 4PM investigative black journalism since 1997 - regularly breaking stories	Folk Radio 10PM - 12AM Eclectic mix of folk music of all genres and epochs with rotating hosts	Haiti: Our Revolution 4PM-6PM Dahoud & Mamyrah bring you news and updates on Haiti's continuing struggle for justice & freedom
Leonard Lopate At Large 1PM-2PM from famous to fabulous - interviews with amazing people- things you need to know about	The Independent News 5PM - 6PM Local, national and international news from The Independent, New York's free, progressive newspaper.		Rick Smith Show 6PM - 8PM NY's labor & union show - tired of mass media "corporate" BS? No puppets. No talking heads. No BS.
Soujourner Truth 4PM - 5PM news & views on local and national policies and stories that affect us all.	On The Count Prison 9PM - 10 the ONLY prison show in the NY area by for and from formerly incarcerated persons & their families - the issues		WBAI Playhouse 8PM - 10PM Theatre for the ears, to rest the mind and inspire the spirit. Radio drama like they used to do it
Evening News - PDR 6PM - 6:30PM Paul catches you up on stories the mainstream ignored and more	The Sweet Spot 10PM - 12AM Baby K & Kyle drop musical honey in your ear - biography, history, and tracks from down Memory Lane		Soul Central Station 10PM - 1AM Tony spins oldies, pop, rhythm and blues, funk, gospel, classic dance tunes - the great ones of all time.
WBAI Music Shows 10PM-12AM music from all across the world - the best, can't find it anywhere else			

MONDAY

Cat Radio Café 12AM - 1AM a live salon of the arts, the politics of art and the creative bounty of NYC	Guns and Butter 9AM - 10AM the relation between capitalism, militarism, & politics. Bonnie explains why we always get guns & no butter	On The Ground 3PM - 4PM social justice activism with Esther - militarization, war, the corporate and police state, the neoliberal myth	And You Don't Stop 1AM - 3AM Chuck-D brings you the Epicenter of NYC Hip Hop and Rap
La Nueva Alternativa 1AM - 3AM the only show in the Tri-State about Rock en Espanol, or Rock Latino - and your generation's issues	Living for the City 11AM - 12AM the real NYC insider scoop -from the bottom looking up. Michael G has guests you won't hear anywhere else	Women Fight Back 5PM - 6PM Rachel & Hannah on current issues facing women from a socialist perspective	Spirit of Jazz 6AM - 8AM Lona spins the best jazz & gospel around - cuts you've never heard and background on the artist
Law and Disorder 9AM - 10AM world class lawyers explain legal issues eroding our freedom, equal protection, due process & more	First Voices Radio 3PM - 4PM Tiokasin with indigenous perspectives for us and Mother Earth	Radio GBE Global Black 7PM - 9PM music & discussions with Imhotep African American and music from across the globe	Morning Irsay' 8AM - 10AM historical classical recordings emphasizing piano with encyclopedic analysis of the works & versions
Vantage Point 3PM - 4PM Dr Daniels demolishes historical political and social myths	Max Politics 5PM - 6PM Ben (Gotham Gazette) goes in-depth with officials, candidates, advocates, & experts on NYC issues & more	The Harlem Connection 10PM - 12AM DJ Black Icon 1, Mama Soul, & The L.A.W. bring you the artists & sounds that made the Harlem Cultural Mecc	City Watch 10AM - 11AM Jeff & David present NYC social, economic, & political issues - in depth on target - not just soundbites
Covid Race & Democracy 4PM - 5PM Pacifica Radio presents news and events from around the US	Afrobeat Radio 10PM - 12AM Wuyi talks African music. Issues, news, & perspectives. one of a kind		Radio Free Eirann 11AM - 12:30PM Malachy & John, two of NYC's most famous raconteurs cover everything Irish & make fun of each other
Deadline NYC 5PM - 6PM with forty years as a NYC journo (Voice, Daily News.) Tom has seen it all - & drops new nuggets in your ear			Chris Hedges On Contact 12:30PM - 1PM Chris opens up more governmental cans of worms than you can keep track of - in your face commentary

THURSDAY

Counterspin 6:30PM - 7PM a critical examination of major stories & major media (NYT,WAPO) and the holes & biases in their coverage	Black Seinfeld 12AM - 2AM a show about "nothing" by 2 experts on the subject - American culture seen from the other side	Hour of the Wolf 7AM - 8AM Jim does the ONLY science fiction & fantasy show around - live readings, radio drama, prominent writers	Voices Of Resistance 1PM - 2PM Lucy Andreia & Zabrina take it to the mat - anti-imperialist- real voices from Latin, Central, & South America
Building Bridges 7PM - 8PM longest running & best known labor & community affairs program in NYC	Equal Rights & Justice 9AM - 10AM Listen Up and educate, agitate and organize to empower - for a Better World is Possible!	Ralph Nader Radio Hr 6AM - 7AM the granddaddy activist, author, lecturer, & attorney - consumer, environment, government reform	Con Sabor Latino 3PM - 6PM Nando & Maria bring you the best Latin music & hot news events & culture from people who know it
Housing Notebook 8PM - 9PM the housing tsunami is bearing down on us - the GBU (good,bad,ugly) of housing & essential info u need	CODEPINK Radio 11AM - 12PM the best of social justice and peace activism in the United States and around the world.	Hour of the Wolf 7AM - 8AM Jim does the ONLY science fiction & fantasy show around - live readings, radio drama, prominent writers	Mindflight 6:30PM - 8PM Imhotep's journey today's Black Experience - music & commentary
Joy of Resistance 9PM - 10PM multicultural feminist radio for everyone everywhere	Resistance Radio 3PM - 4PM John & Regan take live call-ins on native issues, plus guests & music	Any Saturday 8AM - 10AM veteran broadcaster DavidR telling stories & great music- you'll laugh, you'll cry, he'll make your brain hurt	Golden Age of Radio 8PM - 10PM Max's vintage radio from the '30s, '40s, & '50s, laughs, love, adventure

TUESDAY

From The Soundboard 12AM - 1AM one artist for one hour deep dive, music from all over u've never heard	Driving Forces 5PM - 6PM Jeff & Celeste with city, state & national stories and analysis	On The Count Prison 9PM - 10PM the ONLY prison show in the NY area BY formerly incarcerated persons for IP's and their families - all the issues	Everything Old Is New 10PM - 12PM Big Band, Swing, Jazz, Standards, Showtunes, Cabaret with DavidK - Celebrity Interviews - a WBAI fave!
	Justice Matters 6:30PM - 7PM BobG with the Police Reform Organizing Project talk NYPD, housing, and public education	From the Streets Bob Law 11AM - 12PM a wide range of black & progressive political & cultural issues with major national / local personalities, call-ins	

Your People, Your Issues, Your Voices

design by LeiaLeeDoran.com

Real News. Real Music. Real People.

WBAI 99.5 FM

WBAI.ORG