

THE

WHAT THE SUPREME COURT REALLY WANTS — P12

INDYPENDENT

#272: JULY 2022



FEAR INC.

HOW OUR DESIRE TO BE SAFE HAS BEEN HIJACKED TO KEEP AN UNJUST STATUS QUO IN PLACE

BY JOHN TEUFEL, P6

DAVID HOLLENBACH

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CALENDAR

JOAN MARCUS

JULY**JULY 8 • FREE**

DOORS 6:30/SHOW 7:30

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN: VIC MENSA/AJA
MONET

Raised on the South Side of Chicago, Vic Mensa challenges the American system responsible for a history of overcriminalization, racial injustice and issues that affect the lives of people in underserved communities, showcasing profound levels of consciousness and self-reflection. aja monet is a surrealist blues poet, storyteller and organizer from Brooklyn. Her first full collection of poems is titled *My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter* published by Haymarket Books. Her poems explore gender, race, migration and spirituality. *PROSPECT PARK BANDSHELL*
141 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn

JULY 10 • FREE

7PM-10PM

PUERTO RICAN SALSA AT CONEY ISLAND
Tropical orchestra Puerto Rican Power marked the beginning of a new era in Puerto Rican salsa history in the 80s. They will be joined on stage by Domingo Quinones, one of the biggest salsa stars in 1990s Puerto Rico, with an intense, high-energy live show that also demonstrates a proficiency in bachata and rumba and Lower East Salsa, a dance party hosted by Lower East Side restaurant Gonzalez y Gonzalez.

CONEY ISLAND AMPITHEATRE
3052 W 21st St, Brooklyn

THRU JULY 10 • \$15-\$18

THU-SAT 8PM; SUNDAY 3PM

THEATER, MIME & DANCE: MOSAIC
From Scratch Performance Company continues its successful and exciting 2022 season as Theatre for a New City's Resident Company with 'Mosaic', an evening combining theater, mime and dance. The event is divided into four blended parts (and will including a promising virtual dance) and is sprinkled throughout with excerpts from the plays

of Francis Callahan, a prolific and insightful playwright known for his gritty depictions of night life in the city.

THEATRE FOR A NEW CITY

155 1st Ave., Manhattan

THRU JULY 17 • FREE/DONATION

8PM

THE PUBLIC THEATER'S SHAKESPEARE IN
THE PARK: RICHARD III

Tony-nominee Robert O'Hara (*Slave Play*, *The Public's Barbecue*) brings his sharp wit and story-telling genius to The Delacorte with a bold new production of Richard III. One of Shakespeare's most indelible villains, Richard is determined to be King. This masterful dive into the muddy middle between political genius and violent power grab will open Free Shakespeare in the Park's 60th Season with piercing relevancy and electrifying drama. Run Time: two hours and 40 minutes with one 20 minute intermission. Tickets required. See ticket information via <https://bit.ly/30v9nEO>.

DELACORTE THEATER

81 Central Park West, Manhattan

JULY 22 • FREE

6:30PM-8PM

TEACH-IN: "CLIMATE CHANGE AND
SOCIALISM"

A teach in on the intersections between the fights for climate justice and socialism offered by the People's Forum.

THE PEOPLE'S FORUM

320 West 37th Street

JULY 24 • FREE

4PM-7PM

DJs IN THE PARK: A PARTY CALLED ROSIE
PEREZ

DJs Christian Mártir, Suce and Laylo love hip-hop and dancehall, but there was always a moment at the parties they frequented where something was missing – the salsa, merengue, and other Latin music that also populates their playlists. This party, which started in 2015, represents their vision for the future of Latin music with raucous sets that seamlessly integrate the sounds of

the Latin diaspora.

VON KING PARK

60 Lafayette Ave.,
Brooklyn

THRU AUG 15 • FREE

EVERY MONDAY @ 5PM

MOVIE NIGHTS AT BRYANT PARK

Bring a blanket and a friend and grab a patch of grass. The lawn opens for picnicking at 5 p.m. and film begins at 8 p.m. For the roster of films, <https://bryant-park.org/activities/movie-nights>

Bryant Park

6th Ave. b/w 40th St. & 42nd St., Manhat-

tan

THRU SEP 4 • FREE

WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY 1PM-6PM

EXHIBITION: JAMEL SHABAZZ, EYES ON
THE STREET

Brooklyn-born Jamel Shabazz was one of the first photographers to realize the joyous, infectious potential of youth culture in neighborhoods such as Red Hook, Brownsville, Flatbush, Fort Greene, Harlem, Manhattan's Lower East Side and the Grand Concourse section of the Bronx. This exhibition is an extensive archive of New York City's outer-borough communities.

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

1040 Grand Concourse, the Bronx

ANYTIME • FREE

UNSANCTION YOUR MIND: CUBA NEWS
FORUM IN ENGLISH

An English-language selection of news from, about or related to Cuba. Because of the U.S. sanctions against the island, most of us cannot travel there, so we need to bring Cuba to as many people in the English-speaking world as possible. CubaNews specializes in English translations from the Cuban media and a wide array of Cuba-related materials. Your interest and active participation are welcomed. Don't like a lot of emails? Please choose the "daily summary" in subscriptions settings, which will bring you links to everything in a single daily message at 9 a.m.

Sign up online via groups.io/g/cubanews

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE:

Shakespeare in the Park is celebrating its 60th anniversary season this summer at Delacorte Theater in Central Park.

EVERY SUNDAY

11AM-8PM

COMMUNITY FAIR IN SUNSET PARK

Organized by Mexicanos Unidos, a group of Mexican diaspora "in defense of all oppressed" based in Sunset Park, Plaza Tonatiuh features cultural events, political education, music and vendors, including artisans, dessert makers, taqueros and more. "Localizing our economy ensures that our community benefits from our consumption. The plaza combats gentrification and discriminatory rules." @plazatonatiuh on Instagram.

SUNSET PARK

Near 6 Ave. & 44th St.

EVERY SUNDAY • FREE

~4:30-6PM

FREE MEALS: FOOD NOT BOMBS

Food Not Bombs is an autonomous non-hierarchical volunteer-run organization, with many cells all over the world committed to rescuing food that would otherwise go to waste, creating new sustainable food sources and then distributing said food to hungry people in our communities. The Lower Manhattan chapter currently serves food every Sunday in Tompkins Square Park from around 4:30 to 6. You can go get food there, and if you're interested in helping out, they're always looking for new volunteers. Find them on Facebook: @lowermanhattan-foodnotbombs.

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IN THIS ISSUE



LANDLORDS' REVENGE, P4

Eric Adams' impact on the Rent Guidelines Board is beginning to be felt.

POWER IN A UNION, P5

Homeless residents in a Midtown shelter are organizing a union to advocate for better living conditions.

THE POWER OF FEAR, P6

NYC's political and media elites are using our fear of crime to keep an unjust status quo from being challenged.

DIRTY DETECTIVE, P9

The murder conviction in the Yusuf Hawkins case is in doubt due to the involvement of disgraced NYPD Detective Louis Scarcella.

ABORTION FIGHT COMES TO NYC, P10

A Planned Parenthood clinic in Lower Manhattan has become a magnet for anti-choice activists who don't want to stop with Roe's repeal.

REPEALING THE 20TH CENTURY, P12

The Supreme Court is pursuing a far-right agenda that could never win popular support.

WIND, SUN & SOCIALISM, P13

Advocates for expanding New York's public power system and making a rapid transition to wind and solar are plotting their next moves.

LIVING WITH COVID, P14

NYCers protected themselves and each other during the worst of the pandemic. But we can't remain frozen in time, Mark Read argues.

PRISON MEMOIR, P16

Keri Blakinger is blazing the trail for formerly incarcerated people becoming journalists who cover a beat they know all too well.

FREEDOM STORIES, P18

The historian Robin D.G. Kelley looks at the raft of strategies Black activists have employed to keep the dream of freedom alive.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS, P19

How to defeat the far right's resurgent homophobia + what to do when you get a cringe wedding invitation.



BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

DEFUNDED: Public school students and educators rallied outside City Hall on June 13 as City Council voted 44-6 to cut funding for their schools by more than \$200 million.

CITY COUNCIL OPPOSES SCHOOL CUTS IT APPROVED

The New York City Council approved a budget that reduced funding for public schools by \$215 million — and two weeks later protested the cuts after some schools were forced to lay off teachers. Mayor Eric Adams “needs to get on board as a partner and fix this problem,” Councilmember Rita Joseph (D-Brooklyn) said at a City Hall rally on June 24. The mayor’s budget slashed funding because enrollment has fallen by 120,000 students, and the council went along with the allocation after he promised to adjust it in the fall. The city’s contribution rose by more than \$700 million to make up for lost federal aid, but it reduced the amount per pupil. United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew told the council that the City has not yet spent \$4.6 billion of the \$7.6 billion in federal stimulus funding for schools, and that that money is “not to be left in a piggy bank.”

STARBUCKS UNIONIZING ADVANCES

Baristas at the Astoria, Queens and Williamsburg “Reserve” Starbucks voted yes for Starbucks Workers United representation in June. “This victory goes far greater than just North 7 [Street], it’s a victory others will reap in due time,” said Williamsburg barista Arianna Ayala. On June 27, two more area stores, on Staten Island and in Wantagh, Long Island, filed for a union election. Nationally, more than 175 Starbucks have unionized, and more than 300 stores have filed for recognition. Meanwhile, the company is amping up its union-busting efforts. It has offered to reimburse workers who travel to get abortions from states where it’s illegal — but said it couldn’t promise that benefit to union workers. “This shows what Starbucks is willing to leverage,” Maggie Carter, a union barista in Knoxville, Tennessee, told *Bon Appetit* magazine. “It makes me feel disgusted that they’d dangle abortion over people’s heads as if it’s a cat toy.”

ABORTION-RIGHTS PROTESTS AT ST. PATRICK’S, FEDERALIST SOCIETY

Federalist Society members got greeted with chants of “Turn back!” and a sea of raised middle fingers from abortion-rights protesters outside the University Club of New York on June 29. The far-right legal organization was hosting a talk by former attorney general William P. Barr, a mass-incarceration advocate who served under George H.W. Bush and Donald Trump. All six Supreme Court justices who voted to void *Roe v. Wade* are members, and the society was the Trump administration’s personnel pool for choosing federal judges. Protesters said they wanted to make attendees feel what it’s like for women harassed by self-titled “sidewalk counselors” outside abortion clinics. Earlier, they chanted “Fuck the church, fuck the state, women will decide our fate!” outside St. Patrick’s Cathedral. The Democratic Socialists of America said St. Patrick’s funded deceptive “crisis pregnancy centers.”

LOCAL UNIONS SLAM COURT’S ABORTION RULING

New York labor unions denounced the Supreme Court decision to let states outlaw abortion. 32BJ SEIU President Kyle Bragg called it “a brutal attack on women and fundamental rights” by “a corrupt, illegitimate, and radical right-wing majority.”

“No one should be forced into labor or into making dangerous choices,” said New York State Nurses Association President Nancy Hagans. “As a union predominantly of women, we understand how important it is.”

“The same politicians who herald the end of reproductive freedom will not raise a finger to improve pre- and post-natal care and ensure that health services are universally available,” said 1199SEIU President George Gresham. The outcry included some predominantly-male building-trades unions. “The extremists on the Supreme Court who don’t believe in reproductive rights also don’t believe in the most basic labor rights,” the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades said.

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

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HOUSING



RGB RENT HIKES 'JUST THE BEGINNING'

LARGEST INCREASES SINCE BLOOMBERG ERA

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The city Rent Guidelines Board's June 21 vote to allow the highest rate increases in nine years is likely an omen of what the rest of Mayor Eric Adams' administration will bring.

The nine-member board voted 5-4 to let landlords raise rent by 3.25% for a one-year lease renewal and 5% for two years, the largest increases allowed since 2013, Michael Bloomberg's last year in City Hall. They will affect most of the city's 1 million rent-stabilized apartments.

"I think this is just the beginning," long-time tenant activist Michael McKee told the Independent. "More of the same and even worse."

All nine members are appointed by the mayor, and "the first one he's going to replace," McKee says, is Christian Gonzalez-Rivera, the only one of the five public members to vote against the increase. His three-year term expires on Dec. 31.

By "forcing the chair to go to one of the landlord members to get the fifth vote," McKee says, Gonzalez-Rivera violated the RGB's "charade" of impartiality. In the board's usual ritual, the public members vote as a bloc to approve their proposed increases by 5-4 with little or no debate, with the two tenant and two landlord representatives opposed. This year, landlord representative Christina Smyth provided the fifth yes vote.

Adams maintains a front of neutrality. "We witnessed renters having to deal with this trauma of financial trauma," he told reporters the day after the vote, "but we also saw those small property owners, 15 units, 16 units, 9 units... They're hurting. Oil, water bill, taxes. So we had to find a medium." In a statement, he also claimed to have been "successful in pushing the increases lower."

Not many rent-stabilized apartments are owned by small landlords, though. RGB tenant representative Sheila Garcia said that according to the board's data, only 1 percent of rent-stabilized landlords own fewer than 10 units. According to an analysis of city ownership data by JustFix, as of 2018, landlords with more than 20 buildings owned more than half of the city's 2.3 million rental apartments.

Meanwhile, according to data from the city-commissioned 2021 Housing and Vacancy Survey, rent-stabilized tenants have

a median household income of \$47,000 a year, and pay a median of \$1,400 a month—36 percent of their income. Only about one-sixth of rent-stabilized apartments cost less than \$900. The city has not yet released more detailed data, but among all renter households making \$25,000 to \$50,000, 86 percent spent more than 30 percent of their income on rent, and 44% spent more than half.

For tenants already overloaded like that, the RGB increases will be significant: roughly \$50 to \$75 a month on a \$1,500 apartment. Mercedes Torres, a 62-year-old widow from Hell's Kitchen who protested outside the RGB vote, said that although her rent is lower ("more than \$600"), her income is about \$1,400 a month from Social Security.

"My son helps me with the rent and food, otherwise I'd be unable to eat," she said.

McKee says the tenant movement needs to start looking for a primary challenger to Adams for the 2025 election—now. Mayoral influence on RGB decisions is "generally not as blatant" as dictating specific percentages, he says; "it's an understood thing." But Adams "thinks like a landlord," and his talk about the plight of small owners is "completely misleading."

He says the tenant movement, which for the past few years has concentrated on closing the loopholes in the state's rent-regulation laws and trying to outlaw evictions without "good cause" in unregulated housing, now needs to work on reforming the RGB process.

The RGB's tenant representatives were both frustrated. Adán Soltren, appointed by Adams in April, denounced the board during the meeting as "people who believe return on investment deserves more respect than basic human needs." Garcia, who's served for nine years, said after the vote that the public members' professed concern for tenants was "performative."

Both Soltren and Gonzalez-Rivera said that one public member had been asleep while tenants were testifying at an RGB hearing in Queens June 12.

RENT REBUKE:
A tenant demonstrates outside before the June 21 Rent Guidelines Board meeting.

STEVEN WISHNIA

EARTHCHURCH

EVERY SUNDAY 5PM
36 AVE C revbilly.com

SHELTER RESIDENTS LAUNCH HOMELESS UNION

ITS FIRST CAMPAIGN IS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE OFTEN ROTTEN FOOD THEY ARE SERVED

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN

A young homeless man sits outside of a convenience store packed with “I♥NY” sweatshirts and bongos on an afternoon in late June in the outer reaches of the Times Square area. “Need shoes, zapatos,” his sign reads.

Around the corner, well-dressed retirees form a line for a Broadway matinee. Across the street from the theater, in front of a city Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter, three people stand behind a table scattered with literature on homeless unions. One of them is Ender, 23, who has lived at the shelter for three months. “People are like, ‘Oh I’m in my shimmy dress, yasss,’ and I’m like, ‘Can you spare a dollar?’” Ender said of the glaring wealth disparities in the area.

“There’s so many reasons that homelessness is useful [for those in power]. In one way, homelessness is useful because in capitalism, you need to have unemployment. There needs to be a reserve labor force. If everyone is employed, it’s harder for employers to negotiate,” said Ender. “These rooms are so expensive that the city doesn’t care about homelessness. If the city was trying to understand how to make it cheap for homeless people to live, then they would put us in apartments.” The average cost of keeping a single person in a city shelter is more than \$4,000 a month, according to a 2021 report by the Independent Budget Office.

At the end of May, Ender formed a union at the shelter and is organizing other residents in the nine-story building with the help of Devon, 23, who has lived there for seven months. Both are members of Brooklyn Eviction Defense (BED), a tenants-rights group that specializes in eviction defense and has been supporting their union efforts.

At the table near the shelter, Ender, Devon and a member of BED offered pizza to shelter residents who passed by. Their literature included “Know Your Rights” flyers, union sign-up sheets and “Why Start a Homeless Union?” zines. “What could we achieve if we work collectively with each other?” read the zine. “We currently don’t have access to basic necessities such as free laundry and three meals a day even though we’re supposed to be guaranteed rights to them. The city isn’t going to provide these unless we force their hand, and we can’t do that individually... Imagine if we had free therapy or clean bathrooms?”



GARY MARTIN

...

IN MARCH, MAYOR ERIC ADAMS began to carry out his plan to “sweep” all of the city’s homeless encampments. As of March 30, police had evicted 239 encampments, but only five people had agreed to go to homeless shelters, the sweeps’ supposed goal.

Ender, who has been homeless for five years, learned about BED because of the group’s involvement in sweep-response efforts. “BED is sort of famous for doing militant action, and I’ve always been attracted to that,” Ender says. “I’m attracted to groups that will be like, ‘Yes, we will guard this building from getting evicted even if it means eight people will get arrested.’”

Shortly after joining BED, Ender formed the Homeless Union. The first thing Ender did to recruit members — the first step in organizing in any building — was slip flyers under residents’ doors.

Devon responded within hours. “I was genuinely excited but also confused and cautious,” he told *The Independent*. “[The union] gives purpose and strengthens the community.”

The young union has almost 20 members. Membership is roughly defined by being added to its WhatsApp group. For now, it’s limited to those who live at the Midtown shelter, but Ender says that opening up membership to people that live on the streets and expanding an organizing model to other shelters are longer-term goals.

In addition to tabling and flyering, the union does outreach through its Instagram, @homelesspals. But Ender has learned that person-to-person conversations are the most valuable organizing tool. “I’ll literally just see people when I’m using the bathroom and will say, ‘Have you heard of this homeless union?’ I’ll go to the basement and while they’re eating, I’ll ask if they like the food here.”

The first issue the union is organizing around is the shelter’s food. Members say eating healthy meals is nearly impossible. Ender, a vegan, says tofu patties are often the only thing offered to vegans but that after eating one, “you don’t feel good.” Ender talked to one person who wants kosher food, another

Multiple residents have died at the shelter in the few months Ender and Devon have lived there and harm-reduction around drug use is a resource the union would like to offer in the future.

In recent years, homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression. As of March there were nearly 50,000 homeless people, including roughly 15,000 children, sleeping each night in the city’s main municipal shelter system. Ender and Devon’s shelter has 80-square-foot single rooms, but dormitories are common. Of the “countless” shelters Ender has stayed at, most offered shared rooms, they say.

...

EVERYBODY THAT STOPPED BY the recent tabling session accepted receiving further communication from the union. A couple of older residents gave their room numbers and said it was okay to knock on their doors.

“Hells Kitchen needs this right now!” said one woman who lives at the shelter and was eager to read the handouts. “We need more literature — the power of the ink,” she said.

The Homeless Union is already forming mutual aid community. It has received offers from groups that would be willing to cook food for the shelter, but needs to find transportation for that to be practical. Emotional and mental support is another goal. “When people reach out to the union, they usually don’t even have an ask such as ‘I need help with food,’” said Ender. “The most common ask is, ‘I want to hang out; I need a friend.’”

Ender got involved with community organizing after stumbling across a Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council meeting at the age of 18. “I was like, ‘I’ll go with my friend.’ There was no rational reason to improve my rights. I just went there to hang out,” said Ender. “I’ve always had a taste for militant actions. I’ve never been interested in ‘Let’s pass a bill.’ My first workshop was on forming human blockades.” Ender has also organized with the food-manufacturing workers’ group Brandworkers and is inspired by the Black Panther Party’s survival programs.

“WHEN PEOPLE REACH OUT TO THE UNION, THE MOST COMMON ASK IS, ‘I WANT TO HANG OUT; I NEED A FRIEND’.”

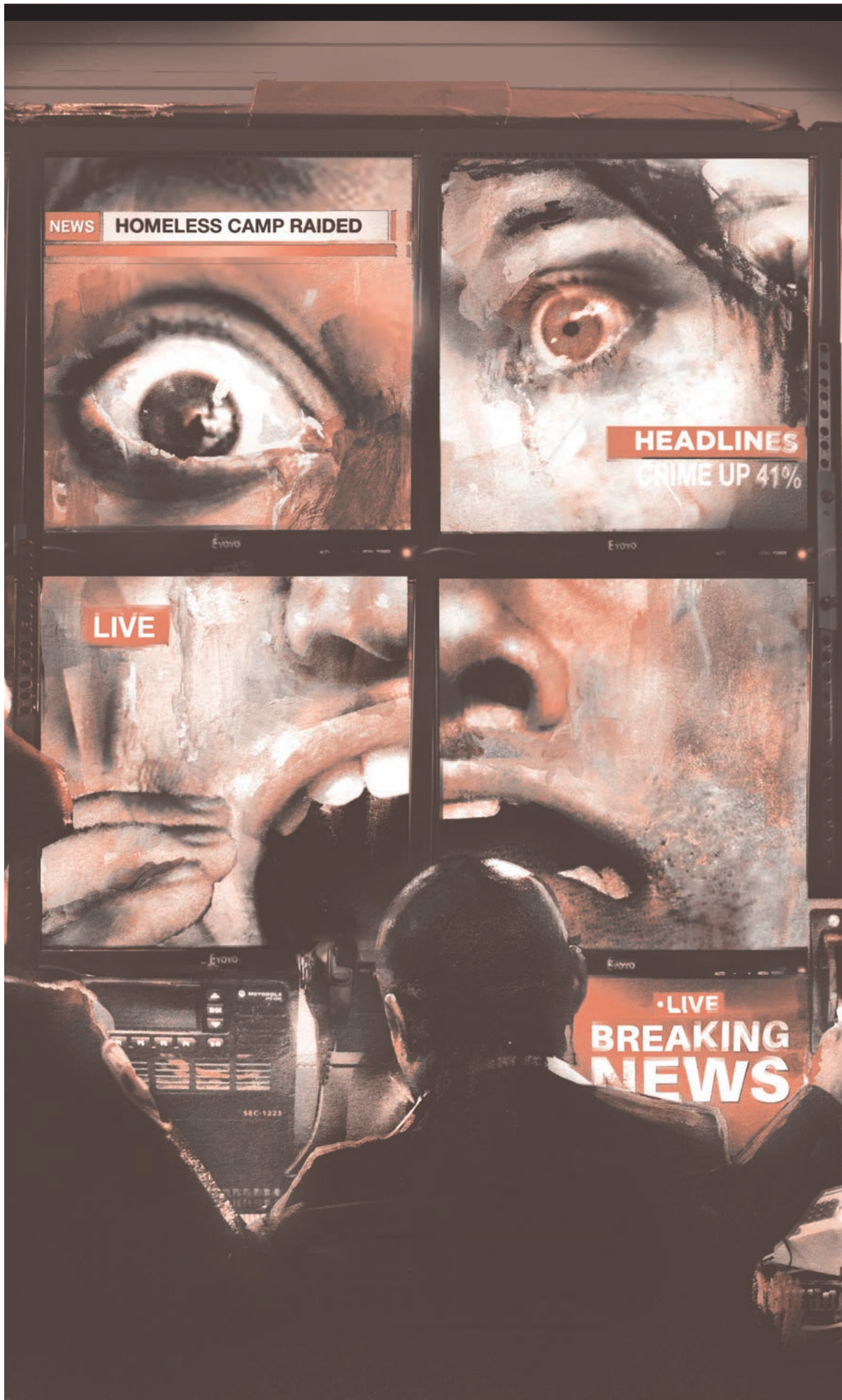
who wants more fruit and vegetables, and multiple who said that the food makes them feel bad.

The shelter offers food out of a freezer in the basement, which is available from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. There are not three different meals available; the same meal — which often doesn’t include vegetables — is available in the freezer all day and residents can heat it up in the microwave. There are often apples and bananas, but coffee isn’t available in the basement every day. There is no designated drinking water or kitchen; residents get water from the sinks in communal bathrooms.

Some of the shelter’s residents find food elsewhere, from grocery stores, begging or dumpster-diving, say Ender and Devon.

The “Why Start a Homeless Union?” zine on the Homeless Union’s table includes lessons from homeless people’s organizations in Philadelphia and Oakland, California that successfully took over housing.

“The National Union of the Homeless has some message along the lines of, ‘You only get what you organize to take.’ I’m not interested in demanding anything,” said Ender. “There are politicians that don’t see you as human. What’s the point of asking for things when these people have repeatedly denied you of housing, health care, food? You just have to take it.”



GRAPH BY MIKAEL TARKELA
SOURCE: NYPD

WELCOME TO THE FEAR FACTORY

HOW THE MAYOR, THE COPS AND THE CORPORATE MEDIA MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SOLVE NYC'S MANY CHALLENGES

BY JOHN TEUFEL

“**Y**ou guys gotta start writing about this,” Eric Adams commanded reporters at a June 6 press conference, flanked by his usual coterie of sullen NYPD officers. The “this” in question was gang violence, and Adams’ claim that New York habitually refuses to imprison violent criminals. The next day, stunned by his poor showing in a new Siena poll indicating that New Yorkers were starting to blame him for not alleviating their constant state of terror, a prickly Adams changed his tune. To the endless amusement of anyone who has followed Adams’ year-plus campaign to scare the bejesus out of New Yorkers, the Mayor suddenly discovered that endless crime propaganda can be bad. “I don’t know if we realize the role of what blasts on our front pages every day,” he said. “You may see a reality around you that things are doing well, but if you get on that J train and the first thing you see on the page is that someone was shot on the J train, you’re gonna disregard that you take that trip everyday and you’re not a victim of crime. That becomes your reality.”

Eric Adams became mayor by crafting the same reality he now bemoans. And since becoming mayor, Adams has consistently found it difficult to manage the forces he unleashed. The confused results have been whiplash-inducing. One day in May, Adams claimed crime had never been higher during his 40-year career, a lie so extreme he later lied again to say he simply didn’t say it. After spending the first few months of his mayoralty ducking under the yellow tape at seemingly every crime scene across the five boroughs, Adams has pulled back and allowed families to grieve in peace. Adams is now fond of pointing out that crime is worse in red states than blue states, a finding that would seem to contradict his also frequent assertion that New York’s unique lack of a “dangerousness” standard in bail setting is wreaking havoc on peace and safety.

What Adams is belatedly realizing is that, once you teach humans to be scared – once you’ve done the hard work of unmooring the emotions of the populace from the conditions on the ground – it’s not so simple to un-flip that switch. The NYPD may have tanks and rocket launchers and robot dogs, but it still hasn’t invented a real-life Men In Black neuralyzer. Whether Adams likes it or not, a pall of terror has taken over our city. It’s up to us to understand how and why.

DAVID HOLLENBACH



THE STATE OF THE CITY

It can be difficult to discuss crime in a way that doesn't put people on the defensive. Any honest accounting of crime in New York City requires holding somewhat dissonant ideas in the brain at the same time. First, crime is, historically, very low. There were 458 murders in the city in 2021. In 1990, that number was 2,262, and in 2000, it was 673 (our population was also, of course, lower in those years). I moved to the city in 2002 — that year, there were 587 murders, and never once did I hear people warning me about crime or keeping safe.

Second, certain types of crime are higher now than they were in recent memory. For example, those 458 murders in 2021 were an increase of 30% from 2019. In that same time period, so-called "shooting incidents" more than doubled, from 777 to 1,562.

Third, some lower-income neighborhoods have consistently seen elevated crime compared to the city overall, even while those same neighborhoods have also enjoyed the overall historic decline in crime rates. So, for example, murders in Brownsville, Brooklyn are around double the citywide average as of 2020, even when the 2021 murder rate was down almost 70% compared to 1993.

Fourth, crime in New York City has overall worsened during Eric Adams' tenure, with murders going up or down depending on the month and grand larceny, robbery, rape, assault and burglary all increasing from 2021 levels. The Adams strategy — a return to hyper-policing minor infractions and more stop-and-frisks — has failed spectacularly.

This is all to say that almost everything we think about crime is wrong. The fear really is irrational. The police really don't help. And yet every murder is, on some level, a tragedy. Some are heartbreaking and enraging — last month, a 15-year-old boy shot and killed an 11-year-old girl while trying to hit a 13-year-old boy. Nobody believes this is a good thing or even an ambiguous thing. Nobody wants this.

The debate in New York is not about whether murder is bad. It is about whether — in a city of 8.8 million people and many millions more visitors going in and out — 458 murders in a year is cause to place every other social issue on the back burner until you can get

that number down to, say, 300, which we all apparently agree is a "good" number. It is a debate about choices, strategies, tactics and poverty. It is difficult to calculate the odds of being murdered in New York City, but this is a debate about whether one should live in a state of fear over a chance of being killed that is somewhere between .00005% and .000007% for a given year, depending on whether or how you count the millions of tourists we get. You are — I promise you — almost definitely not going to be murdered. So why are you acting like you are?

A CONDITIONED RESPONSE

Fear is a conditioned biological instinct that was almost certainly present in some form in the earliest lifeforms inhabiting our planet. In the animal kingdom, fear helps prey avoid predators. But fear can also have other, unan-

lines like "No One Safe" and "Killed On School Steps."

A few months back, I decided to set Twitter notifications for all the tweets sent out by our local news providers, which to this day have massive audiences, especially among our city's older population — ABC 7, CBS New York, PIX 11 and Fox 5. On any given day, at least half the tweets sent out by these accounts highlighted crime stories. The reports covered everything from brutal murders that could legitimately be called news, to the sort of anodyne muggings, robberies and burglaries that happen multiple times a day in every U.S. town and city.

All of this has an effect. In the same Siena poll that annoyed Adams, 76% of New Yorkers reported worrying that

FEAR CITY: Some recent covers of the New York Post, the right-wing tabloid that has an outsized influence over the politics of the city. Its coverage is closely emulated by local television news.

CRIME CROWDS OUT ACTION ON OTHER SOCIAL PROBLEMS, AND THIS IS BY DESIGN.

anticipated consequences. When Yellowstone National Park reintroduced grey wolves into its ecosystem after decades of absence, a major study found that the elk that called the park home became paralyzed by fear — they ate less, birthed less and spent much of their time in a state of rigid paranoia. Eventually they began dying out, not from being eaten by wolves, but by being too scared to live.

Fear is taught. When humans left the state of nature and set down roots in the prison of language, it became possible to condition fear through symbols — signs, words, signifiers. Nowadays, we are taught fear through the words and gestures of media figures and cultural shot-callers like politicians and celebrities.

Of the 31 New York Post covers in May, only nine did not feature a crime story. For 22 days out of the month, if you saw a Post cover at a newsstand, you saw a headline about guns, murder and/or death. To be fair, there were mass shootings in Buffalo and Uvalde, Texas with big media coverage that month, but April wasn't much different: 15 covers featuring crime stories, including head-

they would become the victim of a crime — 76%! A number like that cuts through every demographic. Adams came to power on this wave of paranoia. By June of 2021, a plurality of New Yorkers told New York 1 that crime was their number one election issue.

"A lot of kids are afraid," a local parent recently told PIX 11 about kids bringing weapons to school. "It's fear." Yes, it is. Eric Adams, working hand-in-glove with local media, has so rattled the brains of New Yorkers that people try to justify kids bringing weapons to school for their own protection. Why?

THE WAGES OF FEAR

New York City has a lifeguard shortage. With a target number of 1,400 to 1,500 lifeguards, the city has managed to hire just 480. As Katie Honan reported for The City, much of this

Continued on next page

NYC MURDER RATE: 1963-2021

It was 1963. America's long post-war economic boom continued. The Yankees returned to the World Series for a fourth consecutive season. New Yorkers filled buses and trains to join Dr. Martin Luther King's March on

Washington. It was also the year that the NYPD began compiling reliable crime data. In a moment of relative peace and prosperity remembered by many Baby Boomers as a golden age never to be recovered, there were 548 homicides in a city with a million fewer people than today. New York City's murder rate would steadily

climb over the next three decades peaking at 2,245 murders in 1990 before abruptly falling in the mid-1990s in tandem with a similar trend in other major cities across the country. It would continue declining through the tenures of Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg when New York was hailed as the safest big city in the country. It fell even

further under Bill de Blasio before ticking rising with the onset of the Covid pandemic and lockdowns.

— JOHN TARLETON



FEAR FACTORY

Continued from previous page

shortage can be explained by enforcement of a decades-old cost-cutting rule that bans some city workers from moonlighting as lifeguards, which would require overtime pay. To this reasoning I'd also add that lifeguards only make \$16 an hour for seasonal work – not exactly a convenient or lucrative gig, especially considering the danger.

Meanwhile, four kids drowned at Queens beaches in one week in June. I'd submit that, given the much lower denominator of people who swim, there's a far higher chance of drowning in NYC waters than being murdered on the street. And there's an easy, uncontroversial way to prevent these deaths: more lifeguards. But because we are not being told that this is a crisis – we are not being bombarded with headlines that no swimmer is safe and city waters have become death vortexes – there is no urgency for a fix. There is no call for more funds, or citywide drive to draft lifeguards. We just...shrug our shoulders.

Crime crowds out action on other social problems, and this is by design. During his campaign, Adams called overcoming crime a "prerequisite" to any economic prosperity. A few days after taking office, he told StreetsBlog that talking about anything other than COVID and crime would be a "luxury" that must wait. Until recently, when he realized the Pandora's Box he opened was threatening to swallow him whole, Adams shied away from discussing issues of housing, education, or poverty. Crime – or more accurately, the fear of crime – sucked up all the oxygen in our city.

Adams represents the epitome of the decades-long neo-liberal project. He did not come to office with any sort of policy platform to address social inequities, or to help people live better, easier lives. Nor does he seem to care about these issues in any real way. His new city budget slashes public education spending and gives the savings to the NYPD. He's proposed no citywide programs to lower housing costs. This stuff does not interest Eric Adams, former cop, like crime does, and as someone largely funded by the real estate industry, he has millions of reasons to look the other way.

Nowhere has the primacy of crime over all other so-

cial issues been more apparent than in Adams' treatment of the homeless, also the bane of our city's real estate barons. Although anti-loitering laws have their genesis in early capitalist English prohibitions against joblessness, it is not a crime to be homeless, and the homeless are no more likely to be violent than the housed. But homelessness, thanks to the efforts of people like Eric Adams, has become synonymous with the sort of violent disorder the fear pushers seek to convince us is omnipresent. Thus, while homelessness can only be cured with the provision of homes, instead we get brutal "sweeps" of homeless camps by riot cops, and this is called a solution.

We would also be naïve not to recognize that this push to make people tremble in fear until the cops ride to the rescue has come on the heels of the first nationwide, sustained campaign to rethink policing and, yes, reduce the funding of police departments. This is a backlash, but not an organic one. It's a backlash that has been engineered by the people with megaphones, who drown out the chants of activists and marchers and turn their message against them.

In the end, creating a climate of fear is a buy-one-get-one-free for market fundamentalists like Eric Adams. A scared populace demands more police, more police lock up more of society's unproductive members, and nobody has any breath left to talk about social inequities or how broke everybody is. More police don't bring down crime, the fear increases, and the cycle continues until some superseding force reduces crime rates, or we all drown in the rising waters. We have become the Yellowstone elks, too petrified to better our lives, always looking for the wolf around the corner.

A BIND

The truth is, nobody really knows why crime rises and falls. It's not policing – studies have shown that police funding and crime rates don't correlate, and as crime now rises in NYC the NYPD is hitting record funding levels. The dramatic decrease in crime throughout the 1990s is still a mystery to sociologists. This is not a controversial idea – so many factors go into criminal behavior (including, of course, what the law does and does not call a "crime") that

we wouldn't expect to see any easy correlation.

That Eric Adams apparently didn't realize this is indicative of nothing less than his total blindness to anything that doesn't serve his own authoritarian instincts. Adams now finds himself in a bind. It was useful for him to stir up emotions and create a climate of fear to get elected. Now, people want results he can't deliver.

The Adams coalition of hard right demagogues motivated by racism and working-class Black and Brown people who genuinely want a safer community was never sustainable. It was borne of a fear created in the backrooms of political clubhouses, the boardrooms of real estate conglomerates, editorial meetings at newspapers and newscasts, and at Zero Bond, the elite Lower Manhattan nightclub that serves as his after-hours office. The right has already turned on Adams, and the rest of the city isn't far behind. The Mayor created a monster, and we're the ones who have to live in its grasp.

John Teufel is a former investigator with the Civilian Complaint Review Board and a litigator who in 2021 successfully sued the city to force the release of the NYPD's disciplinary records. He is the author of the "This Month in Eric Adams" monthly column that appears at independent.org/authors/john-teufel. He is on Twitter: @JohnTeufelNYC.

PROBLEM: YOUR CON ED BILL HAS SKYROCKETED

SOLUTION: YOUR GREEN NEW DEAL CANDIDATE

ILLAPA SAIRITUPAC
DEMOCRAT FOR STATE ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 65

CLIMATE ORGANIZER
SOCIAL WORKER
SON OF IMMIGRANTS

ALEXANDRIA FOCASIO FOR CORTEZ NEW YORK
FOOD & WATER ACTION
GREEN NEW DEAL SLATE

AS CRIME CONTINUES TO RISE...

CRIME IN NEW YORK IS SKYROCKETING

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MURDERS UP 55%

SHOOTINGS UP 135%

50% FEWER POLICE OFFICERS ON OUR STREETS

ILLAPA SAIRITUPAC PROMISES TO SLASH POLICE FUNDING

ILLAPA SAIRITUPAC WANTS TO DEFUND THE NYPD!

REDUCE THE STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT BUDGET BY HALF

— Illapa Sairitupac, jrnwales.org, February 25th, 2022

HOPE VS. FEAR

In the run-up to the June 28 Democratic primary, glossy mailers from two Super PACs – Common Sense New Yorkers and Voters of New York – poured into the mailboxes of voters in select state Assembly districts. They depicted candidates from the Democratic Socialists of America and the Working Families Party as a danger to society due to their past criticisms of the police. The two Super PACs were bankrolled by billionaire investors and real estate moguls.

One of the targeted candidates was Illapa Sairitupac, a social worker and climate activist who lost his race in Assembly District 65 in the Lower East Side and Chinatown. In his own mailers, he promised to fight for a Green New Deal for New York, higher taxes on the rich and increased protections for tenants living in unregulated apartments.

Perhaps that's why he and other candidates who held similar views drew the ire of the two Super PACs. After all, the people who bankrolled the negative mailers don't usually spend much time concerning themselves about the well-being of working class New Yorkers. Hmm...

— JOHN TARLETON



HBO

DID THE NYPD BUNGLE THE YUSUF HAWKINS MURDER CASE?

NEW EVIDENCE EMERGES THAT DISGRACED DETECTIVE LOUIS SCARCELLA STEERED INVESTIGATORS AWAY FROM LIKELY SHOOTER

BY THEODORE HAMM

The senseless 1989 murder of Black teenager Yusuf Hawkins reverberates to this day in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where many longtime residents insist that prosecutors wrongfully convicted Joey Fama of second-degree murder.

More than a few locals involved in the case also know something not widely reported, but not in dispute — that notorious NYPD Detective Louis Scarcella played an active role in the investigation. Fama, now 52, continues to serve his 32-years-to-life sentence.

As *The Independent* reported in late May, despite the fact that Scarcella's dirty tactics have resulted in at least 15 exonerations, the Brooklyn DA's office continues to oppose challenges to the detective's other cases. In mid-June, Brooklyn's most tough-on-crime judge Vincent Del Giudice tossed yet another Scarcella conviction, that of crack kingpin "Baby Sam" Edmondson. The ruling prompted the Detectives Endowment Association to declare that it "stands by the work" of the disgraced detective.

In the Fama case, the Brooklyn DA's office initially denied that Scarcella played any role at all. Twice in early 2016, the DA's appeals bureau informed Fama that "no DD-5's generated by Det. Scarcella were located within the relevant files." Moreover, there were "no records located indicating that Det. Scarcella, who was assigned to Brooklyn North Homicide, had any involvement... with a Brooklyn South Homicide case."

Five years later, in response to Fama's 440 motion (which seeks a hearing to determine whether his conviction should be overturned), the DA's office changed its position. Although there are at least 11 DD-5's (police reports) signed by Scarcella, the appeals team now insists that the detective nonetheless played a "minor role" in the investigation.

To illustrate that point, ADA Morgan Dennehy highlighted the fact that there were nearly 800 DD-5's created during the investigation. But according to Fama's attorney Justin Bonus, the office has not yet turned over at least a few hundred of those reports, making it difficult to gauge the veracity of Dennehy's claim regarding Scarcella's role.

Asked by *The Independent* to explain why he was involved in a

WRONG GUY?: New revelations about former NYPD Detective Louis Scarcella's role in the Yusuf Hawkins murder investigation has raised concerns that Joseph Fama (above) may have been falsely convicted of the 1989 shooting.

Brooklyn South case, Scarcella referred the question to his lawyer, Joel Cohen, who was unable to comment. The Brooklyn DA's spokesperson declined to add anything not found in the office's court filings. Dennehy's response to the 440 makes no mention of the issue of why Scarcella originally showed up in the investigation.

Ever since his arrest, Fama has insisted that he was among the large crowd at the murder scene but that he did not have a gun. Hawkins' three friends with him at the scene described the shooter as six feet tall, whereas Fama is five foot eight. The only eyewitness who claimed Fama was the triggerman recanted amid the 1990 trial.

The prosecution's theory at trial was that Fama shot Hawkins. But after deliberating for over 10 days, the jury acquitted Fama of intentional murder and instead deemed him guilty of depraved indifference (second-degree murder). Jurors viewed him as an "active participant" and "part of the group" of three dozen people that attacked Hawkins and his friends.

According to Justin Bonus, Scarcella was "intimately involved" in the investigation, helping steer suspicion away from Joseph Serrano, whom two witnesses had identified as the gunman (and is six feet tall). A few days after those witnesses fingered Serrano, Scarcella issued a DD-5 reporting that assailant John Vento told witness Christian Mongiello that "he saw Fama shoot the guy." Mongiello, however, did not state that in a subsequent interview with a different detective — and his father then met with Scarcella to discuss why he had visited Mongiello's home "on several occasions."

Vento testified before the grand jury against Fama, but did not take the stand at trial. Serrano and Vento received very light sentences for their involvement in Hawkins' murder.

Because of the multiple exonerations in his cases, Scarcella's newly discovered role in the Fama investigation potentially opens the door for a 440 hearing. (Among other new evidence, Bonus also presents several sworn recantations from a range of key players in the case.) Should Louie take the stand, he won't be able to deploy his "selective amnesia" routine regarding such a high-profile case.

Judge Dena Douglas, who previously ordered a new trial in a Scarcella case, will issue her ruling on whether the Fama case will proceed to a hearing sometime in the coming weeks.



WYNE FOSTER



SUE BRISK

THEN & NOW

Prakash Churaman uses special scissors at the Queens Sheriff's office to remove his ankle monitor hours after prosecutors dropped all charges in his case on June 6. Churaman's legal odyssey began at age 15 when he was coerced by NYPD detectives into confessing to a murder he didn't commit. Now 22, Churaman spent more than four years behind bars before being released to virtual house arrest.

The Queens DA's office had insisted it would retry Churaman but backpedaled as the case came under greater public scrutiny. According to Churaman, *The Independent's* February 2021 cover story about his case was a breakthrough moment when his story reached a broader public audience for the first time and helped catalyze the support campaign for him.

— INDEPENDENT STAFF

DEFEND OUR CLINICS

PHOTOS BY NINA BERMAN
TEXT BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

“Women who have abortions should get the death penalty,” Beatrice, a pro-life protester, told *The Independent*. She wore a T-shirt that read “Hope is here” and was one of several women protesting outside the downtown Manhattan Health Center on the Saturday morning before the Supreme Court toppled *Roe v. Wade*.

While the religious right’s quest for earthly dominion over women’s bodies proceeds undisturbed on this morning, that’s not always the case. On the first Saturday of each month, Witness for Life, an anti-choice group, returns to the same clinic, which is run by Planned Parenthood. They are met by counter-protests organized by NYC For Abortion Rights, a socialist-feminist collective that fights for full abortion and reproductive justice.

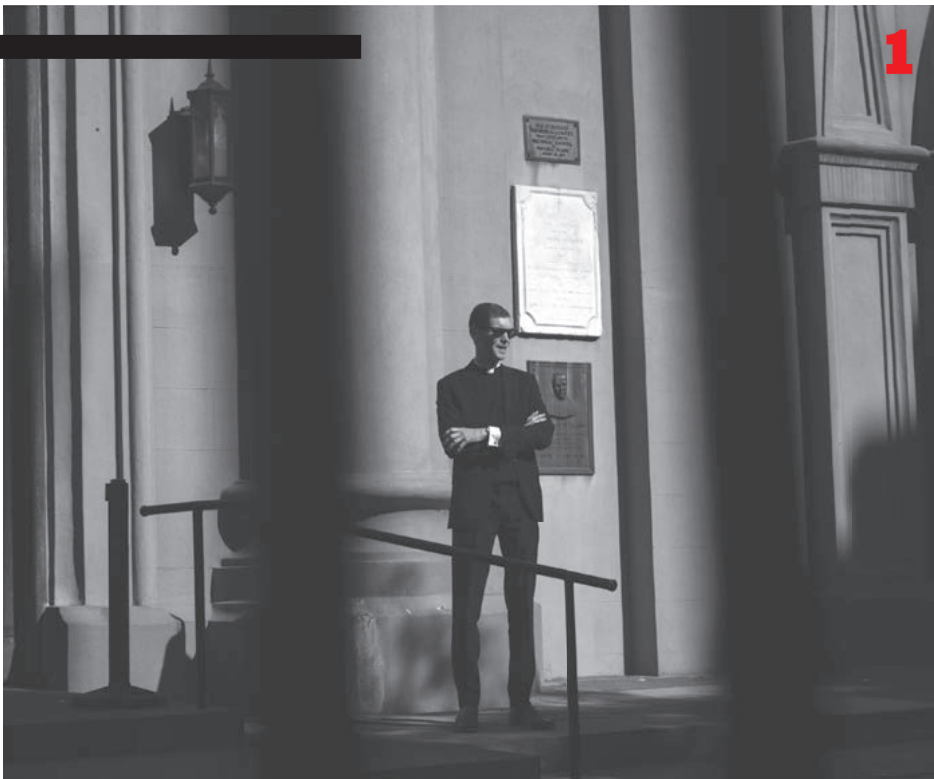
The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Dobbs v. Mississippi* will lead to the outright ban or severe restriction of abortion rights in 22 states that are home to 64 million women and girls, with several more states likely to enact similar laws. It won’t stop there. People who suffer miscarriages or stillbirths could face criminal investigations and those who cross state lines to procure an abortion will be targeted, as will all the people and organizations that help them. Digital surveillance technologies will further the aims of the abortion police in ways that weren’t possible when *Roe* was decided in 1973.

Meanwhile, New York’s state and local leaders have promised that ours will be a sanctuary state for women seeking abortions and won’t cooperate with out-of-state law enforcement. Mutual aid groups have also vowed to aid those in need. The prospect that anti-choicers, now further emboldened, will step up their protests and harassment outside New York City’s abortion clinics seems likely. If they do, how many of us will be there to greet them? For more, see abortionrights.nyc.

1: A Catholic priest stands outside the Basilica of St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral in Soho where once a month anti-abortion protesters gather before descending on a nearby Planned Parenthood clinic.

2-4, 6-9: Pro and anti-choice demonstrators face off outside the Planned Parenthood clinic in downtown Manhattan.

5: Thousands of abortion rights supporters rallied in Washington Square Park hours after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.



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THE SUPREME COURT TRIES TO REPEAL THE 20TH CENTURY

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Will the Supreme Court allow state laws against masturbation?

Don't laugh. By the arguments its far-right bloc has used in cases from *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, its June decision revoking *Roe v. Wade*, to *Lawrence v. Texas*, the 2003 case that held laws against oral and anal sex unconstitutional, the answer is yes.

The late Justice Antonin Scalia made it explicit in his dissent in *Lawrence*. If Texas's sodomy law were struck down, he wrote, then no state law "based on moral choices" would be sustainable — specifically those "against bigamy, same-sex marriage, adult incest, prostitution, masturbation, adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity."

Justice Samuel Alito, in his majority opinion in *Dobbs*, argued that abortion was not protected by either "substantive due process" — the concept that the 14th Amendment principle that liberty cannot be taken away "without due process of law" guarantees certain basic rights — or by the right to privacy 20th-century judges inferred from the Fourth Amendment's right to be secure against "unreasonable searches and seizures."

Justice Clarence Thomas, in his concurring opinion, went further. He said there's no such thing as "substantive due process," and therefore the Court should overturn decisions that relied on that concept — those that voided laws against birth control, same-sex sex, and same-sex marriage.

Alito's doctrine that nothing is a constitutional right unless it's "deeply rooted in the Nation's history and tradition" would enable the Court to go back to the era of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the 1986 case upholding Georgia's sodomy law, in which clear precedents about privacy got trumped by deference to 3,500 years of "morality" as defined by the biblical book of Leviticus. In other words, to repeal the social movements of the last 75 years, dismissing the idea that women and LGBTQIA+ people have rights as a post-1960s aberration.

The Court was not so respectful of tradition the day before, when in *Bruen v. New York State Rifle & Pistol Association*, it struck down a 111-year-old New York State law strictly limiting who could carry guns in public. Justice Thomas argued that the Second Amendment statement that "the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed" is near-absolute, and therefore virtually no restrictions on guns would be constitutional. He ignored that the amendment's first four words contain the phrase "well regulated."

The issue of guns is often rural versus urban: People who live in the country are more likely to hunt and live in places with sparse police protection, while city dwellers don't want some deranged rage-ball blasting away in the subway. But Thomas and the Court are in line with the powerful extremist faction of the gun-rights movement, which sees barring a man from buying a gun if his ex-girlfriend has an order of protection against him as equal to cutting off his balls and making him recite their pronouns as "she" and "they."

The Court also handcuffed attempts to reduce global warming. On

UNELECTED SUPER-LEGISLATURE: (Left to right) Six rightwing judges — Amy Coney Barrett, Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh — are intent on remaking American society with an agenda that could never win popular support.

June 30, in *West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency*, it ruled that the EPA did not have the power to require power plants to phase out burning fossil fuels in order to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions.

The case involved an Obama-era program blocked by the courts and cancelled by the Trump administration. Under the federal Clean Air Act, the EPA is supposed to regulate stationary sources that "cause, or contribute significantly to, air pollution." The agency classified carbon dioxide as a pollutant under a "gap filler" provision: It is not toxic or carcinogenic, but is devastating in large quantities. It argued that systemic changes were needed "to mitigate the dangers presented by climate change."

Chief Justice John Roberts, however, wrote that the EPA has historically regulated only individual sources of pollution, the plan's limits on carbon dioxide emissions were too tight for any individual coal plant to meet, and that "it is not plausible that Congress gave EPA the authority to adopt on its own such a regulatory scheme."

Roberts relied on what is called the "major questions" doctrine: That some issues are too big to be decided by the administrative state unless specifically authorized by Congress. The ultimate target is the Court's 1984 decision that courts should defer to federal agencies' expertise in interpreting laws to set regulations, as long as they have a clear legal and rational basis.

The Court cited the major-questions doctrine in January, when, in a group of cases that could have been called *OSHA v. COVID*, it blocked emergency federal vaccine regulations. The law gives the Occupational Safety and Health Administration power to issue temporary standards to protect workers exposed to "grave danger" from "new hazards," but the Court ruled that Congress had not authorized it to order mass vaccinations, and COVID was a public-health hazard, not an occupational hazard.

That may sound like a bizarre pretext, but such logical stretches are common. In the 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* decision, the Court reversed a 40-year-old precedent that workers on union jobs had to pay the union fees to cover the costs of representation, but could opt out of contributing to its political activity. It ruled that public-sector workers don't have to pay anything, because asking the government for a raise is "political activity."

The judicial far right does have two consistent principles, however. Anything that interferes with the right to profit, from environmental regulations to worker protections, is oppressive governmental overreach. But the government should have the power to intrude into other people's sex lives, because it's "morality."

As for masturbation: "There is no substantive-due-process right to stimulate one's genitals for non-medical purposes unrelated to procreation or outside of an interpersonal relationship," Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, now governor, argued in 2007, defending the state's law prohibiting the sale of dildos.

A federal appeals court disagreed, holding that there is a "substantive due process right to engage in consensual intimate conduct in the home free from government intrusion."

But that ruling relied on the *Lawrence* decision.



ZENANJIN NEBES

POWER SHORTAGE

HOW THE BUILD PUBLIC RENEWABLES ACT STALLED AND WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE GREEN NEW YORK MOVEMENT

BY ERIN THIBEAU & JOSH KAREN

As the final hours of the legislative session ticked by on Friday, June 3, supporters of the New York Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) were hard at work. The transformative climate-justice bill had sailed through the Senate but had yet to pass the Assembly. The Public Power NY Coalition — a group made up of climate organizations and several New York chapters of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — were calling legislators in a final-stretch frenzy that saw multiple assemblymembers' offices fielding 500 calls each. By the end of session, activists had confirmed 83 legislative supporters, more than the 76 needed for it to pass. So why did Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie fail to bring the bill to the floor for a vote?

New York is failing to meet its climate goals. By law, the state must achieve a 70% renewable-energy an energy grid by 2030 and 100% by 2040. Yet the state's reliance on private industry has left us languishing at 4% wind and solar energy combined — one-fifth as much as Texas. BPRA is now considered the only feasible path forward to reach those targets.

If enacted, BPRA would enable the New York Power Authority (NYPA) — the largest public power authority in the country — to produce, own and sell renewable energy. Along with divesting from fossil fuels, NYPA would move to provide all state-owned buildings and public transit across the state with 100% renewable energy. It also would also be required to offer energy to low-to-moderate income customers at a 50% discount from private utility companies.

A 2022 report by Climate and Community Project found that BPRA would create more than 50,000 jobs and up to \$93.5 billion in additional economic activity

while directing 35-40% of the investment-led benefits from decarbonizing the state's energy system directly toward disadvantaged communities.

In response to its failed 2021 legislative push for BPRA, the Ecosocialist Working Group of the New York City chapter of DSA (NYC-DSA) crafted a two-pronged strategy to drive climate action:

1. *Elect a Green New York slate of seven insurgent candidates running as climate champions to replace the climate-denying Democrats who block these bills year after year.*
2. *Leverage the electoral threat to pressure lawmakers backed by fossil fuel corporations into supporting or remaining neutral on the legislative push to pass BPRA.*

This strategy was born from insights gained during the ecosocialists' successful fights against fracked-gas plants in Queens and Newburgh, the legislative efforts for BPRA, and the popular response to the heatwaves and blackouts of 2019 and the catastrophic floods of 2021. It became clear from conversations with the state senate's central staff that New Yorkers cared deeply about the climate crisis. That, combined with popular hatred of private-utility companies like National Grid and Con Edison, showed NYC-DSA that there was an opening to make the 2022 electoral cycle a climate election.

Together with the Public Power NY Coalition, NYC-DSA worked closely with legislators, central staff and different constituencies across the state to shore up support for the bill. One focus was enhancing labor provisions in the bill to engage unions in the work ahead and ensure that workers are not harmed by the transition to renewables. The New York State AFL-CIO had voiced opposition in a memo before the edits were made public. Later versions of the bill addressed their concerns, leading key trade unions to lift their opposition and become neutral.

The strategy worked. With the unions no longer opposed and a primary campaign by DSA-endorsed Green New York slate member David Alexis breathing down his neck, Senator Kevin Parker, the chair of the Energy and Telecommunications Committee and one of the key roadblocks to BPRA, stepped aside. The bill passed the State Senate 38-25. Parker skipped the vote.

The State Assembly was a different story. Opposition groups including the Independent Power Producers of New York (the lobby and political arm for fossil fuel corporations) and the Alliance for Clean Energy New York (the lobby for renewable industry capitalists) mounted attacks — like having multiple social media accounts re-

peat the same false talking points that NYPA will “stifle competition and raise prices.”

But the memos and attack ads didn't stop the massive outpouring of support for BPRA. More than 1,000 supporters used NYC-DSA's call guide to contact legislators (some even sending faxes!). #BuildPublicRenewables was the top trending topic on Twitter in New York for two days in a row. In the final moments of the session, DSA's electeds were rousing support and making social media pleas. But the limits of having only six socialists in Albany became clear. Speaker Heastie refused to even bring the bill to a vote in the Assembly. Fossil fuel interests had blocked the best path for the state toward meeting the renewable energy goals it set in 2019.

Yet the unprecedented public-pressure campaign for the bill still validated NYC-DSA's approach. Speaker Heastie called for a special hearing on July 28 “to review this subject and get additional public input” because “we agree with the goals of the Build Public Renewables Act.” This kind of hearing is rare (and unprecedented, considering it was called by the very person who shut down the bill).

This is a crucial moment for climate action in New York State. The failure to pass major climate legislation for the third straight year will be a stain on certain legislators' records, which voters will not forget in the primaries. If, as socialist Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani says, “organizing is the act of punching above your weight,” it's clear that NYC-DSA must replace climate deniers in Albany with climate organizers in order to break any future impasses on desperately needed legislation.

And our movement can use the pressure of the primaries to force Heastie's hand so that after the special hearing, he recovenes the Assembly — where the majority supporting this bill can pass it and Governor Kathy Hochul can sign it into law.

This victory would prove that we can leverage the power of government to democratize and make green our state's energy supply. It would establish New York as a climate leader and inspire other states to follow suit. And it would prove that a robust public sector can meet human needs more efficiently and affordably when led by progressive policies.

What we've accomplished so far is heartening. We have the power of organizing in hand to fight for a livable future for all New Yorkers.



MASKS OFF?

MASKING AND SOCIAL DISTANCING WERE THE RIGHT THING TO DO, BUT HAVE COME WITH A HIGH COST IN SOCIAL ALIENATION

BY MARK READ

In late May, I took a trip to the city to see my 12-year-old niece perform the lead role in her school's performance of *Oliver*. I hadn't been to New York in a while. I was excited to return to the place I'd proudly called home for 22 years and to witness my niece in her shining moment.

While waiting in line to enter the massive school building in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, I ran into an activist friend of mine and his wife. Their son, as it turned out, was also in the play. When we entered the building there was a moment of uncertainty around masking. *Were they mandatory or optional? Should I wear one or not?* They were optional, and this is where things got interesting, at least for me. People were all over the map on this choice. I opted not to wear one, as did my brother and his wife. My friend and his wife, who sat next to me, opted to wear theirs. Once we were in the auditorium, as the crowd gathered, a glance around the room revealed about a 50-50 split. Some of my brother's friends came in from Manhattan, sat on the other side of me and proceeded to furtively take their masks on and off throughout the performance, unsure about what the proper thing to do was. It was a hodge-podge of responses to the moment, a kind of "you do you" chaos that was hard to make sense of. I didn't bring it up and neither did anyone else, but I couldn't stop thinking about it, doubting my own choice, wondering if I was being judged.

We're far enough into the pandemic to be able to look back and evaluate our responses, but there really is no definitive end in sight and we seem to be stuck with some new normals that are, well, alienating.

As I write this, the nightly news reports mass shooting after mass shooting. The nation is convulsed by spasms of violence that have been increasing in frequency and intensity over the last two years. Cultural and political polarization has risen to the point where some pundits are predicting another civil war, for which January 6th appears a prelude. War rages anew in Europe while endless conflict has become the assumed state of much of the world, and the planet's life-supporting systems hurtle towards collapse. Meanwhile, the left seems to be tearing itself apart from within.

At this juncture I think that any conversation about what we should or shouldn't be doing to slow the spread of the virus needs to keep a broader social context in mind. Any conversations that we have in the future about how to respond to a new virus must take a more holistic view of community health than we have taken during this pandemic. Our calculus must expand beyond case counts, hospitalizations and deaths from the virus; the social constraints that have been adopted by the majority of society have taken their own grave toll, in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

The moral clarity of the early days of the pandemic seem like a distant memory now, and part of me misses the certainty I felt back then.

THE BIRTH OF AN INVERTED MORAL LOGIC

In the spring of 2020, the first wave of COVID-19 blew through New York City like a category five hurricane. For months sirens wailed day and night. Hospitals were overwhelmed as bodies stacked up in their parking lots because there was no place to put the overflow. Everyone was rattled. The specter of death hung over us, and nobody knew exactly what was going to happen. It was terrifying and disorienting. As with so many other disasters, the people of the city pulled together to try and get through it. Mutual aid networks formed to get food to people that couldn't leave their homes or had their livelihoods disrupted by the lockdowns. Cheers for frontline healthcare workers echoed across the cityscape every evening, loud and inspiring. In my building we started a WhatsApp group to discuss and distribute information about everything from which neighbors needed groceries to plans for rent strikes and, of course, where to find or how to make masks.

Moments of rupture are frightening, but also exhilarating in the way that people on the ground respond by taking care of one another. It is as though the wound to the social body generates a powerful immune response from that body, a flood of extraordinary prosocial behaviors that serve to protect and heal the collective.

The fact that this was a crisis of contagion, however, created a series of inversions with regards to what con-

stitutes prosocial behavior. In this crisis, what constituted prosocial behavior was, paradoxically, a set of antisocial choices: staying home, staying apart, maintaining distance, moving everything online and wearing masks. Mask wearing, in fact, became the most emblematic of these behaviors, because the rhetoric around it at the time was that

most masks didn't protect the wearer so much as they protected others. To wear a mask was to care for your community, as was staying at home and staying online. Our interdependence — the reality that one's actions directly impact the well-being of others — was made dramatically explicit by the pandemic.

We were in it together, inextricably intermingled by our very breath, on which a wily virus traveled, bent on our death and destruction. As a leftist, a socialist in fact, I have always put social well-being at the center of my ethics and my politics. It is socialism, after all. Interdependence is a core principle. The prosocial moral logic of making otherwise antisocial choices made inherent sense. But it still felt odd, even at that moment. In order to save society, we had to avoid it.

Any doubts I had were pretty quickly dispelled when I watched members of the right wing respond to the compelling moral logic of interdependence. There was an almost immediate backlash to government-mandated prosocial behaviors such as mask mandates.

Gun-toting cadres of libertarians resisted "Big Brother's" efforts to protect the public from a deadly disease, crying "My body, my choice!" and insisting that their individual liberty trumped any consideration of social benefit.

The lines of a culture war over COVID had been drawn, and they only became starker when the same social forces that refused masks went on to storm the capital. Fear of COVID was now accompanied by a justifiable fear of fascist rule, a threat that continues to loom over us all.

In the cauldron of these intersecting terrors, the mask, and general COVID caution, became ever-more culturally important as signifiers of belonging to one political tribe or the other. On this side of the fence there is reason, science and collective care. On that side of the fence there are dragons.

But now, despite a continually improving situation with COVID itself, and a clearly escalating crisis of social alienation, many of my friends remain fixed in their position that reducing transmission of the virus has to remain the first ethical priority for those sincerely committed to public health and collective care.

Unfortunately, the CDC and other public health agencies continue to mostly support this position, in a manner



INDUS 3X1E

that at this point has begun to feel extreme. Similarly, those in charge of the public health response in New York City have been plastering the subways with questionable advertisements that suggest the “best” way to behave is to wear a mask, distance from others and read a book or stare at your phone.

While I understand the value in masking on subways, which can be a powerful vector of community transmission, I find the ad’s underlying message — don’t interact with other human beings — utterly depressing and infuriating. How can the CDC and the public health community writ large continue to advocate for the same measures they were advocating for in the spring of 2020 as though nothing has changed?

The situation around masks specifically has dramatically changed, hasn’t it? It’s no longer accurate to say that wearing a mask won’t protect the wearer or that we must all wear them to protect everyone. If someone wants to do everything they can to avoid catching the virus they can buy an N95 or other respirator mask — which are now readily available — and wear it in a way that will offer them substantial protection, whether anyone else is masked or not. Those masks should be free and made widely available to anyone that wants one. That said, I don’t think there’s a clear moral case for mask mandates anymore, except perhaps during times of significant surges, particularly if cloth masks are counted as sufficient when we know that they are not.

WHY IS WEARING A MASK A BIG DEAL?

In 1961, French moral philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote in *Ethics and Infinity*, “The face is exposed, vulnerable, as if inviting an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what prohibits us from killing.” Ethics are impossible to configure or understand without the face-to-face encounter.

A friend of mine recently told me that masks were no big deal, especially to the young, because they’d adapted. “Hey my daughter loves them,” he texted me, “she says she gets to hide.” My heart broke when I read that. What happens to a society where the vulnerability of the face is too often literally shielded from view? How can we develop an ethics in the absence of that vulnerability?

We are living in a society that is experiencing an acute empathy crisis. It is one crisis among many, but I don’t know how we begin to solve the other problems in the absence of an intact social fabric. That’s what really frightens me these days: The prospect of a cultural and social terrain that impedes the formation of the social bonds that we will desperately need to build a better world.

The crisis didn’t start in 2020, though. Trends toward alienation and atomization were present long before the

pandemic struck, without a doubt. It is, however, undeniably true that the measures we have been taking to slow the pandemic down have greatly exacerbated the problem (especially for the youth). They have resulted in a dramatic increase in the time we spend online rather than with one another. This, combined with less opportunity to establish empathic connection due to masks, have been the proverbial gas on the fire of incivility.

If you want to see an example of a society with an empathy deficit, look no further than Twitter or Facebook, where disembodied, faceless encounters engender an endless cacophony of misunderstanding and cruelty. Who wants to live in that world?

WHAT IS THE CURRENT COVID THREAT LEVEL?

I am not an epidemiologist, or virologist, or any sort of medical expert. I cannot speak with authority about long COVID, or other risks. Whatever I do know is gathered from reading reliable sources of information such as the *Times*, *Science* magazine, *Nature* magazine and other fact-based science reporting.

WE CAN’T HEAL OUR SOCIETY’S FRAYED SOCIAL BONDS WITHOUT MORE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTERS.

The Infection Fatality Rate (IFR) for COVID-19 is a fraction of what it was in the spring of 2020. While the CDC has not shared any new estimates of COVID-19’s IFR since then, scientists in South Africa have crunched the numbers and they estimate that their country’s IFR for COVID-19 during Omicron was slightly lower than the IFR for influenza. It appears that, while the virus remains far more contagious than the flu, it may no longer be more lethal.

I know that death is not the only negative outcome of the virus, but mortality numbers are a reliable indicator for how the virus is impacting society overall. And I am not trying to downplay the virus or imply that those who continue to try to avoid infection are responsible for the harms that quarantine measures and COVID caution have exacted upon society — especially considering how truly confusing and frightening this period has been. That said, I do think that there is a cadre of COVID alarmists that have made media careers out of needlessly terrifying and isolating an already traumatized public.

THE PLAY WAS THE THING

When I think back to the night of the play, I feel a mixture of hope and foreboding in regards to how we might choose, collectively, to live not only with COVID — which will be with us forever — but future viruses that will almost certainly challenge us in similar ways.

The subway ads I saw on the way to the show left me brooding about the future. Public-health experts seem incapable of taking into account the costs of social alienation. I also fear a growing deference toward technocratic expertise and an unsettling lack of skepticism toward authority among my peers. Tech billionaires continue to push their vision of a social world mediated through online services they control, enabled by the messaging of public health authorities who insist that COVID caution and social isolation are the measure of science-based virtue.

Yet it was also clear to me that evening that the judgmental and accusatory impulses around masking have abated for most people. Masks no longer seem to be a key signal of leftist credibility or moral virtue, and that’s a good thing as far as I’m concerned. At this moment, “you

do you” seems to me like a much healthier, more tender orientation toward one another than “you should.”

The problem with “you do you” is that it’s a capitulation to the libertarian vision of society, where we devolve our response to a collective crisis into a set of individual decisions. We need to insist instead on a world built upon a bedrock of interdependence and mutuality, hints of which we saw at the start of the crisis. What would that look like?

For starters, we should be fighting harder than ever for universal health care. Health care is a social good and a human right that must be made available to all. Housing, too, ought to be understood as a social good and a human right that should be afforded or affordable to all. These ought to be our North Stars, our larger goals coming out of the pandemic, but there are plenty of smaller steps that we can fight for as well.

In immediate and practical terms, we could be pressuring our government to stockpile PPP equipment; train and hire more doctors and nurses; fund more research into long COVID as well as medical care for those with

Continued on page 17

FROM ORANGE JUMPSUIT TO JOURNALIST

Corrections in Ink: A Memoir

BY KERI BLAKINGER

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, JUNE 2022

336 PAGES

By Renée Feltz

Glib, almost gleeful, headlines announced Keri Blakinger's arrest with \$50,000 of heroin during the final semester of her senior year at Cornell University. A *Washington Post* blog reported it as "Another Ivy Drug Bust."

"When my hometown paper in Lancaster finally got around to the story," Blakinger writes in her new book, "it can't have taken them long to comb through the archives — like I did every day in my own mind — and see how much I'd fallen."

A decade later, Blakinger tells her own story — one of righteous redemption — in a memoir that ends with her becoming an award-winning journalist who focuses on prisons and jails, often thrilling those behind bars as her reporting holds those in charge of them accountable. Her witty prose and frequent self-reflection put a human face on what many women experience before, during and after they go to prison, in a world where they are often portrayed unforgivingly by those who have no idea what it is like.

As the era of mass incarceration drags on, it has become ever more important to humanize our understanding of what happens to millions of people drawn into the criminalization process. Blakinger writes about how she turned to hard drugs (and sex work to support her habit) in order to cope with deflated dreams as a teenage competitive figure skater. She was also struggling with a related eating disorder that offered both a sense of self-control and "self-destruction that feels like success. I wanted to waste away, slowly and tragically."

When police arrested her in 2010, she was carrying a tupperware container filled with six ounces of heroin that she planned to help her boyfriend to sell, and to use. As bad as the situation was, it could have been worse. Three decades of activism had recently led to the repeal of New York's notorious Rockefeller drug laws, which mandated lengthy prison sentences for such offenses.

"By the time I got arrested, I was able to get a sentence of two-and-a-half years, and I ended up serving 21 months," Blakinger told *Democracy Now!* news hour. "But had I been arrested, you know, a few years earlier, I would have gotten 15 to life, and I would still be in prison and not even eligible for parole yet. So, I think about that a lot when I think about that day that I got arrested."

Blakinger's memoir is based in part on journals she filled with descriptions of conditions in the Tompkins County Jail and later in Albion, Bedford Hills and Taconic prisons. She mailed the notebooks to her parents to keep guards from confiscating them. Blakinger also used

the notebooks to "guesstimate the length of the cellblock" she'd run the length of as she sought to get sober and back in shape. "By the time I got home in the fall of 2012, there was a foot-high stack of yellow legal pads waiting for me. The pages and pages of scrawling blue pen documented every detail of my life from a time when I was a broken person trying to become less broken," she

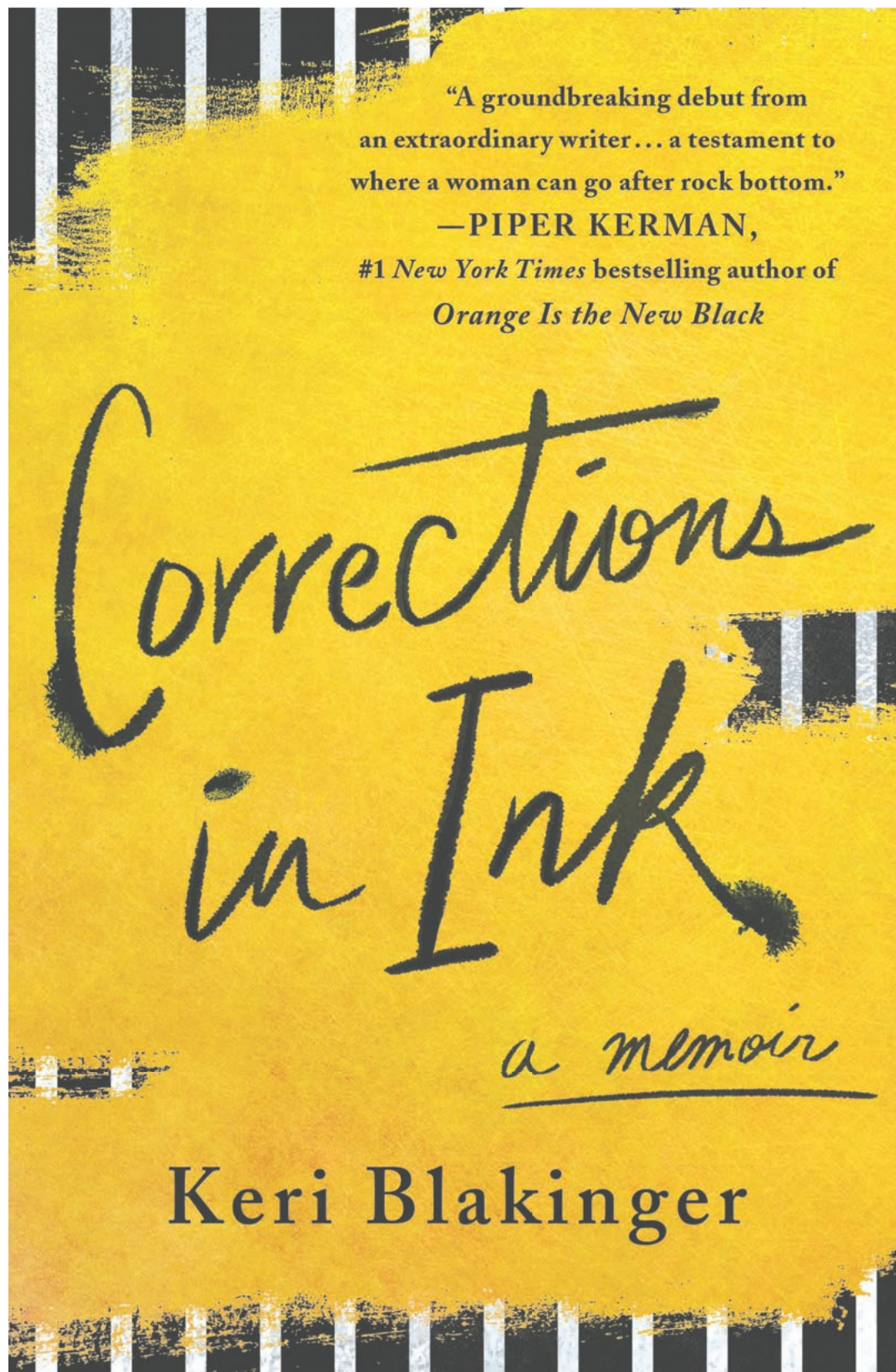
confinement — considered torture in much of the world — to punish trivial offenses, Blakinger recounts how guards would often target the large number of queer incarcerated women. The practice is so common, she says, that it has its own phrase: "Gay for the stay, straight at the gate." She notes, "If you got caught showing any sort of same-sex affection, you could get written up and punished with anything from a loss of phone privileges

to weeks in isolation, and the sort of negative disciplinary record that left you less likely to make parole."

Soon after her release, Blakinger seized on a "second chance" — which she acknowledges she had more of due to her white privilege — when she was interviewed for the local paper about women in prison and the editor offered her a job as a reporter. She went on to work at *The New York Daily News*, then covered death row for the *Houston Chronicle*. She is now the first formerly-incarcerated reporter for *The Marshall Project*, where she writes the "Inside Out" column. Her career has opened the door wider for others to join the ranks of journalism upon their release from prison, to actually apply their hard-gained insight rather than hide it. One of her many awards is for reporting on women's jails with a team at *The Washington Post*, the same paper that once covered her own arrest as "Another Ivy Drug Bust."

While her memoir is titled *Corrections in Ink*, these days Blakinger is perhaps most active online, where she shares her clear-eyed storytelling in real time with massive audiences on TikTok and Twitter and continues to shape coverage of prisons and jails. Naturally, she lambasted a TV news outlet that recently described her as an "addict, prostitute" in its on-screen graphics during an otherwise fascinating interview about her life and work.

"So many words to describe what I was instead of who I am," Blakinger lamented. Scribes like her can help set the record straight about how we describe the millions of people ensnared in the prison-industrial complex, and we need more of them.



recalled. She later wrote parts of her book while jogging, stopping to jot down passages on her phone.

Drugs were readily available while Blakinger was incarcerated, if she'd wanted them, whereas treatment for addiction was hard to find — or really any decent medical treatment at all. She describes struggling to get help with a period that lasted six months and how relieved she was to transfer to Taconic, where a psychiatrist and doctor finally approved the treatment for her Hepatitis C, as if she'd "won some kind of healthcare lottery." Blakinger's struggle with the lack of access to — or denial of — basic dental care for prisoners later became a focus of her reporting that embarrassed Texas officials to provide dentures to more prisoners after years of *de facto* denials.

On topics such as the use of long-term solitary

**A POIGNANT
MEMOIR
ABOUT THE
EXPERIENCES
OF FEMALE
PRISONERS.**

MASKS OFF

Continued from Page 15

long-term disabilities; make treatments and tests available and affordable to everyone; and invest in retrofitting public buildings to provide better ventilation. The failure of our government to do these things — to keep us safe — has, I believe, contributed to some of the hyper-caution that people feel a need to exercise, so let's focus our time and energy on fighting for these political victories that will advance collective well being.

The play was a sweet serenade to the courage and determination of teachers, administrators, staff and students, who worked tirelessly to wrestle a shred of normalcy out of yet another tough school year dominated by the pandemic. They were all so terribly brave, and we were all so enormously fortunate, especially the children. It was moving just to be there. I still feel grateful.

My niece, in the meantime, was phenomenal in her turn as Oliver. She was beaming afterwards, as were all the kids.

Whatever pang of guilt I felt for being maskless was overshadowed by the moment she looked out into the audience at the end of the show, searched out her people, met my eye and saw me smile, from ear to ear. I believe that she will remember that smile for a long time.

Mark Read teaches Media Studies, Art, and Utopian Possibility at New York University. He is best known as the founder of The Illuminator, an art-activist collective that founded during Occupy Wall Street that has staged hundreds of projection interventions in public spaces. He currently resides in Maine.

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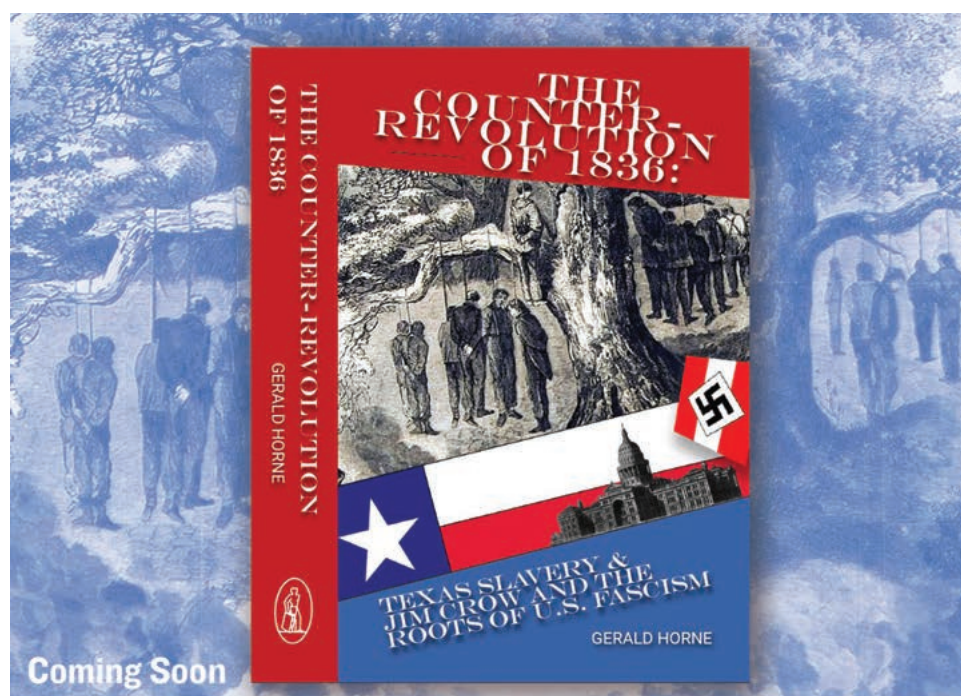
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Ever since Texas seceded from Mexico in 1836 for pro-slavery reasons, the "Lone Star State" became a bulwark of reaction. By 1845, unable to withstand pressure from abolitionism at home and abroad, Texas entered the U.S. and quickly became the right-wing anchor of the nation. By 1861, Texas was in the vanguard of secession from the U.S. again because of pro-slavery mania. By June 19th, 1865 — Juneteenth — it required the dispatching of thousands of U.S. troops to compel enslavers in Galveston to retreat from slavery, well after the "Emancipation

Proclamation" of 1863. (The rendering of "Juneteenth" in this book provides the most comprehensive account of what is today a new holiday.) Thereafter, Texas was a kingpin in imposing Jim Crow and lynchings and expropriating and liquidating Native Americans. Today, Texas threatens to be in the vanguard once again: this time in spearheading fascism. However, the lesson of this comprehensive analysis is that Repression breeds Resistance — yet one more reason why Texas could well become an anti-fascist leader nationally.

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BOOKS

A DREAM THAT NEVER DIES

Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination

BY ROBIN D.G. KELLEY, FOREWORD BY AJA

MONET

BEACON PRESS

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION WILL BE RELEASED ON

AUGUST 23, 2022

281 PAGES

By Eleanor Bader

In his new introduction to the 20th anniversary edition of *Freedom Dreams*, activist-professor-scholar Robin D.G. Kelley writes that “the catalyst for political engagement has never been misery, poverty, and oppression but the promise of constructing a new world.”

He’s right, of course, and the idea that another social order — one free of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of inequity — is possible has kept activism alive for generations. But how do we transform ourselves and our body politic?

For Kelley, this question requires an un-

WORLD BUILDERS: *Women of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California in the late 1960s*

Then there are the people Kelley calls solutionaries. “They fight water shutoffs,” he writes, “create their own alternative sources of energy (wind, solar), run freedom schools, build collective economic power and sustainability through cooperatives and time banking, and turn empty lots into urban farms to deal with food insecurity, joblessness, and community alienation.”

Pragmatic and fierce, Kelley posits solutionary activism as one tier on a ladder of options. Still, while solutionary dreams are solid, and their efforts bear evident and inspiring fruit, this is a relatively small movement.

Larger, and arguably more potent, are movements Kelley barely mentions in *Freedom Dreams*. Among them is the radical faith that has goaded many activists — from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and ‘70s to today’s Poor People’s Campaign — to take action.

Similarly, Kelley gives short shrift to con-



derstanding of the ways Black activists have kept the dream of freedom alive since enslavement, and *Freedom Dreams* describes a raft of strategies that have been employed. That said, he centers the ideas of radical activist-philosopher Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015) throughout the book, and although her outlook shifted over time, he writes that she ultimately felt that “it was time to leave old protest strategies behind and focus on creating a society that promotes self-sufficiency, ecological sustainability, human interaction, and values of cooperation, mutuality, nonviolence, equality, and love.”

The book doesn’t only promote Boggs’ form of utopianism. It also zeroes in on the myriad ways that other Black radicals have sought to build a better world. Chapters interrogate efforts to secure reparations for slavery, create new visual mediums and other art forms, pursue historical research and scholarship, and forge solidarity with freedom-fighters throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and Palestine. And while some activists have nurtured liberatory dreams by participating in communist, socialist and anarchist movements, others have never strayed from their local communities, creating coops and organizations to mentor youth, serve seniors, and feed, clothe and educate their neighbors. Still others have found community in feminism, and Kelley heralds feminist work in reimagining gender roles and opening new pathways to understand what it means to be female, male or nonbinary.

temporary electoral politics.

These are odd omissions since many people, most prominently Stacey Abrams and Raphael Warnock, have found both solace and strength in liberation theology and public service.

Criticism aside, *Freedom Dreams* remains a potent reminder that despite a flurry of retrenchments and losses, progressives can’t lose sight of the overall goal of human liberation. As poet Aja Monet writes in the book’s foreword, a number of pressing questions require attention as we set our agendas: “Who are we without war, poverty, violence, police, and prison? Who would we be if money wasn’t our concern? If love was our currency, how would we distribute it? How do we value the unseen?” she asks.

Freedom, she continues, is “always now.” Calling *Freedom Dreams* a prompt rather than an answer, she urges readers to imagine a more open, egalitarian world. “Freedom is not beyond our reach,” she concludes. “It is within our very hands. The capacity to dream, to cultivate and facilitate the collective as self-determined visionaries, is how we demand the alternative.”

What’s more, dreams of freedom — however construed — allow us to persist in working for, and demanding, social and economic justice. Indeed, it’s the only way to keep hope alive.

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THANK YOU!

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Billy,
I'm young. I'm queer. And I find myself wondering why so many people hate us, want to push us back in the closet, even kill us. Now that the Supreme Court has thrown out Roe v. Wade, it looks like they're coming for our rights next. Why can't straight people accept us, or at least leave us alone?

ROBIN
Jersey City

Dear Robin
There were a hundred thousand angry folks in the New York City streets this Pride Weekend, and in that outpouring is your safety, because in that anger is love. There were seven or eight big marches, and much mixing of causes. Part of our choir was in the women's march on Friday night while some of us were in the drag march, and the two marches came together on 5th Ave. The shouting defense of all genders was clear in the chanting and signs of both surging processions. Gays Against Guns (GAG) shouting for reproductive rights for women was positive intersectionality and should make you feel safer, Robin. Yes, we live in a homophobic society with a violent Supreme Court, but there is much to be thankful for, and the flood of loving anger last weekend will fan out across the landscape, taking the form of care and concern in little domestic things. And, there will be a strict guard against right-wing violence in the coming days and months and years. Take heart!

Love is strong!
REV BILLY

Rev Billy,

A close friend of mine from college is having a destination wedding in France later this summer. It's a lot of money to fly there and back. And I also think about the carbon footprint from all of the flying we'll be doing. I don't want to be a killjoy on my buddy's big day, but it seems like there ought to be a simpler way for two people to say "I do." What do you think?

LUCAS
Greenpoint

Lucas, I'm an imperfect messenger as our Stop Shopping Church makes its living flying to European arts festivals, and — irony alert — we flew and bussed to the Glasgow climate conference last November. A lot of us labor under the contradiction of defending the Earth while polluting it. But a "destination wedding" in France? — that's a rich person's thing. That's the investor class, whose leisure is paid for by the fossil economy. If its any comfort to you, while you're having fun washing dishes, eating some mushrooms and having sex back in the states, you can be sure that his self-selecting wedding list will bring his rich friends only, and that spells VERY BORING.

On a compassionate note, I wouldn't disapprove openly of your friend's rented chateau with the private airport. You don't want to be the killjoy on your college buddy's big day. The rich adorn themselves with expensive toys, big lawns and long views unblemished by working people — why? — because they are afraid of real life. And they should be afraid as the 6th Extinction accelerates. On the other hand, fuck your friend, Lucas. He's a putz.

Sincerely,
REVEREND WILLIAM "BILLY" TALEN

REVEREND BILLY TALEN 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.

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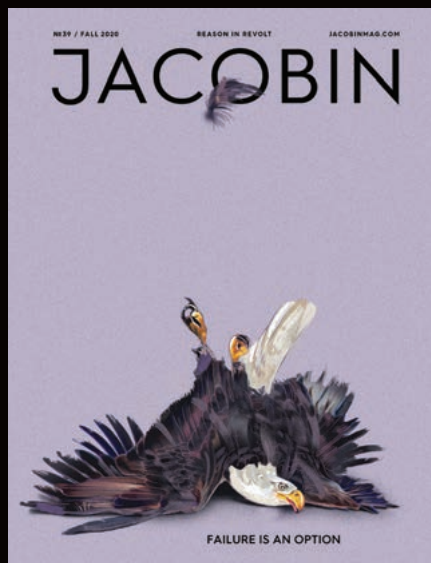
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