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INDYPENDENT

#273: AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2022



**WHAT I LEARNED
AT THE CRISIS
PREGNANCY CENTER
20-YEARS-OLD WITH A POSITIVE PREGNANCY TEST AND
THIS IS WHAT THEY TOLD ME**

The EMC Pregnancy
Center at 344 E.
149th St. in the
Bronx.

BY YASTIKA GURU — P6

OLGA FEDOROVA

**THE INDEPENDENT, INC.**

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AUG/SEP

AUG 6–SEP 18 • FREE

STREET THEATRE: "TEACHER! TEACHER!
OR PS I LOVE YOU"

Couched in satire, song and slapstick, educators teach against the background of the January 6th attempted coup, the desperate war in Ukraine, the constant threat of gun violence and the terrible mistakes of the Supreme Court. The musical also celebrates the joys of a good book report, the brilliance of a Mother's Day poem, an eloquent essay blasting climate change, and the ultimate triumph of graduation. The production will be staged with an elaborate assemblage of trap doors, giant puppets, smoke machines, masks, original choreography and a screen providing continuous moving scenery behind the actors. Music will vary in style from Bossa Nova to Hip Hop to Musical Comedy to classical Cantata. Directed by Crystal Field. 75 min. In parks, playgrounds and closed-off streets throughout the five boroughs. Visit bit.ly/3zJTWml for more info and show locations!

AUG 17 • 4PM–7PM

RALLY: RESISTANCE AND REPARATIONS
In the Spirit of Marcus Garvey! Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the first U.S. National Reparations Rally. Contact (718) 398-1766 or D12@AOL.com for more information.
RESTORATION PLAZA
1368 Harriet Tubman Blvd.

AUG 20 • 7:30PM • FREE

MOBILE CINEMA: "LOOKING FOR THE WOLF"

More than 40 years after members of a revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean documentarist Kim Mirye makes a painstaking trip across Japan to find the now-aging revolutionaries who participated in the attack. 74 minutes. If you can't make it to this screening,

check out CinéMoviil, a mobile cinema spreading revolutionary culture. Always free, always for the people.

Visit linktr.ee/cinemovilnyc.
SUNSET PARK, BKLYN

AUG 20 • 11:59PM–9AM • \$20–\$30

DANCE PARTY: GROOVY GROOVY – DJ PLEAD, THE DANCE PIT & BABY LEO B2B AKANBI
Dance all night with this young Brooklynite DJ collective that has consistently been putting together great parties marked by respectful rave culture! Akanbi will start with his ongoing series of spiritually opening sets, joined by Baby Leo. Then, New York's unsung club music hero The Dance Pit will be cooking it up with all flavors of global rhythms that are sure to expand your perspective. Be sure to check out their outstanding work on the ongoing Club Etiquette 'zine publications. Tasked with the duty of landing the spaceship is returning GG alumni DJ Plead. You can recognize his Arabian-drenched percussive & melodic experiments from miles away. Tickets via ra.co/events/1567398. Get them while you can!
Secret location TBD (see link above)
BUSHWICK, BKLYN

AUG 24 • 5PM–10PM • FREE

SUMMERSTAGE: UB40 BIGGA BAG-GARIDDIM TOUR WITH THE ORIGINAL WAILERS FEATURING AL ANDERSON, MAXI PRIEST, & BIG MOUNTAIN
Celebrating 40+ years, Grammy nominees UB40 have sold 100 million+ records, and in 2021, they released their latest: Bigga Baggariddim. Join the pop-reggae group as they play songs off the new album along with your all-time favorites, including "Red Red Wine," "(I Can't Help) Falling in Love With You" and "Food for Thought." They'll be joined by The Original Wailers featuring Al Anderson, carrying on the legacy of Bob Marley; reggae-fusion vocalist Maxi Priest and American band Big Mountain. Doors at 5; Show

at 6:30.
CENTRAL PARK
RUMSEY PLAYFIELD,
MNHTN

AUG 28 • 3PM–7PM • FREE

CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FEST: ARCHIE SHEPP AND JASON MORAN FEAT. CECILE MCLORIN SALVANT / MELISSA ALDANA / BRIA SKONBERG / PASQUALE GRASSO
Archie Shepp and Jason Moran are two avant-garde jazz musicians from different generations that nonetheless share a penchant for pushing the envelope. The bill also includes the Grammy-nominated Chilean tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana; Bria Skonberg, a Canadian jazz trumpeter and bandleader and Pasquale Grasso, a master be-bop guitarist influenced by Bud Powell and Art Tatum in a revolutionary hard-swinging way. Unmissable for anyone into experimental jazz! A City Parks Foundation event.
TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK CIRCLE
Ave. B & 7th St. entrance, MNHTN

AUG 30 • 6PM–7:30PM • FREE

BOOK TALK: THE WITHDRAWAL WITH NOAM CHOMSKY AND VIJAY PRASHAD
Join The New Press and The People's Forum for the launch of Noam Chomsky and Vijay Prashad's *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power*. Leading public intellectuals Chomsky and Prashad discuss the past 20 years of American imperialism, and their horrifying outcomes – disastrous interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, as well as the engineering of a new security state with unprecedented powers of surveillance and detention. This event will be livestreamed and in person. If coming to The People's Forum, please be prepared to show proof of vaccination and ID. Visit bit.ly/3vOrWMV to RSVP.
VIOLETA PARRA STAGE
320 West 37th St., MNHTN

OPENS SEP 20 • \$15

FILM: RIOTSVILLE, USA
In the wake of the mid-1960s urban ri-

PUBLIC ART: *The cast of "Teacher!, Teacher! or P.S. I Love You" which is being staged outdoors in city parks on Saturdays and Sundays through Sept. 18.*

ots, LBJ tasked the Kerner Commission with studying their causes, and among their findings: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one white. Separate and unequal." The commission recommended that the U.S. aggressively address income inequality and institutional racism. The government instead used federal funds to militarize local police forces. "Riotsvilles" were ersatz "towns" constructed by the military to train police in riot control tactics. Sierra Pettengill reveals stupefying archival footage featuring soldiers playing both the rioters and police. 91 min, USA.
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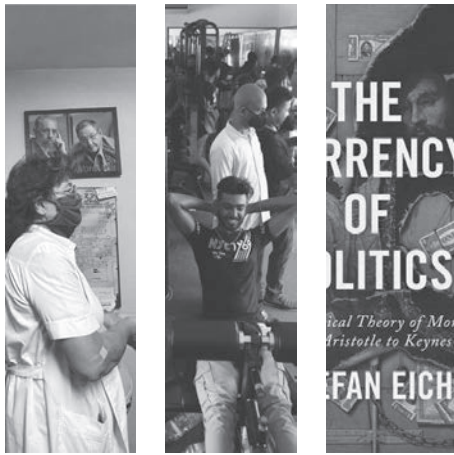
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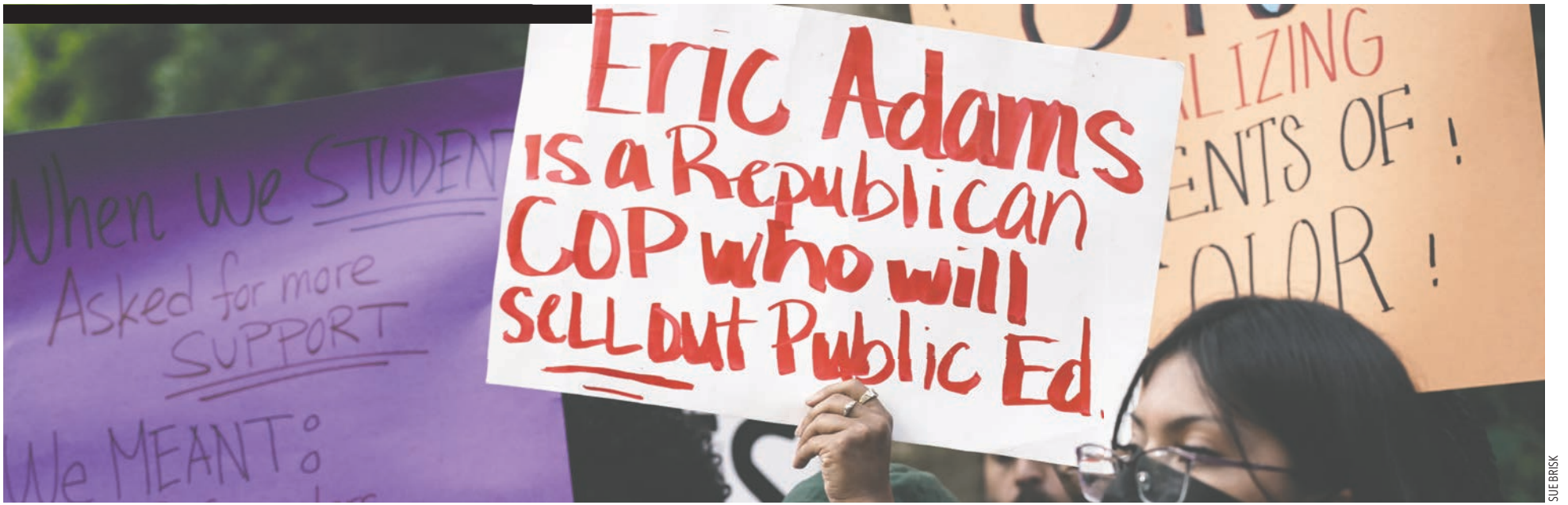
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NYC SCHOOL BUDGETS IN LIMBO

APPEALS COURT REINSTATES \$469 MILLION IN SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS UNTIL AT LEAST AUGUST 29

BY MOLLY MORROW

Less than a month before New York City schools are scheduled to open, administrators still don't know what their budgets will be. In June, the City Council passed an education budget for the 2023 school year that cut at least \$215 million from 2022 levels. On July 18, two parents and two teachers sued to block the cuts, arguing that the budget approval was illegal because the city's school board, the Panel for Education Policy (PEP), had not voted on it before the council did. On Aug. 5, State Supreme Court Judge Lyle Frank ordered the City Council to reconsider the 2023 education budget, but on Aug. 9, the city appealed the Aug. 5 ruling, reinstating the original budget cuts until the appeal is heard on Aug. 29.

City schools Chancellor David C. Banks got around the PEP voting requirement by issuing an "emergency declaration" on May 31. Laura D. Barbieri, a lawyer representing the four plaintiffs, argues that "no emergency justified the chancellor's ignoring the proper procedure."

Estimates of how much the education budget was cut vary widely. There are several sources of funding, and the biggest losses have come from those based on enrollment and attendance, which shrank during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Eric Adams' office puts the figure at \$215 million. City Comptroller Brad Lander has said it's \$469 million. Kaliris Salas-Ramirez, the Manhattan representative on the PEP, says the cuts amount to approximately \$1.42 billion.

Judge Frank's ruling used Comptroller Lander's numbers: His order requires the city to restore \$469 million to the education budget. If it fails to do that, the budget will revert to last year's numbers. With Mayor Adams' appeal, this requirement is on hold, and the budget has reverted to its original numbers.

The cuts provoked protests before the council approved the city budget June 13, and they have continued since then. Protesters at a town hall on public safety held by Mayor Adams in Harlem on July 11 were removed by security guards. Matt Gonzales says he was "dragged out of the room."

"Our purpose in attending was to make clear that when talking about public safety, we need to talk about public education," Gonzales, a policy analyst, says. "We wanted to confront Mayor Adams publicly, as he is the only person who can restore the budget."

On July 13, 41 councilmembers, many of whom had voted to approve the budget, signed a letter asking the Adams administration to restore the education budget. Several attended a rally on the steps of Tweed Hall, the Department of Education's Manhattan offices, on July 18.

The cuts forced many city schools to consider laying off staff and eliminating extracurricular activities and entire departments. P.S. 241 STEM Institute of Manhattan, a Harlem elementary school, is set to lose over \$400,000. It already lacked a physical-education teacher and an assistant principal, and was prepared to lose arts and technology programs.

"There were a lot of teary-eyed students when I told them I wouldn't be their teacher next year, and that they wouldn't have a music program at all," says Paul Trust, a music teacher at P.S. 39 in Park Slope who is one of the four plaintiffs in the suit. "Music is essential to what makes us human.

To sever that, what do we become?"

"Schools are laying off arts teachers and music teachers, but those are precisely the way to reintegrate students back into school and cultivate a love of learning," says Queens public-school teacher Amanda Vender.

Though activists initially celebrated the lawsuit win, reverting back to the initial budget until the appeal is heard means that, with school beginning on September 8, principals will likely have to make hiring and budgeting decisions without knowing which budget they will operate under, and many teachers will remain unsure if they'll have a job.

AMBITIOUS VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This situation has led teacher and parent activists to question the city's commitment to public education. More than just restoring the budget, they want far-reaching improvements to the public-education system. "I don't just want to restore the cuts. I want to invest more," says Kaliris Salas-Ramirez.

She says the city has the money to fund public education, in the form of leftover federal stimulus money, its general reserves, and its \$1.95 billion Rainy Day Fund.

One of the major reforms many teacher and parent activists support is smaller classes. In June, the state Legislature passed a bill requiring the city to limit class sizes to 20 students in kindergarten through third grade, 23 in grades 4-8, and 25 in high school. Governor Kathy Hochul, however, has not yet signed the bill; she has until Dec. 31.

Leonie Haimson, executive director of the nonprofit Class Size Matters, says the bill would provide "a huge opportunity for New York City children to be known by their teachers, and for their teachers to provide them the academic and emotional support they need."

"I saw in the pandemic what a difference it made when we had 10 students in the classroom," says Amanda Vender, who also has two children in city public schools. "You can meet students where they are and get to know them in a way you cannot otherwise."

Salas-Ramirez, a medical professor at City University of New York whose field is behavioral development, says schools should be based on an "enrichment model" — such as "problem-based learning, hands-on learning" —

rather than a testing-based model, and "this should be supported schoolwide, not just for the Gifted and Talented program."

Aixa Rodriguez, an English Language Learner middle-school teacher in the Bronx, would roll back the city's moves toward smaller schools. If smaller schools were consolidated into larger ones, she says, they would have the staff to provide a full suite of services and non-core classes, "something for everyone."

Vender, an English as a New Language teacher, criticizes the lottery system, in which admission to many middle and high schools is based on random selection. She believes it increases segregation, because many children of immigrants are shut out if they move into their district after the lottery. She advocates the "controlled choice" system adopted by District 15 in Brooklyn, in which families rank which schools they want their children to attend, but an algorithm is used to make sure the schools reflect the district's demographics.

Many activists argue that the Adams administration's reluctance to restore the cuts is a sign of its intention to boost enrollment in charter schools, and believe that this is a major obstacle to achieving reform. Matt Gonzales describes Adams' plan, like that of former mayor Michael Bloomberg, as privatization by sabotage: "starving public schools of resources, causing them to fail, and then replacing them with charter schools." Salas-Ramirez believes that one tactic is to enroll a high number of students in charter schools, but move low-performing students to regular public schools immediately after the budget is finalized on Oct. 31; this leaves the charter schools highly funded, based on their September enrollments.

Applying political pressure to councilmembers paid off in gaining their commitment to restoring the cuts, says Jonathan Soto, a community organizer in the northeast Bronx, and should be continued when advocating future reform. "A few City Council members have said they would not vote to approve further cuts to education," he says. "The protests were centered around getting these elected officials' commitment to protecting education in the future."

FIGHTING FOR THEIR SCHOOLS:

Students, parents and educators rallied outside City Hall on June 13 before City Council voted to approve a \$469 million cut to the Department of Education while fully funding the NYPD.

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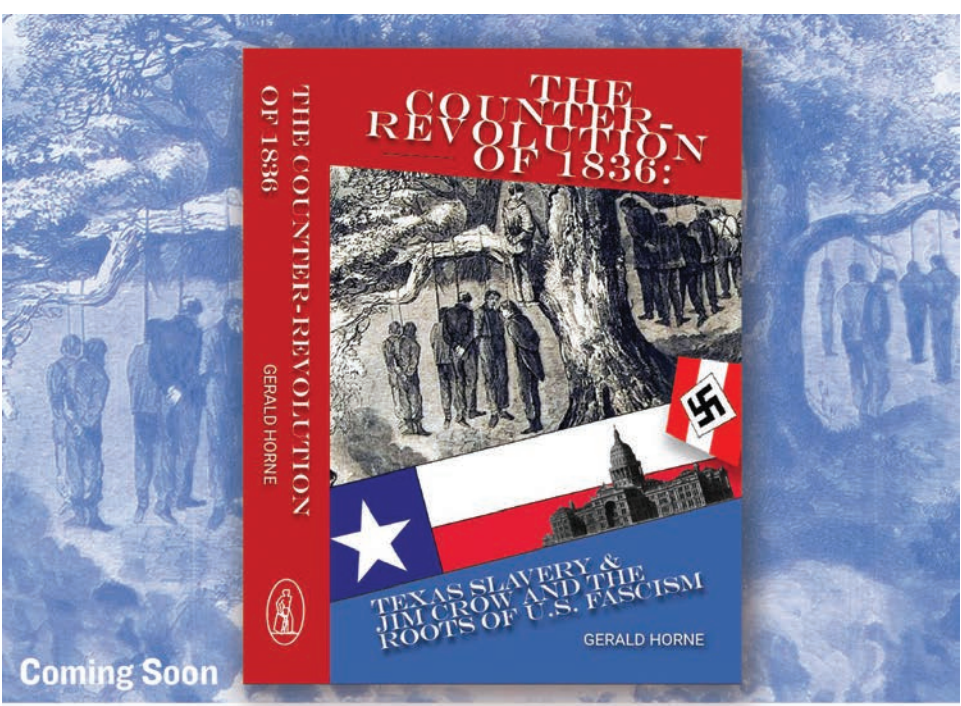
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INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS



GERALD HORNE

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.



MEDICAL MASQUERADE INSIDE NYC'S CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS

BY YASTIKA GURU

EMC Pregnancy Center is a three minute walk from Third Avenue - 149th St. station, located in “the Hub” — a dense, commercially busy area in the South Bronx. While a crowd waits for the walk sign to cross the street, one man briefly struggles as his wheel pops out of his wheelchair. By the time I go to help him, he has expressionlessly jammed the wheel back in and hurried across the street. Everyone is in a rush. Few pay heed to the clusters of street vendors selling jewelry and sunglasses. The July heatwave is especially searing on the Bronx pavements.

Walking down the East 149th St. bustle, it's hard to notice a little blue sign inviting pregnant people in.

The pregnancy center shares the building with a tattoo studio. When you enter, the walls are covered in loud calligraphy fonts and tattoo samples. Camouflaged by the designs of sample tattoo designs of roses with thorns, devil-angel sex and dominatrixes, another blue sign reads, “FREE PREGNANCY TEST. NO APPT. NECESSARY. CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELING.”

EMC Pregnancy Center is a crisis pregnancy center. A young woman in her 20s opens the door and introduces herself as Felix when I knock. After an eager welcome, a pregnancy test is administered. The Quick and Clear pregnancy test used by EMC is supplied by Heritage House '76, Inc., which claims to be “the largest supplier of Pro-Life, Pro-Abstinence, and Pro-Family materials for over 45 years.”

When two purple lines on the stick indicate pregnancy, Helix's work truly begins. “For me to even get this job, I had to watch abortion videos. Very traumatizing,” she says, almost like we're gossiping. “I do not recommend.”

Various claims are made at EMC Pregnancy Center. “The abortion could mess up your system. You might not be able to get pregnant again. It's really painful and traumatizing,” Helix says. She hands me a pamphlet that reads, “Many women have been damaged for life as a result of their legal abortion.” It also says that abortion causes “thwarted maternal instincts which may lead to child abuse or neglect later in life...” and that during a saline abortion, the baby “convulses in pain for the hour or so that it takes for the solution to do its deadly job. You then go into labor and give birth to a dead baby.” With the suction method, “your baby is torn to pieces.”

(Contrary to these claims, first-trimester abortions pose virtually no long-term risks of such problems as infertility, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage or birth defects. Experts also agree that abortion does not cause mental-health problems for women or post-abortion syndromes similar to PTSD. Medical induction abortions, which do involve going into labor to deliver a fetus (in the hospital and with medication), are generally administered if the pregnancy is after 16 weeks and are mostly for pregnancies with severe fetal abnormalities or that pose a danger to the mother.)

Framed pictures of babies smile back at me when I glance up from the pamphlet. Helix continues to explain to me how bad of a decision it is to have an abortion. “Look, it's not my job to tell you what to do, and I respect your choices. But, as a woman and a Christian, I really think you shouldn't get an abortion,” she said, assuring me that if my concerns

were financial, I needn't worry. “Most people who are abortion minded, it's because maybe they're not financially stable or they have a lot going on. ... We provide diapers. We check in on you. We give you lots of free stuff, like baby clothes.”

If EMC is well-funded, it isn't evident in the abortion prevention center's humble appearance — dim, cluttered and dusty with sparse furnishings.

Helix hands me another pamphlet as she leads me out of the office. “What They Won't Tell You at the ABORTION CLINIC...” reads the headline, followed by, “This is a tough decision you have to make, but please be mature. Only an immature person thinks of herself alone.” And so on.

Once she closes the center's door behind me, I'm offered tattoos by the people sitting outside Bronx Ink. The tattoo artists don't seem to realize where I'm coming from.

• • •

HERE'S THE CATCH — I was not and am not pregnant. Appearing to be pregnant is the only way to access these centers, so *The Independent* went undercover. A friend of a friend was pregnant, and luckily, the crisis centers' employees don't follow you into the bathroom when you're extracting a urine sample from your handbag.

Even in New York state, where abortion was fully protected as a constitutional right in 2019, there are more “crisis” centers than actual abortion clinics. The EMC pregnancy center was founded in 1985 by Christopher Slattery, a former advertising executive who switched careers after talking a 15-year-old girl from Crown Heights out of getting an abortion. The group has run 20 clinics across the city over the years.

EMC does employ a licensed medical professional, a nurse and a trained ultrasound tech, Slattery told *Brooklyn Paper* in an interview, which he says proves his operation is not a “fake clinic.” Like many other crisis centers, Slattery intentionally sites his in close proximity to abortion clinics; the Downtown Brooklyn location is in the same building as a Planned Parenthood.

Over the years, a slew of lawsuits and fines have been filed against Slattery, most prominently by a succession of attorneys general of New York, including Letitia James in 2021.

The openings and closures of crisis pregnancy centers are tracked nationally by rhispregnancycentermap.com. In 2020, the site counted more than 2,500 centers across every state — at least three for each remaining abortion clinic. With the overturning of *Roe*, there have been countrywide reports of CPCs being overwhelmed by an influx of new patients with no other options. A rising percentage offer ultrasounds, even if staff disguised as medical personnel might not actually be authorized to perform them.

State attorneys general have mostly declined to go after CPCs that mislead women. Because most centers are not licensed as medical facilities, they are generally exempt from state and federal laws on patient privacy and medical ethics.



VIA GREGG PHOTO

• • •

IN ADDITION TO EMC PREGNANCY CENTER, I visited two other crisis pregnancy centers. One was Avail NYC, which goes out of its way to appear non-religious and non-political. Their website says, “We decided to ditch the labels of political rhetoric and all the associations they carry. We’re committed to client care. You have options, and we’re here to help you find one you feel confident about. No politics.” Their center is located a half-block away from Times Square on W. 45th St.

There are copies of *The New Yorker* and *National Geographic* in Avail’s waiting room, along with Stash tea bags, a hot-water dispenser and a bowl of Hershey’s candy and chocolate. The flowers on the table are hot pink and fake. When my turn came, I was escorted into another room with comfortable sofas and cushions where an employee, Chelsea, discussed my options. The trash can in the room had a positive pregnancy test in it, evidence of the one other visitor before me. Chelsea spoke to me with furrowed expressions of concern and empathy and emphasis that I had come to the right place. “This is exactly what we are here for. To sort through your values and what you want. There’s no right or wrong thing to do,” she said.

Of all the centers I contacted, Avail was the most demonstrably “neutral.” Abortion was seriously acknowledged as an option. Visitors are handed an “Ottawa Personal Decision Guide” which grids out three options — parenting, abortion and adoption — and helps you reason out the benefits costs of each choice. That being said, their stance toward any uncertainty on my part was to nudge me away from choosing to have an abortion. Chelsea described her past experiences with post-abortion support and counselling. “If people are torn up about the abortion beforehand, it’s exacerbated afterwards. If you have feelings against abortions, I would say you should lean into that, listen to it.”

“If you’re feeling worried about how things are going to be after you get an abortion, I want you to lean into that instinct,” she said. “Even if that means you disagree with your family and boyfriend. If you want to have this child, you can do it, you’ll make it work. Your family and partner are not pregnant. They don’t know what you’re going through, especially with an abortion. I want you to feel empowered to make the decision to parent. There’s ways to do it. There’s resources. We’ll help you.” What had started out as a neutral approach began to fall in-line with the notions espoused by the other centers and to feel more coercive.

“You’re obviously an ambitious person with dreams and goals. Sometimes an unexpected pregnancy and having a child can push you in a positive way. That [sense of] responsibility kicks in.”

Avail provided robust information about what the adoption process would look like, specifying that as a birth mother, one would be in full control selecting adoptive parents and setting up the parameters of the adoption and future relationship with the child.

• • •

DIFFERENT CPCs ENGAGE in different degrees of misinformation and misrepresentation. For example, Pregnancy Help on West 14th St. does not blatantly lie to its visitors or explicitly reject abortions. Instead, abortions are discussed cryptically and the only information provided is from an animated video that portrays various abortion procedures in graphic detail.

The door to Pregnancy Help is inside the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The employee I interact with, Nicole, was sweet. She sat on a chair across the table from me in a room with pink furniture and a fireplace. After we talked about my situation, she said we were going to watch a video on abortion so that I could make a fully-informed decision. She set up her phone in front of me on the coffee table and we watched it together.

The video claimed that it is possible to reverse the effects of an abortion pill and uses language such as “force the dead baby out of the woman’s uterus.” I was distressed when I heard the film’s narrator say, “the woman will often sit on a toilet as she prepares to expel the child, which she will then flush. She may even see her dead baby. If she looks carefully, she might be able to count its fingers and toes.”

Nicole emphasized repeatedly that abortion is “very serious,” no matter how easily accessible it is in New York City, and needs to be thought about very carefully. This was the main point driven home at every center, regardless of how explicitly anti-abortion they were.

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AVAIL AND PREGNANCY HELP FOLLOWED UP WITH ME via text message. Chelsea from Avail messaged me reiterating that they’re here for me, but when I told her I was leaning towards getting an abortion, she urged me to visit again and said that they could offer “financial resources” if I was stressed about not being able to afford raising a child.

Nicole from Pregnancy Help persistently texted me about when I’d visit next, how conversations with my family were going and the necessity of getting an ultrasound — it’s important to them that you hear the baby’s heartbeat.

While I didn’t give my phone number to EMC Pregnancy Center, and as such did not experience its follow-up process, EMC professed the most blatant lies.

“An abortion in the early months of pregnancy when estrogen levels are high predisposes a woman to getting breast cancer,” claims one of their pamphlets. “By the time you miss your second period, your baby’s brain is divided into three parts — one to experience emotion and understand language, one for hearing and one for seeing.”

In fact, exhaustive reviews by panels convened by the U.S. and British governments have concluded that there is no association between abortion and breast cancer. And, a fetus is essentially a ball of tissue for the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.

I also reached out to EMC centers in Brooklyn and Queens. “Hey, is this EMC?” I would ask. “I was wondering if I could stop by today... I’m pretty sure I’m pregnant and I don’t know what to do,”

When I told them I only wanted to come in for the

test and some counseling, I received a brusque response.

“Look, you can do what you want to do, but we really strongly suggest the ultrasound” said the employee of a Brooklyn EMC who on the other end of the line. “It’s critical for your health and the baby’s health.”

“What do you plan to do?” The woman on the other end of the line pushed. “Are you willing to keep the baby or are you abortion minded?”

Similar questions have continued to light up my phone. When I finished writing this article, another notification from Pregnancy Help chimed.

“Hi again Jessica! Just checking in. How are you doing today?” goes the message, with ominous cheeriness. This is the seventh message I have received from Pregnancy Help in the two weeks since I visited, despite my clarifying that I was leaning towards an abortion. I’m not sure how to respond.

DISINFO SHOP: *The EMC Pregnancy Center at 344 E. 149th St. in the Bronx.*

WHAT THEY TELL

YOU: *A text message exchange between Independent reporter Yastika “Jessica” Guru and an employee of Pregnancy Help, a crisis center in Chelsea.*



TAMMY LUNGBLAD

TIME FOR A RECKONING

THE REPUBLICANS' UNHOLY ALLIANCE OF BIG MONEY AND RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST THIS FALL

BY JOHN TARLETON

On Aug. 8, Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts announced he was ending his push for a special session of the state legislature to pass new abortion restrictions. He didn't have the votes. "It is deeply saddening that only 30 Nebraska state senators are willing to come back to Lincoln this fall in order to protect innocent life," Ricketts said in the announcement.

The Cornhusker State is a Republican bastion that Donald Trump won by 19 points in 2020. So what happened? Kansas happened.

On Aug. 2, Kansas voters rejected an anti-choice ballot initiative by a margin of 59-41 — in a state Trump won by 15 points. The measure would have repealed the right to an abortion guaranteed in the Kansas state constitution and empowered the state legislature to pass an abortion ban.

The ballot initiative was crushed by overwhelming turnout in Kansas City's affluent suburbs. It also underperformed in the deeply conservative western parts of the state. Six weeks after the Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Kansans had glimpsed the dystopian realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion, pregnant women at risk being forced to reach the brink of death before getting the care they needed, a burgeoning surveillance state to enforce such madness — and they want nothing to do with it.

The impact of the pro-choice victory in Kansas will ripple across the country in the November midterms. At the moment of one of its greatest triumphs, the conservative movement is reaping the consequences of a political alliance that for decades has been premised on trading away women's freedom to control their own bodies for political power.

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IN THE LATE 1970S, the Republican Party was hungry to overturn the New Deal order which, over the previous 40 years, had ushered in the most egalitarian period in U.S. history. This era had been marked by high taxes on the rich, a thriving (though mostly white) middle class, the advent of at least a rudimentary social welfare state and tighter regulation of big business, especially Wall Street.

This arrangement had been too politically potent for conservatives to defeat. However, surging inflation, resentment over the humiliating end to the Vietnam War and, crucially, a backlash against the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s offered them an opening.

Reactionary tropes about Cadillac-driving welfare queens, anti-family feminists and promiscuous gays played to the fears and resentments stirred by historic advances in the rights of racial minorities, women and LGBTQ+ people. The culture war was on. However, no issue would prove to be of more enduring value for driving social conservatives into the arms of the Republican Party than abortion.

What had once been an obsession of the Catholic Church was turned into a mass movement by conservative evangelical leaders such as the Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell. Where evangelicals had once take a passive attitude toward the "fallen world" of politics and shown little interest in abortion, they were now inflamed by the desire to "save the unborn" and, more broadly, roll back the social transformations of the 1960s.

In 1967, California Gov. Ronald Reagan had signed one of the most liberal pro-choice laws of that era. By the time Reagan ran for president in 1980 he was fully on board with the "pro-life" movement. "Pro-lifers" delivered their votes by the millions, and he delivered huge tax cuts for the rich, slashed government regulations on business and opened the door to devastating attacks on labor unions. This lopsided bargain has continued for decades, with country club Republicans reaping the benefits while offering rhetorical support for a movement many of them privately disdain.

In 2016, Donald Trump needed to reassure the hesitant, self-styled "values voters" in the Republican Party that he was worth their vote. Famous for being a Manhattan playboy, Trump had shown no interest in abortion during his decades of public life. But selling out women and other menstruating people to advance his own prospects was an easy choice for The Donald. He made Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, a fierce abortion foe, his running mate and released a pair of lists composed of 21 anti-choice individuals that he would draw from when nominating Supreme Court justices. Among those on Trump's lists were Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

As for the Democrats, they have trumpeted their support for Roe for decades, but have done little to act on it. The past

four Democratic presidents have had Democratic congressional majorities during their time in office but never codified Roe into law. When pressed on his inaction in 2009, President Barack Obama stated that fighting for abortion rights was not his "highest legislative priority" or, as it turned out, any priority at all.

That lethargy has continued to the present. When *Dobbs* was announced on June 24, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi read a poem and sent out a tacky fundraising email. Pelosi's top lieutenant Jim Clyburn (D-SC) called the ruling "anticlimactic," while the Biden administration was silent for days about how it would respond before being shamed by activists into speaking out.

In the aftermath of the Kansas referendum, the Democrats have begun pouring tens of millions of dollars into campaign ads defining Republican candidates as anti-abortion extremists. They have plenty of material to work with. These efforts will likely succeed in many races. If history is a guide, keeping Democrats to their pro-choice promises — such as carving out an exception to the Senate filibuster to pass a law codifying *Roe v. Wade* — will be a whole other task.

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THE EGG RELEASED EACH MONTH from an ovary is 100 millionths of a meter in diameter. Abortion rights opponents believe that the moment the egg is penetrated by a sperm cell, a new human being with a soul has been created, with rights equal to other humans and in many ways superior to those of its host. To end the newly formed zygote's existence is thus tantamount to murder and must always be opposed.

This is religious dogma. In the real world, the cruelty it requires to be fully enforced is unsustainable. If exceptions are granted, the whole ideological construct of the "pro-life" movement unravels. It took a viciously misogynistic Supreme Court ruling to make this clear. Republican candidates now find themselves in an untenable position: Defy the wishes of millions of their most implacable supporters? Or defy a clear majority of Americans on an issue that can no longer be overlooked?

May this moment mark the unraveling of the unholy alliance between big money and religious zealots that has fueled an increasingly extreme Republican Party for the past 40 years. And out of this debacle may we also see a new politics emerge that recognizes the humanity of all people.

Amen.

AN ABORTION DOCTOR'S STORY

BY MELANIE MACLENNAN

Abortion — like sex, and the pill and birth, and arthritis — is life.

My first abortion was in 1992, in my third year of medical school. I was seeing a remarkable therapist who put me in touch with a woman in Harlem who was part of a self-help group of women practicing menstrual extraction (a form of abortion that came about just before the *Roe* decision). Abortion was legal at the time but I wasn't fond of the idea of going to the hospital for one and I liked the idea of women helping women.

It took me a while to decide what to do, so I was about eight weeks along by the time we did the extraction at my apartment in the East Village. A couple of women came. One was a nurse; the rest were lay people who had all been practicing on each other — which was what self-help menstrual extraction groups did. They regularly got together several times a month, examined their own and each others' cervixes and vaginas, noted the part of the cycle they were in, extracted menses only or perhaps it was also a very early pregnancy (less than two weeks or so).

There are a lot of doctors and do-it-yourself-if-possible sorts of people in my family, so I liked this idea. My aunt drove ambulances for the socialists in England during WWII. My uncle was a doctor who did reconstructive cancer surgery in the outback of Australia. I had the pill years before I needed it because some of my friends found a doctor who would give it to us. They, all a few years older, took the risk of taking me around with them, and I went to all the marches and protests — sometimes out of state — antiwar, Earth Day and the burgeoning women's movement.

I had my second abortion at a clinic a year after the first, when I was interning in eastern North Carolina. My unintended pregnancy was causing me to fall asleep standing up while talking to the attending physicians. Finally, I had an emergency room patient who told me about the abortion clinic she had just been to. I made an appointment and made the four-hour drive each way.

After these experiences, I wanted to learn how to do an abortion. In residency in North Carolina, I learned about a doctor who was willing to teach me. Richard Manning, is on the hit list of abortion doctors to kill. He was a part of a group of OBGYNs in Knoxville. He traveled six days a week throughout the South and did abortions from Knoxville to Asheville to Charlotte to Charleston, and then Arkansas and Mississippi and then back home to Knoxville. He's in his 70s now and still doing abortions.

Dr. Manning was willing to teach me — a non OB. I went every Saturday that I wasn't on call. There is no "certification" for abortion competency. He decided that I was to watch 50 he did and then I did 50 with him behind me and then he turned me loose! Fifty abortions is more than any OBGYN resident has usually done after four years of residency.

Right before I graduated, Dr. Manning had a heart attack; he asked me to cover for him for a couple of months. I covered for him in Charleston and Charlotte and Asheville. When Dr. Manning returned, I officially became part of the schedule and ended up doing abortions with him for 12 years.

One of the first abortions I did was with a 15-year-old girl in Charlotte. One of the techs called me and

FRONT-LINE SERVICE: Dr. Melanie MacLennan performed abortions in the Deep South for 12 years before returning to New York City.

said, "I can't find the pregnancy." Her blood pressure was very high — something like 200 over 100. I plunked the ultrasound on her belly and saw that there was a full-term infant, ready to be delivered. We called the ambulance right away.

She didn't know how pregnant she was nor did she want to know. She'd been wearing a loose basketball shirt and had been playing basketball the whole time. She was raped by a family member.

I once did a nine-week abortion on a young woman who was very nervous. The woman who owned the clinic later told me that this woman was an anti-abortion protester, that she'd protested at the clinic. She also told me this woman had thrown herself down the stairs and swam into a cold pond.

In 2008, after 12 years, I stopped doing abortions. I'd been with the same group for over a decade and wanted a change. I moved back to New York, where abortion malpractice insurance is very expensive and I couldn't afford it. But I didn't think I was done performing abortions.

For the past decade or so, I've been doing addiction medicine, working mostly with homeless people and other marginalized populations in shelters, safe havens and now a public hospital. I didn't plan out a medical career for myself. I just thought that if I loved what I did, I would make enough money. Unfortunately, those days ended shortly after my medical school graduation with the advent of privatized insurance.

Since the overturning of *Roe*, people have reached out to me asking if I'd be willing to do abortions again. At the hospital where I'm working, a surgeon and an OBGYN have inquired about my experience and what I'm capable of doing. I'm also a member of various doctors groups, mostly family practice who do reproductive health and abortions and other reproductive health organizations. There are many ways to help — many doctors are stretched very thin doing abortions in the states they are licensed in, others are helping train people to do them. There are funds to help support medical providers such as Dr. Caitlin Bernard in Indiana who did an abortion on a 10-year-old rape victim and has been targeted with death threats by "pro-life" zealots. One thing I am doing is mentoring medical students that are interested in reproductive health.

You can't even see that it's an embryo until you hit 10 weeks. Before that, it's a tablespoon to two tablespoons of different colored tissues. The easiest way to do an at-home abortion is by taking a pill, but now states are regulating against that, too — and to such an extent that miscarriages are now potential crime scenes and the doctor and patient could end up in jail even if the pill is mailed to them.

Right now, communities are organizing to provide abortions for people in need who live in the near-majority of states where it is now illegal — with travel routes, medication abortion by mail where legal, etc. There are a lot of people who are organizing around this right now, and you should simply find them and hook up with them if you're interested. There's power in numbers. There is also continued and renewed interest in the long history of contraception and abortion that is sometimes, in some places, still shared knowledge — and one can go out into their garden to pick their contraception and put it in their salad!

As told to Amba Guerguerian.



COURTESY

ABORTION THROUGHOUT HISTORY

BY MOLLY MORROW

Though many believe abortion to be a modern issue set in motion by the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the desire to control one's reproductive choices, and often to terminate pregnancies, has existed across millennia. During that time legal and moral codes have ranged from highly restrictive to fully tolerant with many shades in between. In light of the Supreme Court's recent *Dobbs* decision, which has activated a variety of state bans on abortion, it is relevant to consider the wide range of attitudes toward abortion throughout history, and how those inform our beliefs today.

ANCIENT GREECE

The Pythagoreans believed human life began at the moment of conception, and the Hippocratic oath spoke against abortion out of fear of injury to the woman undergoing one. However Plato and Aristotle both supported abortion as a means of population control. Aristotle believed abortion was permissible up to 40 days for a male embryo and up to three months for a female embryo, based on what he believed to be developmental differences around when the fetus obtained a human soul. In *Politics*, he argued that the line between lawful and unlawful should be the fetus' development of sensation. However, Aristotle's theory of potentiality, which concerns the possibility of what something may become, has been interpreted by Catholic moral philosophers to support the idea that a fetus should be protected from its earliest embryonic stage because it will later develop into a full person. A similar argument is later used in the *Roe v. Wade* decision, saying that at the point of viability, the fetus' potentiality must be protected.

BIBLICAL TIMES

Neither the Old nor the New Testament deals with or mentions abortion directly. Exodus 21:22-23 says that a fine must be paid for one who injures a woman and causes a miscarriage, but if the woman is seriously injured, the guilty party should be killed. Though several biblical passages mention fetuses or the womb, no passage directly mentions abortion, and the point at which a fetus becomes a life is not clear from the biblical text.

EARLY AND MEDIEVAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

For much of the early Catholic Church's history, abortion was seen as sinful primarily when used to hide the sins of fornication or adultery, and was even deemed less serious than the sexual sins it was meant to hide. The medieval philosopher Saint Thomas Aquinas, influenced heavily by the ideas of Aristotle, said that the fetus' soul became rational only when the body was developed. Only in 1869 was the distinction between formed and unformed

fetuses no longer considered, and all abortions were explicitly condemned by the Catholic Church.

EUROPE: MIDDLE AGES TO 19TH CENTURY

During the Middle Ages, abortion was typically left to women and midwives, and was not considered a legal offense until "quickening," the time in which the fetus' movements can be felt, around 16-18 weeks into pregnancy. In 1803, abortion even before quickening became a felony, and much of Europe and North America followed suit throughout the 19th century.

NATIVE AMERICANS

Typically, Native Americans, though they had no word for "abortion," had herbal methods that served as abortifacients, and women's reproductive decisions were generally left to individual women. They used methods like black root and cedar root, but were affected by later colonial rule, which at times regulated or banned abortions. Since Native American reservations have their own laws, present-day activists have suggested that abortion services could be provided on reservations in states that now ban abortion. However, many Indigenous advocates feel that proponents of this potential option have not consulted with the Indigenous people themselves, who have long suffered from a dearth of adequate health care.

PRE-ABOLITION AMERICA

Enslaved women frequently sought to control whether they added to the labor force of their enslaver, one primary method being the termination of pregnancies through medicinal herbs. Enslaved women on cotton plantations chewed cotton root to prevent pregnancy or induce abortion. Following the abolition of slavery, Black midwives, who had previously held space in medical practices regarding women's bodies, were largely excluded from their practice by male gynecologists who considered themselves experts in their fields and who decried midwifery as unsafe and ineffective. However, these gynecologists themselves had nonconsensually experimented with a variety of procedures on enslaved Black women, causing excruciating pain and suffering.

19TH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

In the United States from approximately 1840 to 1880, abortion was socially constructed as an issue of the loss of fetal lives, prompting harsh restrictions on the procedure. This reversed the previous practice of classifying abortion before quickening as acceptable, fetuses began to be considered the same as children. The moral panic surrounding depopulation served as a basis for this sudden change: In the United States, doctors noted the high prevalence of abortion procedures in upper-middle class white, Protestant women, and the high birth rates in immi-



grant communities. Wishing to counteract this trend, doctors not only cried out for the criminalization of abortion, but called on lawmakers and religious leaders to declaim the immorality of the procedure.

20TH-CENTURY SWEDEN

In Sweden, the topic of abortion was socially constructed in the opposite manner: fear of abortion was centered around the maternal health risks of the procedure, rather than the loss of fetal lives, as in the United States. As such, Sweden focused on promoting safe, legal abortions. Sweden, too, invoked nativist claims, but instead cited fear of the depopulation of the working class. If this population's birth rate fell significantly, immigrants would rush in to fill the jobs needed to sustain the labor force. However, Sweden's construction of the problem relied on the notion that should abortion be legalized, white working-class women would be free from the burden of many children and thus able to enter the workforce, essentially keeping minority groups out of the workforce and guaranteeing opportunities for the white working class.

20TH-CENTURY EUROPE

Notably, the Soviet Union in 1920 legalized abortions during the first trimester to give women equal status in society, but recriminalized the procedure under Stalin in 1936.

This restriction was repealed in 1955, and other socialist countries followed the Soviets' lead. In the 1960s and 1970s, European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France enacted legislation permitting abortion, typically for pregnancies within the first trimester.

MID-20TH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

Support for abortion rights could be found in unlikely places pre-*Roe v. Wade*. In 1967, California Gov. Ronald Reagan signed a bill into law that permitted abortion until 20 weeks of pregnancy for a variety of reasons including rape, incest, and the physical or mental health of the mother, a liberal law at the time. Evangelical leadership did not formally oppose abortion until the late 1970s, with Catholics leading the fight against abortion until then. Abortion only became a prominent political issue for evangelicals when conservative political activist Paul Weyrich used abortion to inspire grassroots evangelical involvement in politics. By the time Reagan became president in 1981, "pro-life" voters had become a key constituency in the party that could not be ignored.

HUMAN RIGHTS ARGUMENTS

Notable is the shifting rhetoric surrounding abortion. According to a Guttmacher Institute article on recent changes to abortion law, the recent expansion of abortion worldwide "has occurred against a backdrop of human rights advocacy," in which the argument for women's rights is at the forefront. Findings suggest that there is an irreversible trend toward more liberal perspectives on abortion internationally, in particular due to the use of human rights-based arguments that posit that women should have control over their bodies. The U.N. has remained neutral in the debate over whether abortion should be legalized, effectively leaving it to individual countries to decide. However, despite increasingly widespread support for abortion, countries such as Nicaragua and El Salvador have imposed greater restrictions on abortion.

20TH-CENTURY IRELAND

Ireland during the 20th century aimed to set itself

apart from increasingly pro-choice sentiments and in 1983 voters approved a constitutional ban on abortion. Though many Irish women traveled to obtain abortion procedures, and many likely died from miscarriages in Ireland, one famous case occurred in 1992 when a 14-year-old rape victim was not allowed an abortion and was prohibited from leaving the country to obtain one. Public backlash grew, and in 2013 abortion was permitted in cases of protecting the mother's health. Eventually, in 2018, the constitution was re-amended to allow abortions through the first trimester.

U.S. TODAY

The Supreme Court's June 24 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* took away the constitutional right to an abortion that had been protected in the United States since 1973. It left the regulation of abortion up to the states, many of which have since passed legislation restricting or banning abortion. Anti-abortion activists and some leading Republicans have spoken openly about passing a nationwide abortion ban the next time the GOP controls the White House and both houses of Congress, which could be as soon as 2025. Meanwhile places like Illinois, surrounded by states with abortion restrictions in place, will likely become sanctuary states for those seeking abortions. Activists and lawmakers are attempting to develop interventions and legislation that will protect women's right to abortions.



GREEN TIDE RISING IN LATIN AMERICA

U.S. HAS MUCH TO LEARN FROM NEW FEMINIST MOVEMENTS THAT SPURRED ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA AND MEXICO TO DUMP TRADITIONAL ABORTION LAWS

BY LAURA CARLSEN

Latin Americans looked on in shock as the Trump-loaded U.S. Supreme Court in June stripped women of a basic right that they had taken for granted for decades. Since 1973, women in the United States could choose to terminate a pregnancy, while in Latin American countries, women suffered clandestine abortions and imprisonment for deciding if and when to enter motherhood. Now powerful women's movements in Mexico, Argentina and Colombia have won access to the right to choose, just as women in half the U.S. states are on the verge of losing it.

Mexico's Supreme Court unanimously declared it unconstitutional to penalize abortion on Sept. 7, 2021. The decision, centered on a woman's autonomy, affirmed that criminalization violates the sexual, reproductive and human rights of women and discriminates against "women and persons with the capacity to become pregnant." Tens of thousands of Mexican women poured into the streets to celebrate the decision.

"It is really fundamental in concrete terms that in this country no woman can be imprisoned unjustly for exercising her right to choose," Karla Micheel Salas, a Mexican feminist lawyer-activist, told me.

THE GREEN TIDE

Mexico's victory was the result of decades of feminist grassroots organizing and strategic litigation. It also received a gust of wind in its sails from the Argentine women's victory in December 2020, when congress passed a law allowing abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. What became known as "the green tide" — after the green bandanas worn by women in Argentina to symbolize life — fueled movements throughout the hemisphere.

The green tide and previous movements broke down social taboos against talking about abortion and mobilized people to defend their rights. The change at the community level happened silently, as a reality that had been kept hidden by associations of sin and personal shame was placed in the public sphere.

Women in Mexico first had to build a movement that worked on three main fronts: pressuring the state to guarantee the right to abortion as the domain of a woman's choice; educating and galvanizing public opinion in favor of women's rights; and creating networks to accompany women who decided to abort, when it had to be done clandestinely and under threat of prosecution. These strategies were carried out simultaneously, and all faced opposition from the right wing and from the state that put the women involved at great risk.

The bravery and perseverance of women activists enabled

the green tide to advance. Colombia legalized abortion in February 2022, freeing more millions of women and their families to make independent reproductive decisions. The next showdown could be in Honduras, which has among the most draconian anti-abortion laws in the region, rammed through by the government of former president Juan Orlando Hernandez, now indicted for drug trafficking in the U.S. The new progressive president, Xiomara Castro, has promised feminist allies to support efforts to eliminate the constitutional ban on abortions to at least allow it in cases where there is a risk to the pregnant woman or girl's life or health, the fetus is not viable, or the pregnancy is a result of sexual violence. Chile is also in line, as the right to abortion is included in the proposed constitution that will go before voters on Sept. 4.

BACKLASH

But the U.S. Supreme Court decision has once again proven that progress in women's freedom and rights are always vulnerable to reverses. Latin American countries face a powerful Catholic Church hierarchy and Christian fundamentalist movements that invest enormous resources in restricting women's rights. Governments maintained the prohibition on abortion even as majority public opinion and international human-rights standards evolved. Several countries, notably Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, have complete bans on abortions in all circumstances. Recent health research estimates that as many as a quarter of pregnancies result in miscarriage in the first trimester, which means that miscarriages too are subject to criminal investigations and punishment.

The legacy of Catholic colonialism and the reality of neo-colonialism form major barriers in the fight for women's reproductive rights. Control over women's bodies and reproduction was key to the colonial conquests and now to imperialist efforts to exploit scarce natural resources through extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas exploitation, monocropping and hydroelectric plants. As women lead the efforts against these projects being imposed on their lands, unwanted pregnancies and criminalization of their sexuality force them to retreat from the public sphere and severely affect their mental health. Powerful economic interests benefit from women's confinement to domestic labors, and many of those interests emanate from the United States.

Christian fundamentalism has played a role in the rise of reactionary movements in both the United States and Latin America. In recent Latin American elections, far-right candidates with explicitly anti-woman platforms supported by religious fundamentalists have gained power as their numbers rise. Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, elected in 2018 in large part because of the support of fundamentalist groups, tweeted after the Argentine legalization, "If it depends on me and my

administration, abortion will never be approved on our soil."

Experts warn that the Supreme Court ruling could fuel a backlash in Latin America and the rest of the world. Right-wing anti-abortion organizations are tightly linked and internationally funded. Many have set up "crisis pregnancy centers" throughout Latin America that offer disinformation to frightened young women facing an unwanted pregnancy. They lobby against all efforts to respect women's rights over

their own bodies. Abortion-rights organizations warn that the ruling could increase funding to these groups, and have documented that most opposition to abortion rights in Latin American countries is driven by organizations from outside the country. This encouragement of fundamentalists will also increase harassment and persecution of abortion seekers and providers.

The Supreme Court ruling is also likely to interfere with U.S. organizations abroad working for sexual and reproductive rights. The 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act has long prohibited federal funds being used for abortions abroad. The "Mexico City Policy," initiated by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, banned U.S. foreign aid from going to any non-governmental organization that provides abortion-related services. The policy was rescinded by Bill Clinton, reinstated by George W. Bush, rescinded by Barack Obama, reinstated and strengthened by Donald Trump, and rescinded again by Joseph Biden. This Democrat-Republican ping-pong game has wreaked havoc with women's health services abroad and points to the need for structural guarantees for women's basic rights.

A NEW ERA OF FEMINIST SOLIDARITY

As a new phase of struggle begins in the United States, a new phase of solidarity has also begun. Feminist organizations in Mexico are working intensely with organizations in the United States to create networks to accompany women having medication abortions, using knowledge and experience they developed during decades of prohibition. The World Health Organization has long recommended medication abortion as a safe and effective method of terminating pregnancy.

"Because abortion had been restricted for so many years in Mexico, there came a moment when we in the movement had to go the other way — not betting exclusively on legislation, not just relying on the courts or that access to health services be guaranteed," explains Verónica Cruz, a pioneer in the formation of these networks in Guanajuato, one of the most conservative states in the country. "In addition to that, we began to work on the social decriminalization of abortion, woman by woman, guaranteeing every woman who needs it her right to abortion with social accompaniment. That has made a difference in Mexico and throughout Latin America, and I believe that today the United States has the opportunity to learn from this experience, to learn from the South again."

The lessons from Mexico and Latin America are that grassroots mobilization works to change laws that deny women's rights, but also that women cannot depend entirely on the patriarchal state to guarantee their rights — even though that is supposed to be the state's job. Autonomous women's organizations in Mexico made huge strides under cover in access to abortion, contributing to countless women's mental and physi-



DANIEL ROMERO

HUMAN RIGHTS VICTORY:

Women in Colombia celebrate after the country's Constitutional Court legalized abortion earlier this year.

cal health, and also preparing the ground for legalization.

This is not to say that legalization is not necessary. All women need the right to have medical backup and to talk to professionals about their decision to terminate a pregnancy. Most of all, they need the assurance that they will not be prosecuted. However, in Latin America, we have learned how to organize and how to access this right with and without the blessings of the state. The issue here is not whether to “permit” a medical procedure, it is how far the state should be allowed to intervene in women's personal lives. Mexico's decision is perhaps the clearest yet to legally and constitutionally locate the decision in the realm of women's life choices, with no legal grounds for the state to dictate one way or the other.

This is a dangerous moment for women's rights in the Americas. But women's movements have perhaps never been stronger in Latin America. In Chile, feminists mobilized nearly 2 million people on International Women's Day in 2020 and have achieved the inclusion of women's rights, including the right to abortion, in the proposed constitution. Mexico's “8M” demonstrations on the same day gathered hundreds of thousands of marchers around the country. In many countries, feminist and women's movements are the strongest autonomous grass-roots movements, challenging right-wing and supposedly progressive governments alike.

Even a chill factor from the United States will not turn back the green tide. Now the challenge is to make it global, to recognize how much strengthening or weakening restrictions on the rights of women in one country can affect their rights in another. If we can leverage the lessons learned, the organizing methods and the analysis of the threats we face, we can move forward together and have women in nations throughout the world, including the United States, filling the streets with green bandanas and the assurance that their daughters and granddaughters will experience the joy of sexual freedom and the satisfaction of choosing their own life courses.

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ERIN SHERIDAN

AGAINST DYSTOPIA

IN POST-ROE IDAHO, PRO-CHOICERS MAKE A STAND

BY ERIN SHERIDAN

In Idaho, the Supreme Court's June 24 decision allowing states to outlaw abortion set off a “trigger law” that will make abortion a felony when it goes into effect Aug. 25, unless the Idaho Supreme Court rules otherwise.

Passed in 2020, the law was designed to go into effect if the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. It sets a two-year minimum prison sentence for medical professionals who perform an abortion. The only exceptions are to save the life of a pregnant woman and in cases of rape or incest — but only if the crime was reported to police and the patient gives the doctor a copy of that report.

Two other bills passed in 2021 would bar all abortions after six weeks of pregnancy — before most women are able to confirm they're pregnant — and allow family members of a woman who's had an abortion to sue the medical providers who performed it. Planned Parenthood is challenging all three of these laws in state courts. During an Aug. 3 hearing, justices questioned conflicting language in the three laws. The court is expected to issue a ruling on whether those bans go into effect at the end of August.

Things could get worse. Politicians espousing white Christian nationalist views have won an increasing number of elected offices in Idaho. The highest ranking is Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, who was a featured speaker at the white-nationalist America First Political Action Conference in February, though affected offices range from school board positions to county commissioners to state legislators.

The Idaho Family Policy Institute, the Christian-right group that pushed the six-week abortion ban, has lobbied for more extreme legislation. Some legislators have floated ideas like banning emergency contraception and IUDs, eliminating the exceptions for rape or incest, and penalizing individuals and businesses who attempt to pay for a pregnant woman to have an abortion out of state.

That last proposal would be significant because abortion is legal in Oregon and Washington, the two states on Idaho's western border. Planned Parenthood, which operates the only current abortion clinic in eastern Oregon, has opened a clinic in Ontario, Ore., a border town of 11,000 people where many Idahoans al-

GETTING NOISY IN BOISE: Hundreds of pro-choicers march on the state capitol in Boise where Republican legislators are weighing increasingly extreme anti-abortion laws.

ready go to buy legal cannabis. It's about an hour from Boise. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that the number of Idahoans seeking abortions in Washington will more than quadruple.

Even before the Supreme Court ruling, there were only three known abortion providers in the Boise area: one private obstetrician/gynecologist and two Planned Parenthood clinics, one in Boise (which closed at the end of May) and one in the

adjacent city of Meridian. Planned Parenthood has another clinic in Twin Falls that provides the abortion pill through 11 weeks.

Idaho previously enacted numerous restrictions on abortion. A 2008 law requires women seeing abortions to receive state-directed counseling designed to discourage them from having one and then wait 24 hours, and girls under 18 must have consent from a parent unless they can persuade a judge to let them bypass that. The state also has numerous regulations that use the pretext of safety to create obstacles to abortion, such as requiring all second-trimester abortions to be performed in a hospital.

I am new to Idaho, and I was born over two decades after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision held that state laws against abortion were unconstitutional. I did not grow up hearing the horrific stories about women having to choose between harming their bodies and risking their lives in back-alley abortions or carrying their rapists' babies to term or giving up talent and careers to raise children against their will. I've always had a certain amount of freedom of movement, the expectation that my body is my own, and that I can pursue whatever I set my mind to.

Idaho became notorious as a haven for white supremacists when the Aryan Nations had a compound outside Coeur D'Alene in the 1990s. That element of extremism still exists here and is growing rapidly with an influx of out-of-state money and right-wingers leaving liberal cities for Idaho's increasingly extremist politics.

But since Justice Samuel Alito's draft opinion was leaked in May, I have seen people across Idaho rally for abortion rights in ways I have not seen since moving here in 2021. In May, an estimated 5,000 people rallied outside the statehouse in Boise, forming an ocean of demonstrators in the city's downtown. State Rep. Lauren Necochea (D-Boise) recalled her great-grandmother dying at St. Luke's Hospital in Boise after trying to abort a pregnancy during her abusive second marriage.

“You can pry my IUD out of my cold, dead uterus,” Rep. Necochea told the crowd.

CUBA JOURNEY

A SOCIETY ROOTED IN SOLIDARITY FEELS MORE HUMAN

STORY & PHOTOS BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN

HAVANA—One evening I looked out my window at the treetops in the lush courtyard below. A middle-aged woman and man tried to pick one of the few ripe fruits in their towering mango tree. One of them used a long pole with a hook at the end while the other guided them. The spotter's perspective wasn't very good and they gave up after failing to snag a fruit. I had the perfect vantage point and should have called out. They would have welcomed the help. I didn't want to bother strangers. In hindsight I felt guilty. In Cuba, holding back something that could help others feels like a sin.

Life in Cuba is the inverse of the United States in many ways. Resources are scarce but spread relatively evenly among the country's 11 million people; in the U.S. a wealthy minority enjoys lives of great luxury while tens of millions of people are one misfortune from financial and social ruin. In Cuba, there is only one political party and its representatives in parliament choose the president, but the people get to vote on national referendums. In the U.S. the people choose their leaders, but don't get to vote on any specific laws or changes. In Cuba, pimps are prosecuted more than sex workers; in the U.S., sex workers are still the ones targeted for arrest and punishment more than pimps. "In the United States, people give when they have something extra; In Cuba, you give what you have," said Carmen, one of our group leaders.

One afternoon, I was sitting in the little plaza in front of the community center where our group stayed. When a man with one arm in a brace and a lopsided gait walked by pushing a wooden cart that couldn't make it over one of the uneven cobblestones. I helped him lift the cart and upon returning to my bench, a man who had been facing away, standing on the edge of the square under the shade of a tree and smoking a cigarette, turned to me and said, *Disculpa, no lo ví*, "I'm sorry, I didn't see him." As if it were everyone's duty to help the man with the cart. When the cart-pusher stalled again, another man walked up and helped him across the street. (My face got hot with anger as I thought of NYC — a homeless man my boyfriend once knew spoke of angry people who beat on him and his friends, spit on them and set them on fire.)

Cuban solidarity runs strong. People greet you with open arms. I've never heard the phrase "you're family" more in such a short period. Once, I was crying against the wall of a house and a woman came out and gave me a hug. Another time, I walked into a neighborhood library and the librarian greeted me with such warmth and generosity of knowledge that I was overwhelmed (in a good way). She teared up when it was time to say goodbye.

Despite the deprivation people experience, crime is sparse. I have traveled widely and Havana is the only city I've been to where, as a woman, going out alone at night didn't feel threatening.

During our delegation's visit, there was a gas leak at a hotel in Old Havana that was closed for repairs. Forty-three workers (including a couple of their children) died. The country went into three days of national mourning and people were glued to the news as the body count grew. Some clubs and bars hosted musical performances, but most didn't. We went to one that refrained. The energy was somber and almost no one was there except for the bar staff. A friend asked one of the workers how he was; *triste*, he responded. My friend asked why, and he said, "Well, because of the explosion," as if it were a total given. In the United States, mass shootings and other large-scale tragedies hit us so rapidly there's little time to mourn or feel anything at all.

Despite the shortcomings of Cuban socialism (many of which are inextricably linked to the U.S. blockade), the people still embody the system's communal values. Cubans focus on the future of the whole far more than the future of the individual. During my first subway ride after I returned to New York, I got worn out by hearing so many people talking about themselves.

In the midst of public health and climate crises, now seems like a good time to take a few pointers from Cuba. Its Latin American School of Medicine has provided free training in community-based medicine to tens of thousands of doctors from poor countries around the world.

The government gives out cigarettes to its people and Cuban doctors have created a vaccine for lung cancer. It has also become a global leader in organic agriculture since the fall of the Soviet Union cost it access to imported farm machinery; agricultural projects that damage the environment are prohibited.

"Every Cuban is a gardener, even in Havana," said Yamila Perez, a scientist at the Ministry of Agriculture.

No one starves in Cuba, but given the need for mandatory rationing of basic food staples, few grow fat either. Gardens dot the capital city's rooftops and patios. Cubans are encouraged to save seeds and plant anywhere they can. The Ministry of Agriculture tells people to just go up to any unused plot of land and start farming it. In the States, there's a term for that, *guerilla gardening*, because it is illegal!

And when it comes to a woman's right to determine if and when she will have a child, reproductive rights are championed. You can go to a pharmacy and buy the morning-after pill over the counter. Abortion has been legal since 1961 and is fully accessible up to 10 weeks; late-term abortions are available but require an evaluation.

"Cuba has problems, but the whole world has problems," said one man I spoke with on the Malecón, the popular esplanade that stretches along Havana's shoreline. It's hard to distinguish which problems are or are not caused by the U.S. embargo. But, corruption does exist though it's more of the kind that accompanies scarcity. For example, a Cuban friend named Rodolfo complained to me about how his brother, as a retired military officer, gets to rent out a room at one of the most desirable beaches at a very low cost.

Rodolfo would later tell me that his cousin and aunt moved to the States and made it: They have a three-story house overlooking the Hudson. But during COVID, the cousin confessed that he wished he never left Cuba. Rodolfo then frustratedly remembered that when he was visiting that cousin, he would say "hello" or wave to people as they passed by his family's porch in New Jersey and that very few neighbors gestured back.

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IF THE BEST WAY TO JUDGE A COUNTRY is by its people, Cubans know what's up. Not us. Amid their shared hardships, they have a different kind of relationship to each other that holds up a mirror to our own dehumanization.

When I returned to "the land of the free" in mid-May, I powered on my phone and read Justice Samuel Alito's draft opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The right to choose was soon to be lost. In front of me, huge, armed customs officials created a menacing presence. One of them plucked a Middle Eastern woman out of the line and literally asked her if she speaks Arabic. Then they escorted her away. I also noticed after returning that so many people feel sullen and angry here — sometimes it feels like everyone's about to explode. I felt much more freedom to be human in Cuba. I could be my true boisterous, emotional self with strangers. I remembered something my Cuban Studies professor once told me. "In Cuba, they say, 'Americans have the freedom to buy what they want, but their minds are caged. In Cuba, we only live with the bare minimum, but our minds are free.'"

I recently woke up to a link coming from a friend in a group chat: "Demolition Begins at Historic Mansion in Bedford-Stuyvesant." After the Landmarks Commission chose not to vote on protecting the 120-year-old masterpiece, a developer tore it down in hours to build luxury condos. Luxury condos. In Bed-Stuy. I thought about all the beautiful colonial-era buildings in Havana that were converted after the 1959 revolution from rich people's houses into community centers and homes for poor people.



REFLECTIONS FROM TWO JOURNALISTS WHO JOINED AN INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION TO THE ISLAND IN MAY



RESISTING THE BLOCKADE, 60 YEARS LATER

BY JULIA THOMAS

HAVANA—In the half-dark of morning on May 1, the city's wide boulevards were empty of cars and filled with the sound of footsteps. People were advancing in loosely gathered groups toward the Plaza de la Revolución, the site of mass assemblies and monumental speeches over Cuba's past 60 years. By sunrise, hundreds of thousands were gathered to celebrate International Workers Day.

The May Day march has been an annual tradition in Cuba for decades but was canceled for the past two years due to COVID-19. This year marked the first time since the pandemic began that Cubans had gathered together in such large numbers. Shockingly and in stark contrast to U.S. events attended by the president, there was little security presence; we were standing very close to President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

Looking out on the crowds of workers of all sectors (who were wearing masks, as required by the Cuban government) as they celebrated Cuba's victories in education, healthcare and vaccine development was surreal at moments and incredibly moving. Placards bore slogans like "Cuba Vive," and banners and flags waved against the backdrop of Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos' faces etched on buildings neighboring the plaza. Some march participants carried children on their shoulders; others danced as they walked, moving forward in masse through the heart of Havana.

The Cuban people have lived under more than six decades of economic sanctions by the United States, the impact of which has become increasingly severe during the pandemic; Cubans have faced severe shortages of food and basic necessities, and limited accessibility to medicine has created widespread challenges. On this day of celebration, however, people celebrated the triumphs of Cuba's socialism and protections for workers.

"We have problems as Cubans, not as workers," one woman said.

"I walked in the parade like everyone," said another man. "I just see it as a festival. It was nice to have it after not having it last year. Some people bring their kids and really enjoy it. Others don't have as much pride."

"May Day is a celebration, a party," numerous Cubans reiterated when I asked them about what the day meant to them. And yet, the day itself was also an affirmation of the living dream of the Cuban revolution, and the struggle inherent to maintaining a socialist society in a capitalist world. The reality of living under U.S. sanctions is exhausting and disruptive to Cuban people's lives.

During my nine days in Cuba as a delegate with the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, I heard Cubans from many walks of life speak about the impact of the U.S. blockade which not only makes normal trade between the U.S. and Cuba impossible but also denies access to the U.S. market to any foreign company that does business with Cuba.

"The blockade shakes my foundations," said Saulo Serrano, a campesino artist and unionist who paints the Cuban countryside and its scenery through a revolutionary lens, depicting farmers, birds, fish, roosters, in varied colors and styles. The blockade, says Serrano, affects his artistic practice down to where he gets his paper, paints and materials.

Other Cubans even responded with a sense of resignation, as if speaking of white noise, a reality that is sadly synonymous with life. For them, a change in the status quo is urgently needed. The government's response has been to experiment with a hybrid model, in the vein of other communist countries like Vietnam and China, with initiatives for private businesses and opening up the sale of private property. Increased internet access has inundated young people with U.S. pop culture which can be more enticing for them than nostalgia for the Revolution's golden era from the 1960s–1980s when it was heavily supported by the Soviet Union.

"Censorship is impossible," said Elier Ramirez Cañero, di-

rector of the Fidel Castro Ruz Center. "So, the challenge is to create critical subjects."

The Cuban government continues to exhort its people to strive for the common good.

Instead of advertisements, revolutionary slogans decorate the sides of buildings, bridges and billboards.

One moment that continues to stick with me is a walk through a Cuban community clinic. On the wall of her office, Dr. Barbara Romero pointed out a hand drawn map of the neighborhood she's served for roughly 40 years. The names of people in each household were noted on it; a drawing of Fidel Castro in uniform hung next to the map. In each room, black-and-white photographs of different revolutionary figures decorated the clinic's bright blue walls. Dr. Romero made a point of saying that she was not told to, but chose to be surrounded by the images that inspire her commitment to her work.

The doctor said that she's known generations of family members. She herself lives above her office in order to be available to patients outside of typical hours. Touring the clinic moved me to imagine what might be possible in a system where doctors are embedded as part of the community and not captive to a for-profit model of medicine.

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THE CUBAN PROJECT OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE, rooted in radical imagination, of what might be possible in a world without capitalism. Its people deserve to have a chance to exist and carry out their vision for socialism without being under the boot of the world's most powerful nation.

Nearly every problem on the island can be traced back to the U.S. embargo which was first instituted in 1962 by President Kennedy after the Cuban government nationalized the investments of U.S. corporations such as United Fruit and Texaco. The embargo originally targeted U.S.-Cuba trade relations. In 1996, the embargo went global with the passage of the Helms-Burton Act which punishes foreign companies that do business with both the U.S. and Cuba. In 2017, the Trump administration announced 243 measures to further tighten U.S. sanctions against Cuba. In his parting days, the former president (re)added the country to the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. The island's economy sustained additional damage three years later when the pandemic devastated its tourism sector.

Cubans refer to the U.S. policy as the *bloqueo*, "blockade," because it cuts off the island from much of the global economy as effectively as any direct military blockade could do. This small, broke island 90 miles from Miami poses no military threat to the United States. What it does pose is an ideological challenge. If the blockade were lifted, would Cuba's people-centered socialist programs flourish? Who else would be inspired to do the same? The U.S. government doesn't want to find out.



PARTY TIME: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans gathered in Havana's Plaza de La Revolución on May 1 to celebrate International Workers Day for the first time since the pandemic began.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT MEDICINE: A Cuban doctor greets visitors to her office in a community health center where she has worked for decades serving the same neighborhood.

MAKING MOVES: Young skateboarders hone their skills in Havana.



©KIVKEMBO/TWITTER

SRI LANKA MAKES A SPLASH BUT NOW WHAT?

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN

On July 9, thousands of Sri Lankan protesters stormed the presidential palace and sent the country's president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fleeing.

In iconic images that flashed around the world on social media, Sri Lankans were seen taking selfies on the president's canopied bed and splashing in his private swimming pool. As they wandered through the residence, Sri Lankans scrutinized the mansion's luxuries and compared the air-conditioned space to their sweltering, often dark homes plagued by months of power outages that first sent them into the streets.

The Sri Lankan uprising offered a moment of inspiration to people everywhere saddled with corrupt, out-of-touch elites intent on upholding a rigged system that had failed them (sound familiar?). How did they do it?

The Independent spoke with sources on-the-ground in Sri Lanka, who have asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal. Taking over the presidential palace, it turns out, may be the easiest challenge they will face. With a new interim president installed by parliament until 2024, there's much uncertainty about what comes next.

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THE TEARDROP-SHAPED ISLAND NATION of 22 million people just south of India has been in the throes of an economic meltdown. Beginning earlier this year, the country experienced an intense economic crisis under the Rajapaksa regime, whose policies included lifting taxes on the rich without planning other sources of revenue; making all the farmers start using organic fertilizer (literally) overnight, resulting in major crop loss; serious misuse of the country's funds and international donations; and fuel shortages that resulted in 10-12 hour per day of power outages by the time the GotaGo protests erupted.

The Rajapaksa family owns resorts in the Seychelles and Maldives islands, hotel chains in Uganda, major shares in Ugandan airlines and several properties in the United States. They ran Sri Lanka much like a family business. The clan controlled the presidency from 2005-2015 and regained power in 2019 when Gotabaya took office, appointing two of his brothers and a pair of nephews to key government posts.

Patience with the Rajapaksa family dynasty finally ran out on April 9 when demonstrations erupted across the country. Many people traveled to the capital city of Colombo to protest with an assist from the railway workers union, risking police bullets when they took to the streets. On one occasion, angry protesters beat to death a member of parliament after he shot dead a protester.

"The people do have a threshold," said Yathev, a medical student in Colombo, explaining that people from all classes were affected by the crisis. "The poor, the rich, the educated and the uneducated all went to the streets because they couldn't take it anymore. There were doctors on the streets; there were engineers on the streets; there were taxi drivers on the streets; there were fishermen on the streets... There were cops who came onto the side of the people. In the middle of the protest they would just throw away everything that they had, and they'll just start walking around with the people."

As Sri Lankans flocked to Colombo, a massive encampment called GotaGoGama (gama means village in Sinhala) formed on an ocean-side park in front of the Presidential Secretariat building and right next to Port City, an artificial city being built by China, which has 99-year lease on the property.

At its height, tens of thousands of Sri Lankans participated in the occupation village, which was reminiscent of Occupy Wall Street and the Summer 2020 encampment outside New York City Hall that called for defunding the police. It was outfitted with people's libraries, generous food donations, huge protest signs from different political factions and makeshift shelters for those sleeping outdoors.

HD and her friends organized the Gota Go Gama People's University which encouraged public discussions of various topics. "They will hold talks about politics, or poetry, literature,

SUMMER SWIM: After storming the presidential palace on July 9, Sri Lankans enjoyed a dip in the pool of their ousted leader Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

WEIGHT-AND-SEE: Sri Lankan protesters visit the workout room of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa who fled into exile.

stuff like that. But this is just one stall out of so many," she said.

A second occupation site popped up in Colombo and then towns and cities around the country followed suit. People participated in these outposts of non-violent protest all over the country. "This guy who delivered my pizza in Badulla one day told me he does pizza delivery at night. And then he spends the rest of his time at Gota Go Gama, working shifts," said HD, who told The Indy that demonstrators also established 25 Telegram groups (one for each district in Sri Lanka) that managed webs of communication among protesters around the country.

The same broad coalition of liberals, conservatives, socialists, LG-BTQ+ groups, pro and anti-military groups, Tamil separatists and others that brought down Gotabaya has since struggled with how to coalesce around a shared vision for the country's future.

"There are so many different opposing and contradicting ideas, people from all of these different ideologies in this space," HD said. "But the interesting thing has also been, how do we do it when there's so many different views? What actually tied the whole thing together?"

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ON JULY 20, the Sri Lankan parliament chose Ranil Wickremesinghe as interim president — another political elite who has ties to the Rajapaksas. It turns out the new boss is even harsher to dissidents than the old one.

When Wickremesinghe took office, he immediately cracked down on the protests. "The main protest groups declared they would vacate the occupied premises to strategize and not continue beating the same drum because the political set up has now changed," reports DW, HD's friend.

Nonetheless, the military and police attacked the unarmed protesters around midnight on the day Wickremesinghe was elected by Parliament. DW had driven by the GotaGoGama earlier that day. "Everyone was already packing and leaving. The few people there were in the process of vacating, so it was largely a display of power on Wickremesinghe's part," he said.

The new president has also benefited from the desire felt by many Sri Lankans to return to some sense of normalcy "because otherwise there's actually the possibility that people would starve and everything would completely crumble, and there are already signs of [that]," DW said, pointing out that Sri Lanka can't get funding from the World Bank, China, the United States or other world powers without the semblance of an established government.

"Wickremesinghe's election is of course undemocratic. But it is constitutional," DW wrote in a text message. "We will have to wait for a [popular] election, and on many fronts this is what is being demanded." A timeframe for the current provisional government hasn't yet been announced, although most assume that the next election will be in 2024, when Gotabaya's term would have ended.

The economic crisis has eased, as "neoliberal short-term measures" have been adopted "in order to supply fuel, extra medicine and food and so on," said P. Sri Lanka has also seen heavy monsoon rains this summer which feed the country's hydroelectric dams. Power cuts have been reduced to around an hour per day which, he says, explains why "the public is less keen on protesting like before."

What will happen to this protest movement that quickly receded into the shadows? Smaller protests, rallies and press conferences continue even as the regime asks for the public's help in tracking down individuals who participated in the July 9 takeover of the presidential palace and whose photos have been released to the media. Several activists have been arrested in "the most dodgy ways," said DW. "The ongoing protests are against such practices — and Ranil Wickremesinghe has been renamed 'Ranil Rajapaksa,' so this is definitely seen as a continuation of the same."



ERANGA JAYAWARDENA

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

The Currency of Politics: The Political Theory of Money from Aristotle to Keynes

BY STEFAN EICH
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022

The Bond King

BY MARY CHILDS
FLATIRON PRESS, 2022

Shutdown: How COVID Shook the World's Economy

BY ADAM TOOZE
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, 2021

By Bennett Baumer

Bill Gross, the investment-firm manager who pioneered the speculative bond-trading market of the 1980s and was dubbed the “Bond King” by *Fortune* magazine, once described debt as the “mighty lubricant of capitalism’s engine, allowing its pistons to accelerate at an increasing pace as financial innovation mixed with our own animal spirits produced more and more profits, more and more jobs, more and more everything.” That mighty lubricant has been cheap most of this century, but that has changed recently, if perhaps only temporarily.

The Federal Reserve Bank’s deep interventions in the 21st century’s economy have included providing a river of liquidity to shore up the banking system during the Great Recession and purchasing massive quantities of government and institutional debt through quantitative easing. It also created a low-interest-rate regime that fueled asset prices on everything from urban and suburban homes to tech stocks. We are seeing what happens when the lubricant of cheap debt runs dry: Stocks nosedive and borrowing costs rise.

Stefan Eich’s *The Currency of Politics* tracks central bank power. Central banks are charged with ensuring the functioning of capitalism, but their role has been depoliticized, thus shielding them from the “burden of democratic justification for the distributive consequences of their actions.” Quantitative easing, debt interest rates and asset-price valuations lend a technocratic air to the Federal Reserve. MAGA chuds can slap Joe Biden “I did that” stickers on gas pumps and deny the impact of Russian military aggression, Western economic sanctions, and oil-company price-gouging. Biden takes the blame for the triple-digit cost of filling up vehicles nearly the size of Sherman tanks, not the leaders of the Federal Reserve’s 12 regional banks.

Money in *The Currency of Politics* is not just legal tender exchanged for goods and services, taxes, or debt and equity, but a “political project suspended between trust and violence.” In other words, dollars are the de facto global currency, because the United States currently is the leading capitalist power that spends unfathomable money on its war machine and can dictate world economic and social relations.

Thus far the redistributive consequences of higher in-

terest rates have mainly been Wall Street bankers seeing their stock portfolios shed value and the proverbial “pain at the pump” for Main Street commuters. But there could be darker clouds on the horizon. During the 1970s inflationary period, unionized workers could shield themselves from price increases by bargaining for bigger raises — but while the COVID-19 pandemic’s labor shortages have temporarily given employees more bargaining power, wage increases have not kept pace with

political and economic ground to the Fed, although it has floated the idea of tax hikes for the wealthy, which could free up cash for large governmental investments in key job-producing sectors such as green energy.

Elements of this approach were included in the Inflation Reduction Act. A key component of inflation is fossil-fuel prices. The job market is tight, yet the country only recently fully recovered all the lost jobs from the COVID shutdown and supply and labor disruptions. If the economy produced more goods and services to meet demand, this could cool price increases.

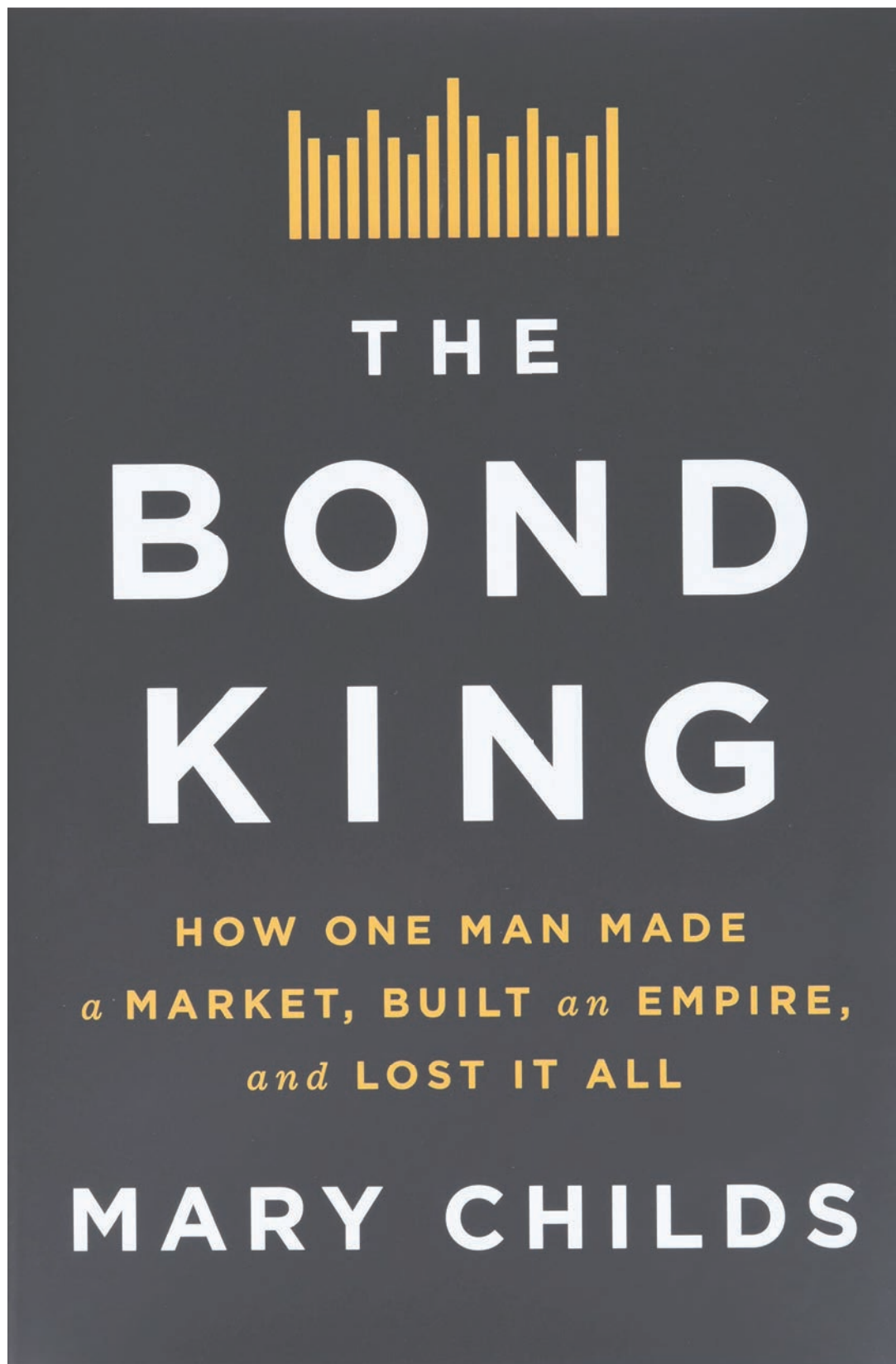
Prolific writer Adam Tooze’s *Shutdown: How COVID Shook the World’s Economy* and Eich’s *The Currency of Politics* urge progressive readers to consider money and the inner workings of capitalism. *Shutdown* documents the massive fiscal stimulus unleashed to combat the global economic downturn precipitated by COVID-19. In Tooze’s book, the lesson is that brash left-inspired spending plans filled the intellectual void created by unpopular neoliberal austerity. The left should remember that their ideas won that policy fight and were also adopted by more conservative governments around the globe.

I would like to suggest that people on the left read more economics and business media. A good place to start is Mary Child’s fantastic *The Bond King*.

The Bond King follows the rise and demise of Bill Gross, who ran what was once the world’s largest bond fund. It’s worth a peek into the paranoia, greed and double-dealing at his asset-management firm. Gross made billions trading bonds — government and corporate debt obligations — and used his firm’s market share to convince the U.S. government to intervene in mortgage and debt markets during the Great Recession. *The Bond King* puts in plain terms how large asset-management firms’ interests influenced the government and Federal Reserve.

Another crisis, climate change, threatens asset management, even as passive funds, algorithmically pegged to stock indexes, continue to pump money into fossil-fuel companies. While some pension funds have waged activist battles to compel corporations to address environmental concerns, they have borne little fruit until recently. But big asset management has a fiduciary duty to maintain their investments over a longer period. You cannot invest in Miami if it is going to be under water.

If climate change is “the greatest market failure the world has ever seen,” then we cannot count on capitalism to solve global warming, but we should demand that private capital be used to fund the transition, in tandem with sorely needed major government investments. Much of the economic establishment is still in the thrall of austerity economics. They will wield the specter of inflation and rising interest rates as an argument against the much-needed green transition and long-overdue expenditures on a more robust social safety net. The broad left will need to counter that.



inflation. Developing countries could also get walloped by rising interest rates on sovereign and private debt, dwindling dollar reserves, and currency destabilization, thus triggering cascading defaults and social upheaval like that in Sri Lanka this summer.

Eich summons a long philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Edmund Burke and F.A. Hayek versus John Maynard Keynes on the politics of money, though his book acknowledges few countervailing forces to central bank power. However, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has vowed to bring inflation down even if the blunt instrument of rising interest rates results in significant job losses. The redistributive consequences would then be in plain sight.

Is hiking interest rates the only weapon to fight price increases? The Biden administration has largely ceded po-

CONSPIRACY THEORIES, THEN & NOW

The Parallax View

DIRECTED BY ALAN J. PAKULA, 1974
102 MIN.

By Rosa Marín

A recent Reuters Institute report suggests that over 40% of Americans “actively avoid the news ... because it grinds them down or they just don’t believe it.” Who can blame them?

We’re living through a cycle of crises often referred to as “unprecedented.” However, this era of stark inequality, conspiracies and political instability has some kinship with the early 1970s, the first half of which were defined by the embarrassing retreat of American forces from Vietnam and the Watergate Scandal. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 — Arab leaders’ reprisal to U.S. support of Israel as it annexed major territories in the Yom Kippur War — triggered a worldwide recession. Major urban centers from Los Angeles to New York City were in a state of decay. There was nowhere to turn; freedom fighters around the world were being stymied and killed.

The United States was reeling from a succession of political assassinations: Malcolm X in 1965, Martin Luther King in 1968, liberal presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy barely two months later and the young Black Panther Party activist Fred Hampton in 1969. In Latin America, Che Guevara had been murdered by CIA-backed counterinsurgency forces in Bolivia in 1967, and Chilean democratic-socialist President Salvador Allende killed in a U.S.-backed military coup in 1973. That same year, the OPEC oil embargo triggered a worldwide recession.

Public trust in government was at an unprecedented low, paranoia permeated the air and despair had become “as American as apple pie” — the advertising tagline for *The Parallax View*, a pessimistic cinematic gem released in 1974. Directed by Alan J. Pakula, it starred Warren Beatty as Joe Frady, an alcoholic journalist trying to uncover the truth behind an assassination. It’s a merciless film born of a merciless time.

The film’s opening minutes unfold quickly and viscerally: It’s July 4 in Seattle, and Senator Charles Carroll, an up-and-coming politician and possible presidential hopeful, is assassinated atop the Space Needle in front of his wife, journalists and numerous bystanders, including Frady. After a chaotic scramble and chase, the alleged assailant plunges to his death, falling off the Space Needle. There is no reviving Senator Carroll, and we realize we won’t be getting many answers as to who or what was behind the assassination.

The film does an excellent job of punctuating helplessness, such as when a faceless and nameless “committee,” shrouded in sinister shadows by cinematographer Gordon Willis, tells the world that months of investigation and hearings have revealed that Senator Carroll was killed by a lone gunman. There was no “wider conspiracy.” Instead, it was an individual, now dead, with a “misguided

sense of patriotism” and a “psychotic desire for public recognition.”

This explanation isn’t enough for Frady, as he slowly uncovers that the Carroll assassination was but a minute note in the grand orchestration of the Parallax Corporation, an entity with more sway than the U.S. government. Yet the word “parallax” means that the apparent position of an object differs depending on where one is looking from. The Parallax Corporation could be an arm of the government, or vice-versa.

The film’s reality isn’t just relatable because of the existence of the simultaneously omnipresent and secretive corporation. It also expertly conveys the helplessness one individual feels in an increasingly complicated world, prophesying our era’s heightened obsession with shadowy cabals and mass murders by supposedly crazed, often white-supremacist lone gunmen. Vulnerability and isolation are amplified by the film’s wide shots, which frame Warren Beatty’s Frady against large backdrops

conspiracy theories easy for a lot of people. Late capitalism distracts from the fact that the rich and the powerful are actively conspiring against the workers of the world. Its compartmentalizing and isolating apparatuses heighten the risk of falling prey to false and predatory theories. Lone shooters are radicalized and inspired by the connections they make in the darker realms of the Internet.

In watching *The Parallax View* in 2022, with the film depicting a powerful corporate cabal secretly orchestrating political assassinations and acts of terrorism to benefit the status quo, this writer could not help but draw parallels with the far right’s obsession with conspiracy theories such as QAnon, whose followers believe Donald Trump will save the world from a satanic cabal of pedophiles that includes Democratic politicians and Hollywood actors.

The Parallax View’s blindingly brilliant ending offers no way out in the face of calamity. The film warns us not to fall into the same trap as Joe Frady, who loses himself trying to single-handedly uncover an insurmountable plot. Given the current level of demobilization on the left, it’s hard to see how we can stop large calamities like war, climate change and a looming recession. However, we can organize our buildings, our workplaces and continue showing up for our neighbors at mutual aid spaces with an eye toward the day when we can fight for broader, systemic change. It is in these smaller settings that we can foster community and prepare for whatever is coming our way. The way to a better world isn’t by checking out, it’s by turning on, tuning in and doing something about it.



PARAMOUNT PICTURES

such as dams, buildings and crowds.

While there is something unique in *The Parallax View’s* Kafkaesque approach to the labyrinthine complexities of corporations and governments, the film was part of a wider movement known as the New American Cinema that both directly and indirectly expressed dissatisfaction with the health of the body politic. It was the coalescence of various film movements, such as Italian neo-realism and the French New Wave (Nouvelle Vague), at the intersection of young American directors, such as Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, and studios willing to take a risk on them. Many of the films of the New American Cinema featured disaffected and alienated, if not outright disturbed, protagonists, as seen in films as disparate as Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate* (1967) and Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976). These films didn’t offer easy solutions, as they embodied an angst and anger that had replaced the hopes shot down by assassins or beaten by police in the late ’60s.

Pakula would go on to direct *All the President’s Men* (1976), which dramatized the *Washington Post’s* reporting of President Richard Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal. The cynicism of Joe Frady’s ’70s eventually gave way to the yuppie decadence of the ’80s and Ronald Reagan, who brought the far right to power in Washington. The world of 2022 is as confusing and complicated as it is grim, which is what makes believing in



REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Reverend Billy, Have you been following the Webb Telescope and the photos of the universe it's been taking? That's some wild shit. That telescope will also be checking out the atmospheres of planets orbiting other stars to see what's up. Do you think there's life throughout the universe like some scientists say? Or is Planet Earth the one and only?

— CHARLES

Charles, you are the one and only.

The Webb didn't find another Earth and I'm glad. If you go chasing a second Earth in the sky — then you're just a consumer looking for the next blockbuster, a thousand special effects wired to make me think that I'm not really here. No I'm in a second place that is just as real as anything I ever experienced. That's the big lie. There is no second Earth. The recovery of the first one from the corporate toxins, over-population and the rest — that is what we should see when we are FAR-SEEING.

All of us were dazzled by the night sky before the big telescopes were downloading the final frontier. The night sky as it was, back in the day when the pollution of profits wasn't smogging up the joint — we saw farther in those clear nights with our one and only miraculous telescope — the naked eye.

Sincerely,
REVEREND BILLY

• • •

Dear Billy, I've been a fan of yours for years and have attended many of your shows. However, I just recently learned you are 72 years old!

How is that possible? What fountain of youth have you discovered? My husband is 20 years younger than you, and I wish he had your vitality and stamina.

Warmly Yours,
SECRET ADMIRER

Dear Secret,
I'll read your letter to my aching back.

Nine out ten of the people who are my age have now returned to the world, spreading out across the land and sea as if they are looking for something, spinning everywhere as molecules and a million invisible things that we don't have names for. The dead come back into us, come up at us as mushrooms and down at us like falling leaves and come into us as vibrating music. John Coltrane is in our bodies with "A Love Supreme".

Then of course we live in a narco-state called Consumerism and so when some of us die we are filled with chemicals and locked in coffins. Formaldehyde is supposed to make you look younger, if a bit chalky... I wonder if I could arrange to be filled with preservatives and stuffed in a Reverend Billy pose in my pink suit, with a looping recording "Stop Shopping! Stop Shopping!" Plant me in Time Square between the Naked Cowboy and Mickey Mouse... Eternal youth!

REV BILLY

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

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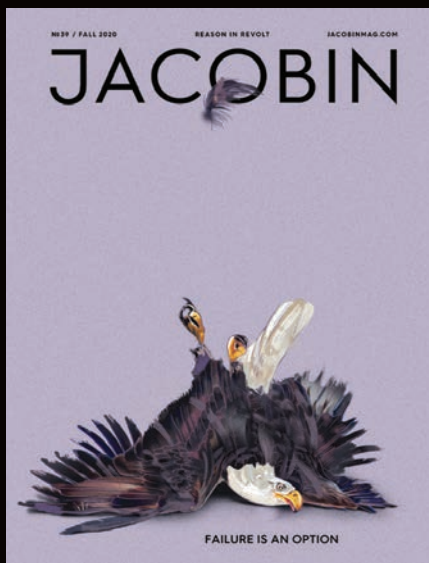
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