Hey, Leave Those Teachers Alone!

What the Corporate Takeover of the Classroom Means for NYC Educators, P6
FLOOD WALL STREET 10 FOUND NOT GUILTY
By Indypendent Staff

The climate change protesters arrested for blocking traffic last September near Wall Street were found not guilty March 3.

New York City Criminal Court Judge Robert Mandelbaum ruled that the NYD’s order to disperse violated the First Amendment.

Following the People’s Climate March, which drew upwards of 400,000 participants on September 21, several thousand people occupied low-or Broadway the following day to highlight Wall Street’s central role in financing climate destruction. At day’s end, about 100 people — and one man dressed as a polar bear — were arrested for sitting in the street at the intersection of Broadway and Wall. Ten of the arrestees subsequently decided to fight their charges in court.

AFTER THE TRIAL: Members of the Flood Wall Street 10, including Indypendent executive editor John Tarleton (bottom row, center), and their lawyers celebrate a not guilty verdict.

In his decision, Judge Robert Mandelbaum found that the NYD’s order to disperse was unlawful, and that by ordering protesters to leave the entire Wall Street area, police violated protesters’ First Amendment right to carry their message directly to its intended recipients. While Judge Mandelbaum did not accept the defendants’ attempt to make a necessity defense, he did break new ground by taking judicial notice that climate change is happening, is a serious problem, requires immediate action and is caused by human activity.

The “importance of judicial notice is that the judge accepted climate change and the need to do something about it as a fact without necessity of any evidentiary support or proof at trial,” said defense attorney Martin Stolar. “To the best of my knowledge, this is unprecedented and has significance for future litigation involving climate change.”

Stolar and fellow attorney Jonathan Wallace represented the defendants pro bono on behalf of the Mass Defense Committee of the New York City Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Go Where the Money Is</td>
<td>Nick Stolentis</td>
<td>NYC can grow its mass transit system without resorting to endless bus and subway fare hikes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Undeterred</td>
<td>Alina Mogilyanskaya</td>
<td>A White House plan to allow more than 4 million undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows has been halted by a Texas judge, but the fight’s not over yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Corporate Classroom</td>
<td>George Joseph &amp; John Tarleton</td>
<td>Today’s public school teachers face a concerted campaign to transform teaching into a low-wage job performed by a transient workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CUNY for the People</td>
<td>Alex Ellefson</td>
<td>Students and faculty are demanding that Albany meet all of its funding obligations to the City University of New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CUNY’s 1%</td>
<td>John Tarleton</td>
<td>While CUNY’s working-class students struggle to make ends meet, the university’s top administrators are pulling down hefty salaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>California Fracking</td>
<td>Jimmy Tobias</td>
<td>The momentum for a statewide fracking ban in California has increased since one was announced in New York in December.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Greece’s Left Turn</td>
<td>Stanley Aronowitz</td>
<td>After five years of austerity, Greek voters turned to the radical left Syriza party in recent elections. But can the new Greek government deliver on its promises?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Chile’s Contentious School Reform</td>
<td>Emily Achtenberg</td>
<td>Changes to the country’s deeply unequal education system have drawn criticism from both the left and the right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Red Decade</td>
<td>Gerald Meyer</td>
<td>The Great Depression, the Scottsboro Boys, the Spanish Civil War and more are covered in an exhibition on politically engaged art from 1929 to 1940.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Race, Gender &amp; Fantasy</td>
<td>Mike Newton</td>
<td>The thought of fantasy heroes as female, dark-skinned and full-figured shouldn’t be all that strange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Events Calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calendar listings of lefty book launches, movie screenings, film festivals, public forums, museum exhibitions and more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW TO GET MTA ON TRACK

By Nick Sifuentes

During the depths of the economic recession, Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature took over a quarter billion dollars from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to fill gaps in the state budget. Since then, not only have our elected leaders not restored all the missing funds, they have also continued to steal millions of dollars from dedicated funds that were supposed to go to the MTA. That lack of political support for transit has taken a toll on riders. For the five years following the financial crisis, the cost of riding the subway or bus went up at double the rate of inflation.

Commuter woes haven’t ended there. A few years ago, the MTA drastically reduced service, eliminating the V and W trains and 32 bus routes serving every corner of the city. For wealthier New Yorkers, these service reductions were just one more inconvenience in a city often filled with them. However, for residents in low-income, transit-starved neighborhoods, cutting a bus or subway also means cutting a lifeline to jobs, education and economic opportunity.

Now the MTA has announced its five-year Capital Program, $32 billion in transit projects that the entire region needs to keep our system running. Unfortunately, the plan faces a $15 billion shortfall that needs to be resolved. If our elected leaders don’t fund the full Capital Program, the New York City metropolitan area will be faced with even higher fares and worse service.

The next generation of public transportation. If we don’t make these hard choices, the alternative will be higher fares, worse service and a disproportionate burden for New Yorkers who need mass transit the most.

GO WHERE THE MONEY IS

On February 19, a coalition of transit advocacy groups, including the Riders Alliance, proposed Move NY, a plan that would fund the MTA by reducing tolls on outlying bridges in the outer boroughs and placing tolls on the four bridges leading into Manhattan’s Central Business District (CBD) below 60th Street, as well as a toll to drive into the district from the north. Those funds would be reinvested in our subways, buses, bridges and streets, making every form of transit, including car travel, better for everyone. Meanwhile, tolls on bridges that do not lead into the CBD would decrease by as much as 48 percent, and commuters who take mass transit would be exempt from any tolls to enter the CBD.

No one wants to pay tolls — or fares — to get around the city. But the status quo is not a progressive option. Choosing not to fully fund the capital plan, or to fund it through more unsupported MTA borrowing, will result in reduced service and higher fares for millions of working people throughout New York.

Charging drivers to enter the CBD and reducing tolls on other bridges would save money for some drivers, would cost more for drivers who have the most alternative options, and, most important, would create a new revenue stream to power the next generation of public transportation. If we don’t make these hard choices, the alternative will be higher fares, worse service and a disproportionate burden for New Yorkers who earn the least.

In our democracy, the only constituencies that get their needs met are those who are educated, organized and vocal. There are more than 8 million people on the subway, bus and commuter rail every day in New York. It could be the most powerful constituency in New York, and that’s why we’re organizing, neighborhood by neighborhood, subway stop by subway stop, to guarantee that transit riders have a strong voice on the issues that affect them most.

Nick Sifuentes is the deputy director of the Riders Alliance. For more, see ridersny.org.

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Nick Sifuentes

March 6, 2015

THE INDEPENDENT
By Alina Mogilyanskaya

“W

We are confident that the process will continue and you’ll eventually be able to apply,” said attorney Nicholas Katz, in Spanish, to a room of some 30 immigrants in Jackson Heights, Queens, on the evening of February 24. It was a week after a federal judge issued an injunction against the expansion of President Barack Obama’s administrative relief for immigrants, effectively grinding the rollout of the programs to a halt.

Katz and organizer Vicente Mayoroga then led the immigrants through a 28-question worksheet that would help staffers at Make the Road New York (MRNY), a community-based organization, determine their potential eligibility for immigration relief. Despite the legal limbo in which the new federal programs — which could grant more than 4 million immigrants work authorization and protection from deportation — now reside as a result of the injunction, they and immigrant rights organizers around the country are pressing ahead with preparing people to apply.

“I’d like to have a paper and not live in the dark,” said Graciela Flores, 39, after the immigration relief workshop concluded. She emigrated from Mexico 17 years ago and is working off the books to support three children, two of them U.S. citizens. “How to explain to a 7-year-old that mama goes back to Mexico because DAPA is stopped?”

In New York City, an estimated 350,000 immigrants are eligible for the two programs: DAPA, for undocumented parents of U.S. citizens or permanent resident children, and the expansion of the 2012 DACA program, for immigrants who came to the United States as children. They were challenged in a lawsuit filed by Texas and 25 other mostly red states after being announced by Obama on November 20. The plaintiffs filed in Brownsville, Texas, the district of notoriously anti-immigrant judge Andrew Hanen.

“It’s no secret that Republican governors went cherry-picking for a conservative judge who has made a name for himself on this issue,” said Daniel Auckschler, community outreach and research coordinator at MRNY. “His ruling, while very troubling, was not terribly surprising.

The Obama administration has since filed for an emergency stay of the injunction in Judge Hanen’s court, and as The Independent went to press, he had not yet ruled on it. It is widely expected that Hanen will grant the stay and that the motion, along with the administration’s appeal, will go to the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans, one of the most conservative appellate courts in the country.

The timing of the programs’ rollout will remain uncertain as the lawsuit winds its way through the courts. DAPA was slated to begin taking applications in May, and expanded DACA, which opens the 2012 program to childhood arrivals older than 30, on February 18.

It may take up to two months for the courts to make a final ruling on the stay and between four months and a year on the appeal, according to National Immigration Law Center attorney Alvaro Huerta, who worked on an amicus brief in the case.

U.S. courts have repeatedly affirmed the executive’s discretionary authority over immigration enforcement. Emphasizing this precedent, the Obama administration, immigrant rights advocates and their Democratic allies have lined up behind the message that the injunction is only a “bump in the road.”

“We want these programs to be implemented as soon as possible, because we don’t want people to be discouraged,” Huerta said. “To the extent that the injunction is having a negative effect, the community is confused and needs information on what’s going to happen next.”

The injunction does not apply to the original DACA program, which continues to take applications, or to the new enforcement guidelines that Obama paired with his DAPA and DACA announcement in November. Those directives instructed Immigration and Customs Enforcement to focus resources on deporting immigrants with certain kinds of criminal convictions and prior deportation orders, as well as new arrivals. Obama has said that even with the legal uncertainty over administrative relief, those who qualify “should be in a good place,” though enforcement data for the period since the guidelines went in effect on January 5 have not been made available.

Obama is facing a barrage of attacks over his immigration policies from GOP hardliners. Hanen’s ruling came last month amid a fierce inside-the-Beltsway scuffle over funding for the Department of Homeland Security, which congressional Republicans tried to tie to a measure that would defund the administrative relief programs.

While the GOP ultimately lost that fight, any hope for a path to citizenship for the country’s estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants continues to languish alongside a long-untouched immigration reform bill in Congress.

“We’ve always been listening to the politicians,” said Leonor Rojas, in Spanish, after the Queens immigration workshop. She immigrated to the United States from Mexico in 1991 and like her friend Graciela, is still undocumented. “The problem is they aren’t listening to us.”
THE WAR ON TEACHERS

By George Joseph & John Tarleton

When discussing how to improve public education, Governor Andrew Cuomo likes to complain about how difficult it is to fire “bad teachers” and the need to reduce teacher quality for classroom educators. He is not alone in this. The Partnership for Educational Justice, a well-funded nonprofit fronted by former CNN host Campbell Brown, is pursuing a lawsuit in a Staten Island court that seeks to scrap teacher tenure protections. Both New York City tabloids, meanwhile, never miss a chance to promote a lurid teacher sex scandal and then denounce the teachers union for protecting the right of the accused to a fair hearing.

But what if the real teaching crisis in New York is not the inability to get rid of bad teachers, but the failure to keep experienced and highly capable teachers and allow them to do their jobs? Take Michelle Baptiste. A teacher at an elementary school in Flatbush, Brooklyn, with 22 years of experience, Baptiste, 47, has watched with dismay in recent years as standardized testing has taken on an increasingly central role in her classroom. Long gone are the early years of her career when she was allowed to creatively respond to her mostly Black and Latino students’ needs and interests and teach them culturally relevant lessons.

Starting in third grade, students at Baptiste’s school are deluged with a battery of federal and state tests, periodic assessment tests, practice tests to be taken in preparation for the real tests and field tests that are carried out to help test manufacturers develop questions for future tests. In addition to preparing lesson plans and grading homework and tests, teachers are expected to log their students’ various test results into Excel spreadsheets. When Baptiste was slow to fill in a spreadsheet for a test she administered in the fall of 2012, she says her principal put a letter in her personnel file and later gave her an Unsatisfactory (or “U”) rating for the year.

Baptiste told The Independent she had been too busy meeting during after-school hours with the families of troubled children in her class — including some who did not have stable housing — to keep on schedule with entering data, which she described as “garbage.” Still, she recognizes her actions put her career in peril. “If you get too many of these letters in your file, you can be brought up on charges of incompetence and you can lose your livelihood,” said Baptiste. She has switched to teaching second grade, where students are tested less frequently.

PRINCIPALS FROM HELL

For Angela — a Brooklyn middle school teacher of more than 10 years who did not wish to be identified by her real name because she feared retaliation — work became hellish when her school’s inexperienced young principal took to berating both students and teachers in the school’s hallways for their allegedly poor performances.

“She would tell teachers they didn’t know what they were doing, and then turn to students letting them know they were going to get someone ‘better,’” Angela said. The constant abuse, she added, drove many of the school’s teachers to psychological collapse and even suicidal thoughts. She later transferred to another school.

Teacher anxiety and stress became widespread during the administration of business mogul-turned-mayor Michael Bloomberg. Principals were freed from traditional oversight by district superintendents and elevated to CEO-like status at their schools. In return for greater autonomy in budgeting and hiring, principals were expected to deliver higher standardized test scores or risk losing their jobs and having their schools closed. Utilizing high-pressure tactics against teachers became an expected practice. Yet, many principals who had come up through the teaching ranks and believed in a more collegial approach to running their schools initially balked at implementing practices that were lifted straight from the corporate world.

In 2004 Schools Chancellor Joel Klein founded the New York City Leadership Academy, which recruited ambitious young teachers who had little or no connection to traditional educational practices and trained them to be principals in the Bloomberg image. From the start, business leaders, not career educators, ran the Leadership Academy. One “instructor” at the Academy, for instance, was former General Electric CEO Jack Welch, who earned his corporate management fame by creating systems for identifying and firing the bottom 10 percent of his managers annually.

The Leadership Academy drastically reconfigured the city’s education landscape. Today, its graduates, comprising roughly one in six city principals, are widely feared by teachers as some of the most demanding and least knowable supervisors one could have the misfortune of working under. Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Schools Chancellor Carmen Farilla has modified Klein’s approach, requiring administrators to gain seven years of experience before becoming eligible to become a principal. Yet for many teachers, the damage has already been done.

“I have never met a compassionate assistant principal or an intelligent principal,” says Tanya Thurman, who spent eight years teaching in several city high schools. She quit her job last fall, exhausted by the constant emotional abuse, sexual harassment and incompetence with which unchecked administrators treated her.

“My assistant principal was absolutely disgusting. I walked in on him cornering a special education teacher in the library,” Thurman told The Independent. “He would even eye students who came into his office. I started encouraging teachers, who started coming to me, that I could be a witness for them, but as a young teacher there’s so many years, not just sexual harassment.”

Thurman now works as an editor at McGraw-Hill Education and deejays in New York’s thriving underground dance music scene. She says she has no desire to teach again.

Her departure reflects a larger trend. According to a 2014 report by the United Federation of Teachers, 32,000 teachers have left city schools to take their talents elsewhere or have exited the profession altogether since 2002.

Among mid-career teachers with six to 15 years of experience, the number of resignations per year leapt from 500 to 950 between 2008 and 2013.

“That’s a very serious loss. There’s a lot of evidence that people don’t become master teachers until after five, maybe seven years,” said Lois Weiner, a professor of education at New Jersey City University. “It’s a generation of experienced teachers who will not be serving New York City public school kids.”

To Weiner, the exodus of experienced teachers is not an accident but part of a larger drive by policymakers to transform teaching into a deskilled, low-wage job performed mostly by middle-class whites for a few years after college before moving on to other work.

“There’s a long-term commitment to alter who teaches and how long they teach,” Weiner said. “If they [policy makers] wanted teaching to be a career, they wouldn’t be attacking the pensions.”

BLEACHING THE TEACHING FORCE

Meanwhile, experienced people of color educators like Baptiste and Angela find themselves in an increasingly difficult situation. According to the New York City Department of Education, whites make up 15 percent of students and 59 percent of teachers while Blacks and Latinos make up 68 percent of students but only 34 percent of the teaching force. The skewed racial composition of...
“It is an absolute outrage that Chelsea Manning is currently languishing behind bars whilst those she helped to expose, who are potentially guilty of human rights violations, enjoy impunity.”

Erika Guevara Rosas
Americas Director
Amnesty International
30 July 2014

POLICYMAKERS ARE USING RACIST TROPES TO DISPLACE TEACHERS OF COLOR.

To create a tougher teacher evaluation process, Under Cuomo’s proposal, 50 percent of a teacher’s rating would be based on state test scores (as opposed to the current 20 percent), 35 percent would be based on a one-day visit by an “independent outside observer”) and 15 percent by a principal or assistant principals. Some version of Cuomo’s proposal could be enacted by the March 31 deadline for completing the state’s annual budget.

“People of color teachers are going to be the first ones he comes after,” Baptiste said. “It’s hard to move the needle, especially when you don’t get any funding and support.”

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PUTTING CUNY OUT OF REACH
AS STUDENT TUITION INCREASES, STATE FUNDING FALLS SHORT

By Alex Ellefson

I t was an icy February morning in Albany. Hundreds of students from New York’s public colleges streamed out of buses near the state capitol building. Some of them had woken up as early as 5 a.m. and been on the road for almost four hours in order to meet with their representatives and pass along an urgent message: that their colleges need greater investment and that the next state budget is the place to deliver it.

Queens College student Mohammed Samra said he had never seen so many students come out to Albany. The first time he made the trip was almost four years ago, after the state voted to increase tuition at New York’s public colleges by $1,500 over five years. Now, as the City University of New York (CUNY) system — which includes Queens College and 10 other senior colleges, as well as seven community colleges — and State University of New York (SUNY) schools enter the final year of the painful tuition hikes, Samra said the large turnout showed that students were feeling the pinch.

“We’re here to say: You’ve got to give us a break. Every time there’s a shortage of money in the system, you can’t reach into the students’ pockets,” he said.

CUNY was founded in 1847 as the Free Academy of the City of New York with the purpose of offering free higher education to “the children of the whole people.” It went on to provide a free college education to generations of students from working-class and immigrant families, and CUNY’s present-day student body continues to be made up of students of mostly modest means. But since tuition was introduced in 1976 the cost of attending has steadily increased, to more than $6,000 at the senior colleges and $4,500 at the community colleges for this academic year.

In 2011, Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature teamed up to pass NYSUNY 2020, a bill that allowed CUNY and SUNY, New York’s public university systems, to raise tuition by $300 per year for five years. The tuition hikes were meant to address deficits resulting from the steep budget cuts that followed the 2008 recession, which was accompanied by a surge in college enrollment. As part of the bill, the state pledged to provide consistent funding levels every year so that the extra tuition revenue would go toward reducing class sizes, increasing resources for student services and improving graduation rates.

However, before the bill passed, Cuomo stripped out a provision introduced by the legislature that would have required the state to cover increases in mandatory costs. Each year, the cost of operating CUNY rises due to rent hikes, increasing supplies and equipment expenditures, higher energy costs and mandatory step increases in pay for full-time faculty and staff. This year, Cuomo’s executive budget doesn’t allocate a penny to cover the $62.9 million in mandatory costs at CUNY’s senior colleges. The state budget process is currently in its last stages, with last-minute deals being negotiated in Albany before the March 31 deadline.

If a deal is not made to cover CUNY’s mandatory costs, the burden will once again fall on the students’ shoulders. Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents CUNY faculty and professional staff, said that the failure to cover these costs amounts to another form of state disinvestment in higher education.

“This is a really critical year because we’re coming into the last year of the SUNY 2020 program. The failure to cover inflationary costs needs to be fixed. Otherwise, we’ll just see a continuing spiral of disinvestment and students carrying more and more of the weight of paying for a college education.”

DECADES OF DECLINING SUPPORT

For decades, the state has been withdrawing its financial support for CUNY colleges and asking students to make up the difference. Since 1990, state support for CUNY’s senior colleges has declined by more than a quarter, falling from 74 to 53 percent as a proportion of total revenue. At community colleges, the state’s contribution has fallen from 36 to 25 percent. During that time, the proportion of total revenue contributed by students through tuition and fees has more than doubled.

The higher tuition rates have not provided students with greater access to full-time faculty. In 1975, the last year that CUNY offered a free education, there were 11,500 full-time faculty members teaching 250,000 students. Today enrollment is at an all-time high of about 274,000 students. Meanwhile, there are only 7,500 full-time faculty employed at CUNY, according to testimony given by CUNY Chancellor James Milliken to the state Assembly earlier this year.

CUNY relies on poorly paid, part-time adjunct faculty to teach the majority of its classes.

“A big part of the higher education experience for students is having mentorship and guidance from full-time professors,” said CUNY-City Tech student Lucas Almonte, who is also the vice chair of legislative affairs for CUNY’s University Student Senate. “A lot of CUNY students come from low-income backgrounds, immigrant backgrounds, and many of us are the first in our family to go to college. We need people to help us navigate the college experience and full-time faculty are our mentors.”

According to a survey conducted by CUNY last year, more than half of CUNY undergraduate students come from households earning less than $30,000 a year. Seventy-five percent of CUNY students are people of color and 42 percent are the first generation in their family to attend college.

However, Cuomo’s 2015-2016 executive budget cuts funding to some of the programs proven to have the greatest success at improving graduation and retention rates for low-income students.

One of these, CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), was slated by the governor to have all $1.7 million of its state funding cut. The program is now in its eighth year and provides admitted low-income community college students with additional advisement services and financial support. It has seen great successes, with graduation rates for ASAP students coming out more than three times higher than the national average for urban community colleges. More than 8,000 students have participated during these eight years, though that is only a small fraction of the student population at the city’s community colleges, which had almost 100,000 students enrolled in fall 2013.

Cuomo’s executive budget withdraws support from ASAP at a time when other liberal politicians are championing the program. President Barack Obama cited ASAP as an effective means to improve graduation rates while outlining his plan to provide free tuition for most community college students. Meanwhile, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to provide CUNY with an additional $35 million in order to expand the program over the next five years. New York City already contributes almost 90 percent of ASAP’s $17.1 million budget.

A year ago, the state Legislature restored ASAP’s state funding after Cuomo cut it from his budget. The CUNY students who traveled to Albany in February asked lawmak-
ers to reinstate it once again.

CUNY spokesperson Michael Arena also expressed hope that funding for ASAP will be restored by the legislature. He added that the governor’s budget “includes many important advancements for CUNY,” such as new funding for teacher training in early childhood education and endorsement of the New York Dream Act.

In a notable step for immigrant rights in New York, Cuomo included a Dream Act provision in his executive budget proposal that would make the state’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) available to undocumented immigrant students in New York. Many believe that his inclusion of the measure in the executive budget almost guarantees that it will pass, but considering that Albany conservatives have obstructed passage of the state Dream Act for years, it remains to be seen what the outcome of the negotiations will be.

Many students who traveled to Albany said they support the Dream Act funding. But while expanding TAP to include undocumented immigrants would be a great achievement, they also said there are many other barriers to receiving TAP that need to be lifted. In the past, the state Legislature has voted to stop making the funds available to graduate students, those who are incarcerated and those who have defaulted on federal student loans.

More important, when TAP was introduced in the 1970s, it was designed to meet the needs of traditional students who enrolled in college full-time right out of high school and either lived on campus or with their parents. The demographics at public colleges, and especially community colleges, have changed considerably since then. Many adults are returning to school after they’ve joined the workforce and some of them have families to support.

“TAP was originally designed for a different kind of student. The student of 1973 is really not the same as the student of 2015,” said Farouk Abdallah, deputy director of the New York Public Interest Group (NYPIRG), which is the state’s largest student advocacy group.

One aspect of TAP that Abdallah said increases college dropout rates is the requirement that a student be enrolled full time for the first two semesters of college. Many students fold under the pressure to work and study full time.

Pawel Rosinski, who just began taking classes at CUNY’s Borough of Manhattan Community College this year, had to enroll full time in order to qualify for TAP while studying full time.

On the first two semesters of college. Many students fold under the pressure to work and study full time.

Despite only having been enrolled in CUNY for a few weeks, Rosinski said he made the trip up to Albany this year because he believes public higher education should be free.

“Education is the first step in decreasing the economic gap between rich and poor. If people don’t have access to that, then you can’t fight income inequality,” he said. “The government should start working for its people. We should have to come here to fight for people to attend college.”

Alex Ellefson is an independent editorial fellow and a 2014 graduate of CUNY-Brooklyn College.

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Alex Ellefson is an independent editorial fellow and a 2014 graduate of CUNY-Brooklyn College.
Air pollution, meanwhile, is out of control. The county’s 10 most polluted days each year are all filled with oil-field fumes. Before Flores can say more, a man in a white truck comes by that acts as if the farmer’s going to shout and tell him how to run his farm. "There are probably a hundred wells within a mile radius of this school," says Flores, an environmental organizer based in Kern County, have become leaders in California’s anti-fracking movement. Along with groups like 350.org and Food & Water Watch, they've generated grassroots awareness of the problem and helped pass local laws restricting drilling and fracking activities and associated wastes in Kern County, especially Kern County's坐, the state's major oil producing region — discovered more than 300 illegal wastewater pits where oil producers have been dumping dirty, chemical-laced water, including methane and other volatile gases, for years. "We worry the chemicals will find their way back to the aquifers," California has to protect its water resources, he says, especially during this historic drought. This concern weighs heavily on Dave Quast, a spokesman for Energy In Action, one of the largest anti-fracking groups in the country. Their mission is to educate and organize communities to stand up to Big Oil. They've trained thousands of residents across California, and they're working on a new campaign to ban fracking at the county level, where they believe they can win. "We won because we gave people a voice that they'd never had before," says Flores. "Back in the '70s and '80s they'd go door to door and try to sell people the idea of hydraulic fracturing. Now, the number of wells has grown, and we've learned how to unitize the local community involved in the fracking process has kept pace. Such chemicals include hydrochloric acid, potassium hydroxide, ammonium chloride, carbon monoxide, and a variety of petroleum distillates. "Fracking has evoked the same anxieties that the industry tried to sell people on in the past," says Flores. "You want your children to live in a healthy environment, but they don't even know what they're exposing themselves to in the first place." The California Department of Conservation, which oversees oil and gas production, recently filed a lawsuit to stop what it called a "flagrant violation" of the state’s drilling laws. The company, which produces about 10 percent of California’s oil, said it was weighing its options, including notifying state officials and moving its operations to another location. The California Department of Conservation, which oversees oil and gas production, recently filed a lawsuit to stop what it called a "flagrant violation" of the state’s drilling laws. 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Greece has been in an economic death spiral since 2009. Saddled with huge foreign debts, it was forced by the European Union to adopt a draconian austerity program of hefty tax increases on working people and deep cuts in public spending. This has choked growth and caused the economy to contract by 25 percent. Unemployment has soared above 25 percent and more than a third of Greeks now live in poverty. For many the best chance of finding their next meal lies in picking through garbage.

Radical economist Yanis Varoufakis famously described the EU-backed austerity program as “fiscal waterboarding.” For all their troubles, the Greeks have watched their country’s debt to GDP ratio actually climb to 175 percent due to a shrinking economy.

Faced with more pointless and punishing austerity for the foreseeable future, on January 25 Greek voters revolted and swept the radical left party Syriza into power on the basis of its vow to break with the policies that brought the country to ruin. Key campaign promises included restoring the country’s minimum wage to pre-crisis levels, reversing privatizations and reviving the country’s battered health and education systems.

Winning 36 percent of the popular vote — good for two parliamentary seats short of a majority — Syriza was able to form a new government when it forged an alliance with a small right-wing populist party on the basis of a common anti-austerity platform. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras quickly named his cabinet. Foreign Affairs, Finance, Education and other major cabinet positions are firmly in the hands of the party’s intellectual leaders. Only internal security fell to Syriza’s right-wing partners, who delivered 13 parliamentary votes to bring it to power.

The rise of Syriza — the name stands for Coalition of the Radical Left — from a marginal party that garnered only 4 percent in the 2009 elections to its current commanding heights was fueled by Greece’s ongoing economic tragedy as well as by the existence of a vibrant, deeply rooted left culture that is rare today in most Western countries.

The party is made up of social movement activists, a segment of rural groups, a breakaway faction of the Greek Communist Party and a wide range of independent leftist intellectuals. For the past decade its practice has been in the social movements: in housing, against unemployment, especially among youth, and in street protests against the government’s cuts to education and health budgets.

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Syriza’s triumph was the most exciting and hopeful development on the political scene in decades. It marked a first-ever breakthrough of an avowed anti-capitalist party against Europe’s pervasive austerity regime, dictated by Germany through the troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Yet, after a tumultuous first month in power that saw its domestic approval ratings climb to 80 percent, the Syriza government found itself struggling to wrest concessions from the troika and the haughty figures of German power that stand behind these institutions: Chancellor Angela Merkel, Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

TENSE NEGOTIATIONS

When Tsipras and Varoufakis, now Greece’s Finance Minister, took office, they started out seeking a reduction in Greece’s 240 billion Euro debt ($273 billion), an end to the bailout and the austerity conditions attached to it. They also sought a four-month bridging loan that would enable the new government to pursue Keynesian policies that would stimulate the economy and begin to put people back to work. Varoufakis floated the idea of converting part of Greece’s debt into new “growth bonds” to be paid off from the increased revenues that would materialize once the Greek economy began growing again. The latter proposal won approving comments from many progressive economists. However, when Greece’s new leaders visited European capitals in February, they received a few feeble words of sympathy from French and Italian officials but otherwise ran into a wall of opposition from European governments.

Faced with an end-of-the-month deadline for making a key debt payment and the prospect of a bank run if Greece was kicked out of the 19-nation Eurozone, on February 20 the Syriza government blinked. It received a four-month extension of the bailout based on the same terms accepted by the previous Greek government.

The Greek government was also required by its creditors to spell out how it would resolve the country’s debt crisis. The long list of reform measures put forward by Varoufakis on February 23 has been derided by many on the Left as a further surrender. However, with the exception of the promise not to roll back completed privatizations, this is a general statement for efficiency, anti-corruption and fiscal responsibility. Syriza has sought all along to improve tax collection from the wealthy in Greece, who have traditionally paid little or nothing in taxes. An attack on corruption — much of it perpetuated by Greece’s traditional political parties — is long overdue.

To say that Syriza has caved shows that while many of Syriza’s critics on the Left are well-meaning and have lofty ideals, they lack a serious understanding of how power works in the real world and what negotiations entail. This is an opening round in a much longer drama that will unfold over the coming months.

There are still three potential outcomes for the Greeks: capitulation, partial victory within the framework of the Eurozone or exit. At this moment none can be excluded, although the first option is not really possible if Syriza wants to stay in power. Greece has a militant tradition that simply is not present in the United States: Communist-led armed resistance to Nazi occupation during World War II, the subsequent civil war between communists and local fascists, the overthrow of a U.S.-backed military junta by student-led protests in 1974, the real mass movement that brought Syriza to power.
Keep the Promise of CUNY

Albany legislators voted to increase CUNY tuition by a total $1,500 over 5 years, promising the hikes would enhance education and not be used to replace State funding. But the tuition hikes can’t fund new investments because the State isn’t covering basic costs for energy, rent, fringe benefits and collective bargaining (what CUNY calls “mandatory costs”).

Tell your legislators:
Invest in opportunity for all
Fund all of CUNY’s mandatory costs.

SYRIZA’S BEST HOPE LIES IN BEING A CATALYST THAT HELPS TO BRING OTHER ANTI-AUSTERITY PARTIES TO POWER IN EUROPE, STARTING IN SPAIN, WHERE UNEMPLOYMENT HOVERS AROUND 25 PERCENT.

and a radical wing within that movement that is determined to pressure the government to move to the left.

WHY STAY IN THE EUROZONE?

Given everything, why is Syriza trying to stay in the Eurozone? Why doesn’t it revert to printing Greece’s traditional currency, the drachma, and make a go of it free from the stultifying grip of neoliberal austerity?

The question brings to mind the debate that preoccupied Soviet leaders in the first years after the Russian Revolution: Was it possible to create “socialism in one country”? Lenin and Trotsky thought not. Starting in the late 1920s, Stalin embarked on just such a program through forced collectivization of the countryside and relentless industrialization based on the subordination of the working class. Though this regime carried on for decades, it never succeeded in meeting the vital needs of its people.

This speaks to Greece’s capacity to really be self-sufficient. Its best-known exports are olive oil, cheese, yogurt and wine, which can hardly sustain a population of 11 million or provide the taxes needed for public goods. In this epoch of global capitalism, Greece remains a minor, dependent player in both the European and world economies. Syriza’s activists and intellectuals are keenly aware of the risks of taking power under these circumstances. As Varoufakis wrote in a 2013 article, the Greek Left can rely on an updated Marxist analysis to help clarify the situation they face. But, he argued, its goals and program are obliged to take account of the limits forced upon them by relative isolation and by the country’s dire economic crisis. Polls of Greek voters showed a strong preference for remaining in the Eurozone even while wanting to break with austerity. On some level, the average Greek also seems to understand that their country is in a poor position to strike out into the world.

SYRIZA’S BEST HOPE

Syriza’s best hope lies in being a catalyst that helps to bring other anti-austerity parties to power in Europe. In Spain, where unemployment hovers around 25 percent, the leftist Podemos party has vaulted to second place in the polls in one year and will make a strong bid for power in elections this fall. The post-2008 legacy of onerous debt and austerity also hangs over Ireland, Portugal and Italy. Only if and when Syriza can participate in a broadened series of anti-austerity alliances with like-minded governments in Southern Europe and perhaps Latin America will it be possible to pose the prospect of radical transformation. In politics as in life, having the best of intentions is never enough. Good timing and the right set of circumstances are also essential for one’s plans to come to fruition, as Syriza and its supporters are being reminded.

Stanley Aronowitz is a professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center and the author of more than two dozen books, including The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers’ Movement (Verso, 2014). He hosted the leaders of Syriza when they visited the Graduate Center last year during their pre-election tour of the United States.
The long-awaited education reform — preceded by a protracted legislative battle over the New Majority’s education reform galvanized strong opposition from conservative sectors. But dissent has also come from less expected quarters: the highly organized Chilean student movement. “This is not the reform we mobilized for,” proclaimed the University of Chile Student Federation (FECH), which spearheaded the massive 2011-13 demonstrations that catalyzed popular demands for education reform and paved the way for the New Majority’s electoral victory. “We have wasted a historic opportunity for educational reform, and also deeply damaged our democracy,” said Gabriel Boric, one of four student leaders elected to Congress in 2013 (who, nevertheless, voted for the reform).

**DISPARATE RESOURCES**

To appreciate these surprisingly dissident perspectives, the new education reforms must be viewed in a broader historical context. The wholesale conversion of Chile’s system of universal free public education to a privatized, deregulated, demand-driven system, which began under Pinochet, was consolidated by subsequent democratic regimes. At the primary and secondary level, public schools have been systematically undermined by a municipalization strategy that generates widely disparate funding levels between jurisdictions, and by the creation of private schools that compete with public ones for state voucher subsidies.

Today, as resource-starved public schools continue to decline in quality, only 37 percent of Chilean students are enrolled in them (down from 80 percent in 1980). Private schools with state subsidies (like U.S. charter schools) are the fastest growing sector, public schools have been systematically undermined by a municipalization strategy that generates widely disparate funding levels between jurisdictions, and by the creation of private schools that compete with public ones for state voucher subsidies.

Most for-profit subsidized schools also charge tuition, and select (and retain) students based on their socioeconomic status, test scores and performance. As a result, each student buys the education that he or she can afford, and 44 percent of students are largely from poor neighborhoods and villages and do not complete high school. Still, even in the most selective institutions, students test well below average for the 34 developed nations that belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), due to the lack of quality control of schools, teachers and teacher training.

At the higher education level, 80 percent of Chilean students now attend private universities or technical institutes. These schools are the most expensive in the world, relative to per capita income. Students pay tuition at public universities, too, an unusual situation in Latin America.

While Chilean universities are technically required to operate on a nonprofit basis, recent investigations have documented illegal strategies used to divert funds for private gain, including service contracts and land or infrastructure leases with related for-profit entities. Universities are also highly segregated, with admission exams disadvantaging poor students from lower-quality high schools and channeling them to “autoefecto” institutes, where roughly half drop out with high debt burdens. Top-ranked schools, including state-subsidized public universities, are available only to elite students.

The result, according to Educación 2020, a key actor in developing the reform package, “This law changes the Chilean education system, the most commodified in the world, by transforming education from a consumer good to a social right.” As anticipated, the protracted legislative battle over the New Majority’s education reform galvanized strong opposition from conservative sectors. But dissent has also come from less expected quarters: the highly organized Chilean student movement. “This is not the reform we mobilized for,” proclaimed the University of Chile Student Federation (FECH), which spearheaded the massive 2011-13 demonstrations that catalyzed popular demands for education reform and paved the way for the New Majority’s electoral victory. “We have wasted a historic opportunity for educational reform, and also deeply damaged our democracy,” said Gabriel Boric, one of four student leaders elected to Congress in 2013 (who, nevertheless, voted for the reform).

**NOT FAR ENOUGH**

Bachelet’s reforms, which seek to de-commodify privatized primary and secondary education, are aimed at one portion of this repressive system. They will require owners of for-profit elementary and high schools to convert to nonprofit status and to admit students by lottery instead of discriminatory selection. Tuition fees will gradually be replaced by increased state subsidies.

Students say the reforms don’t go far enough and may fall short even in meeting their stated objective. They point to loopholes that will allow “flagship” schools to maintain selective admissions for up to 30 percent of their enrollment. Nonprofit schools can also retain transitional leasing arrangements with for-profit landlords, legitimizing continuing profits within the primary and secondary education system through the same subterfuges used by private universities.

The law, students note, also authorizes new forms of profit-taking, through state-guaranteed loans to finance the sale of for-profit schools to nonprofit operators at their subsidized market value. (An earlier proposal allowing the state to purchase these properties was scrapped, due to pressure from the Catholic Church, which owns a significant number of schools. The provision responds, in part, to a scare campaign mounted by the bill’s conservative opponents, who incited parents by raising the specter of massive private school closings in response to the ban on profits. (One newspaper ad posted in December read, in part: “Private subsidized school for sale: 2,000 students, excellent infrastructure—good parents, good teachers ...”)

Students also criticize Bachelet’s program for failing to restructure the decimated municipal public school system; improve teacher training, salaries and quality control of schools; or address their key demand for free and universal higher education. Bachelet has promised additional legislation this year to deal with these issues, including free universal education by 2020, though few details are forthcoming as of yet.

More fundamentally, the FECH and Gabriel Boric argued that the reforms passed and contemplated to date do not break with the logic of the neoliberal education system and may even serve to reinforce it. By enshrining the voucher system, they contend, the reforms will continue the competition for enrollment and resources between public and private schools that has destroyed quality public education. Indeed, Bachelet has marketed the current education reform, in part, as a project to enhance “school choice” by removing costs and selectivity barriers — even though the public sector, under current conditions, can’t provide a competitive alternative.

What’s needed, according to FECH, is a complete re-nationalization and return of education to the public sector, with funding based on institutional need rather than demand. This contrasts sharply with the views of Bachelet and Educación 2020, who envision the end result of Chile’s reforms more as a mixed private-public nonprofit system, similar to the Netherlands or Belgium, that remains demand-driven.

**A GRADUALIST PROGRAM**

Student leader-turned-lawmaker Camila Vallejo has taken a more pragmatic stance, endorsing Bachelet’s gradualist program as the most practical way to eliminate profits in education without a massive expenditure of state resources. Vallejo, who will chair the education commission in the Chamber of Deputies this year, will be in a key position to shape the New Majority’s future education agenda.

The upcoming legislative battle over higher education is expected to be much more contentious than last year’s struggle. Its outcome will be strongly influenced by the student movement’s continuing ability to articulate and link popular demands to a broader structural analysis, using the creative tactics (from school takeovers to “kiss-ins”) that have mobilized hundreds of thousands in the past.

Currently, the student movement appears to be at a crossroads. While massive demonstrations continued last year after Bachelet’s proposed reforms were announced, the passage of the bill has destabilized some sectors and created new organizational challenges.

The movement encompasses diverse political tendencies, and continually struggles to define its complex relationship to electoral politics. Recent elections have split the student leadership between left (FECH) and right-wing (Catholic University) factions, with the latter opposed to nationalization of all universities. On the other hand, FECH, the largest organization, has successfully united its three major political constituencies and is well positioned to lead the upcoming battles of 2015 (dubbed by FECH the “Year of Higher Education”).

While Chilean students may be loathe to claim Bachelet’s reforms as a partial victory, their experience is teaching the world how mass popular movements can transform state policy — even if they can’t win everything at once — and how difficult it is to truly dismantle the entrenched neoliberal educational model.

This article is a joint publication of The Indypendent and NACLA. Emily Achtenberg is an urban planner and the author of NACLA’s Rebel Currents blog, covering Latin American social movements and progressive governments (nacla.org/blog/rebel-currents).
After the din of protest dies down come the works of social science. Activist-academics Todd Wolfson and Michael Gould-Wartofsky take as their research subject the social movements they were embedded in as participant-observers: Indymedia and Occupy Wall Street, respectively. Digital Rebellion and The Occupiers are their attempts to understand the movements’ rise and fall.

Both Indymedia and Occupy arrived suddenly on the scene and rapidly rose to prominence, their reach extending beyond the usual activist circles, only to suffer a swift decline. For all intents and purposes, Indymedia is dead. NYC Indymedia — which this paper was once part of — is no longer and the global Indymedia website hasn’t been updated for over a year. (Full disclosure: I was once a member of the editorial collectives for both.) And Occupy was scattered to the winds with the forcible eviction of Zuccotti Park and its sister encampments, only to suffer a swift decline.

Both Indymedia and Occupy emerged as a distinct subfield of sociology as the remnants of the New Left sought refuge in the academy, trying to figure out what went wrong while trying for tenure. The resulting work is often neither fish nor fowl, caught between serving the two masters of disinterested scholarship and activist agenda.

The best of the genre, however, manages to bridge this divide, using the toolbox of social science to get under the skin of social movements and see what made them grow and die, in the process forming future generations of organizers about which strategies succeed and fail in working for a better world.

Digital Rebellion strides this divide uneasily. While Wolfson’s descriptions of the inner workings of Indymedia are informative, they have the feel of a monograph. On the other hand, while his positions on issues that divided the network, such as how activist journalists should relate to social movements, are supported by his empirical research, they seem to be more rooted in his participation in intra-network disputes. And, finally, while his grasp of academic debates is sophisticated, his discussion of social theory may leave the more practice-oriented bored.

The most compelling part of the book is Wolfson’s critique of the limits of the purely “horizontal” and online organizing that was characteristic of Indymedia. What resulted was a digital version of the “tyranny of structurelessness,” elevating the voices of the usual (white, upper-middle-class) suspects. As a consequence, local Indymedia collectives often maintained a parochial focus on mostly white activist groups and intra-left squabbles, ignoring broader-based social movements and failing to play a role in organizing efforts. Philadelphia Indymedia dealt with this problem by working with Jobs with Justice and local unions to cover issues that would otherwise go unreported by the mainstream media, helping train working-class participants to “be the media,” but they were the exception and not the rule.

The Occupiers is more successful as both a work of scholarship and a study guide for organizers. It is not only compulsively readable but also impressively synoptic. Gould-Wartofsky weaves a rich narrative tapestry, charting the rise and fall of Occupy without romanticizing it or giving a one-sided account of the ideology of its participants. He carries out an ambitious research agenda, studying the social origins of the occupiers, their politics, how direct democracy actually functioned and how Occupy interacted with “the established institutions of social and political life.” And he is sensitive to how his role as a “white guy in a blazer” affected his interactions, and to how issues of class, race and gender informed — and deformed — organizing efforts. This is as close to a definitive account of Occupy as has been produced thus far. Perhaps most intriguing is his tracking of the occupants into exile and speculations on the potential of Occupy to bring out their contradictions, showing how the practice fell short of the theory and demonstrated its blindspot.

In the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, Marx wrote that “[t]he tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” He described how the revolutionary of 1848 conceived of their struggles in terms of the imaginary of the French Revolution, adopting the costumes and roles of their fore-runners. Armed with Digital Rebellion and The Occupiers, future generations of organizers will be better equipped to learn from the failures of their predecessors and build on their work rather than simply emulating it.
The 1930s saw an outpouring of art that responded to the suffering people experienced during the Great Depression. Think of the photography of Dorothea Lange, the novels of John Steinbeck and the Dust Bowl ballads of Woody Guthrie. For anyone who was moved by the tales of economic devastation shared by the victims of the Great Recession who flocked to Zuccotti Park at the height of Occupy Wall Street, the imagery of the 1930s can take on an eerie resonance.

The NYU Grey Art Gallery brings the Depression-era aesthetic to life again with “The Left Front: Radical Art in the ‘Red Decade,’” an exhibition that features more than 100 works by 40 artist-activists who devoted their talents to the twin causes of defeating the increasing menace of fascism and advancing the prospects of socialism. For most of these artists that meant mobilizing the working classes under the leadership of the Communist Party, which reached the zenith of its cultural and political influence in this country during the 1930s. The need to stand in solidarity with Palestinians has never been greater. Ilan Pappé and Noam Chomsky, two leading voices in the struggle to liberate Palestine, discuss the road ahead for Palestinians and how the international community can pressure Israel to end its human rights abuses against the people of Palestine.

On Palestine is the sequel to their acclaimed book Gaza in Crisis (Haymarket Books).

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THE RED DECADE
ART WITH A GRITTY HEART

By Gerald Meyer

The NYU Grey Art Gallery presents “The Left Front: Radical Art in the ‘Red Decade,’” an exhibition that features more than 100 works by 40 artist-activists who devoted their talents to the twin causes of defeating the increasing menace of fascism and advancing the prospects of socialism. For most of these artists that meant mobilizing the working classes under the leadership of the Communist Party, which reached the zenith of its cultural and political influence in this country during the 1930s.

The works on display at “The Left Front” are not art for art’s sake. They were created to serve a revolutionary cause and their message is direct and unambiguous: Workers and other victims of oppression need and merit the viewers’ attention. Yet these works are not propaganda but artistic creations that evoke deep reflection and genuine emotions, reactions that more direct media, such as pamphlets and leaflets, were unlikely to elicit.

With few exceptions, these works are lithographs and other types of black and white prints that could be produced relatively cheaply and thus reach the widest possible audience. The presence of a few large paintings and drawings, as well as one oversized Spanish Civil War poster, add color and serve as centerpieces around which the curators mounted the smaller-sized prints. In a similar manner, the strategic inclusion of works by internationally recognized Mexican social artists — Diego Rivera, David Álvaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco — lends luster to the exhibition while serving the sense that this small family, while not doomed. Perhaps, it is the system, so burdensome by their remaining possessions like the family in Siporin’s composition, is not doomed. Perhaps, it is the system, so indifferent to their plight, that deserves and someday will incur that fate.

The works comprising the exhibition were products of and for a consciously left community. Graphics became illustrations in books, magazines and advertisements for public meetings and theatrical productions. The exhibition extends the viewers’ understanding of the subject by including samples of book illustrations, such as Rockwell Kent’s illustrations of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass and Gropper’s illustrations of Marx’s Capital. Most intriguing are the illustrations by Prentiss Taylor, a white man associated with the Harlem Renaissance, for Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse (1932) by Langston Hughes, Prent...
The contributions of Kent deserve special attention, not only because of his increasingly favorable reputation, but because his life and work illustrate key issues germane to the subject of this show. Kent, a devoted lifelong Communist, never worked in a social-realist style: His masterful work—detached, precise and at times, symbolic—communicated with clarity what was so often left unnoticed. Even the most casual visitor to “The Left Front” can note the obvious: While social realism is the predominant style, every imaginable graphic style, including surrealism and abstract expressionism, is on display. This show powerfully contradicts the canard that the Communist Party imposed social realism as the sole aesthetic style on artists.

While the outbreak of World War II disrupted the artistic movement on display at this exhibition, the political and artistic commitments of the vast majority of the artists represented in the show continued. “The Left Front” in the sphere of the graphic arts was crushed during the anti-communist backlash that followed the end of the war. Today, its work reminds us that art doesn’t have to exist solely for its own sake but can spur us to see the world as it is and as it could be, and to struggle for something better.
MARYLIS DeJESUS MOLESKI’S WOMEN ARE ON A JOURNEY. THEY RIDE SINEWY STEEDS AND CLOTHE THEMSELVES IN THE HIDES OF MAGICAL BEASTS. THEY WIELD GLOWING SCEPTERS AND FIGHT HORDES OF MONSTERS. ALSO, THEY WEAR BRIGHT PINK NAIL POLISH, DIAMOND EARRINGS AND BASKETBALL JERSEYS.

Sheena Rose’s work, meanwhile, takes a less fantastical approach to the idea of the journey. Her art has the amenable feel of a travel sketchbook, but with busy, overlapping lines suggesting some sort of algorithmic undercurrent — hand-drawn memories in the digital age. Her particular aesthetic is well utilized in humble animated videos, where she depicts herself doing everyday activities like waiting for the bus or sleeping. In perhaps her strongest piece here — a small drawing — Rose shows a small figure (maybe herself) trepidatiously setting out into a convoluted streetscape of wires and noise.

Race isn’t the only thing going on in Rose’s artwork — far from it — but in the context of an Afrocentric exhibition space, the work is necessarily cast through an African historical lens. Moleski and Rose’s works are currently on view in “Vision Quest,” a two-person exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts. With that in mind, even the most humdrum of Rose’s actions emerge out of a troubled history, recalling the oppressive restrictions that have been placed on those of African descent. There was a time when it would’ve been unthinkable for a young African woman to be out traveling on her own.

Similarly, in the context of African tradition and lineage, Moleski’s paintings highlight some shared qualities of age-old African and European quest narratives. Her work, though, speaks more to the present than the past. Her characters are on an adventure, and not just into the heart of some imagined storybook hero’s journey, but into the untamed wilds of blog rants and image memes. The creatures inhabiting these paintings — like three-headed monster cats and rainbow-pooping ponies — come from Moleski’s dream world, and also from the Internet.

The idea of fantasy — as a tried-and-true literary genre and as a guiding cultural force — has undergone some wild mutations thanks to digital culture. And yet, even now, the worlds of fantasy and science fiction remain dispiringly white, with depictions of women hewing close to long-established norms of thin-and-paleness (consider the racial makeup of recent motion picture epics like Game of Thrones or The Hobbit). A 2014 study by Lee & Low Books found that of the top 100 highest-grossing sci-fi and fantasy films, only eight had protagonists of color (six of them portrayed by Will Smith). As science fiction writer Steven Barnes has said, most sci-fi is “white people and their imaginary friends.”

Here in the present, the thought of fantasy heroes as female, dark-skinned and full-figured — like Moleski’s Day-Glo, three-eyed warriors — shouldn’t be all that strange. And yet, these kinds of characters carry with them a pleasant shock of newness: they’re familiar but with qualities that remain distinctively underrepresented in the genre. Perhaps, as far as heterogeneous, Internet-era fantasy stories go, the journey is really just beginning.
MARCH

THROUGH MAR 13
Mon–Fri 11am–5pm • Free EXHIBITION: TAINTED FILES: THE EUGENICS RECORD OFFICE. Dig through the drawers, files, note cards and forms of this 1920s office to uncover the details of the American eugenics project, which attempted to advance a vision of “race purity” through mass sterilization, mental institutionalization and immigration restriction. The exhibition exposes how the anti-Asian policies of the era laid the foundation for the racism of modern American politics.

Asian/Pacific American Institute at NYU
8 Washington Mews
212-998-3700 • apa.nyu.edu

THROUGH MAR 15
Sat–Sun 4–6pm or by appt • Free PHOTOGRAPHY: “RIP D.I.Y.” Remember 285 Kent, Death by Audio and Glasslands? It’s been an understatement to say that the last year has been hard on Brooklyn’s DIY music spaces. Cloud City’s exhibition celebrates the DIY spirit by bringing together 20 photographers’ documentation of the venues that have been forced to shutter.

Cloud City
85N 1st St, Bklyn
cloudcity.nyc

THROUGH MAR 22
Sun–Sun 12–6pm or by appt • Free EXHIBITION: COUNTERFEITING FOR CASH. What is authenticity and authorship? Flux Factory’s 12 exhibiting artists will clue you in with their explorations of counterfeiting: Flux is serving as a hub for all kinds of counterfeits as they are inserted into places like Craigslist, the dark web, art markets and universities. Check out the closing reception on March 21, 7–9pm, for a special look at some very unexpected fakes.

Flux Factory
39–31 29th St, Queens
347-869-1406 • fluxfactory.org

THROUGH WED APR 11
Tues–Fri 12–6pm, Sat 11am–6pm • Free EXHIBITION: “YOU CAN CALL ME F.” Functioning as a forensic site complete with quarantine tents, “You Can Call Me F” explores the connection between the paranoia of contagious disease and the patriarchal fear of feminism. Artist Anicka Yi’s work gathers biological information from 100 women to cultivate the idea of the female figure as a viral pathogen that must resist the efforts of outside forces to contain and neutralize it.

The Kitchen Gallery
512 W 19th St
212-255-5793 • thekitchen.org

WED MAR 11
6:30pm • Free DISCUSSION: WOMEN IN POWER: CATHERINE BEECHER, ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN, SHIRLEY CHISHOLM AND ANGELA DAVIS. This panel discussion will consider how these women exercised power in often-hostile environments and advocated changes in American society. Panelists include biographers Cindy Lobel, Lara Vapnik, Barbara Winslow and Robyn Spencer.

Brooklyn Historical Society
128 Pierrepont St, Bklyn
718-222-4111 • brooklynhistory.org

THUR MAR 12
7pm • Free with museum admission, $16 PANEL DISCUSSION: “I WILL RESIST WITH EVERY Inch AND EVERY BREATH: PUNK AND THE ART OF FEMINISM.” Punk has long been a refuge for nonconformists and a platform for DIY experimentation. A conversation about the confrontational forces of punk rock and feminism with multidisciplinary artists, writers and curators Osa Atoe, Johanna Fateman, Narcissister, Lydia Lunch and Astra Suparak.

Brooklyn Museum
Canter Auditorium and Di
200 Eastern Parkway
718-638-5000 • brooklynmuseum.org

FRI MAR 13
6–9pm • Free FILM: OUR DAILY BREAD. Nikolaus Geyrhalter’s 2005 documentary is a visually stunning exposé of industrial farming and food production. Presented by PSC CUNY as part of its Labor Goes to the Movies series.

PSC Union Hall, 16th Fl
61 Broadway
212-354-1253 • psc-cuny.org

SAT MAR 14–SUN MAR 15
Various times • $12–15 CINEMA: NEW YORK PEACE FILM FESTIVAL. The eighth annual New York Peace Film Festival will feature films about tracking, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the renewable energy revolution, conflict in the Congo, Zionism and more. Kickoff party March 13 at 7pm. For a screening schedule, visit the website.

Unitarian Church of All Souls
1157 Lexington Ave
nycpeacefilmfest.com

MON MAR 16
6–9pm • Free MEETING: OUR CITY, OUR CLIMATE: A FORUM ON NYC CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION. It’s been six months since more than 400,000 people marched in the streets of New York City to demand that world leaders address climate change. After the People’s Climate March is the People’s Climate Movement. Join PCM organizers, labor and community representatives, city council members and others to discuss pending and needed legislative action on climate change in the city.

DC37, AFSCE
125 Barclay St
tinyurl.com/uncorrumfleat

MON MAR 16–SAT MAR 22
Showtimes vary • Free $15 CINEMA: SOCIALLY RELEVANT FILM FESTIVAL NYC. This year’s festival will include films from more than 30 countries and will spotlight issues like discrimination, police brutality, immigration, LGBT & rights and much more. Most screenings will be followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers. Check out the festival’s website for showtimes and prices.

Tribeca Cinemas / Proshansky Auditorium, CUNY Graduate Center / Maysles Cinema
54 Varick St / 365 Fifth Ave / 343 Malcolm X Blvd
212-252-2022 • ratedsrfilms.org

TUE MAR 17
7pm • Free BOOK LAUNCH: TERMS OF SERVICE: “Terms of Service is a call for social media users to take back ownership of their digital lives.” Join the book’s author Jacob Silverman for a discussion about the most pressing issues surrounding social media, including surveillance, cultural conformity and the hazards of personal expression on the web.

Powerhouse Arena
37 Main St, Bklyn
718-666-3049 • powerhousearena.com

WED MAR 18
6:30pm • Free DISCUSSION: QUEER GENEALOGIES. Coinciding with the release of the “Queer” issue of Apartment Magazine, Stanford University art history professor Richard Meyer will moderate a panel discussion about how contemporary photographers have cast their attention backward to draw on and enage the visual record of gay, lesbian, trans and non-normative sexualities.

The New School, Wollman Hall
56 W 11th St
212-229-2428 • erasalscenter.org

THUR MAR 19
6:30pm • Free SCREENING: SHE’S BEAUTIFUL WHEN SHE’S ANGRY. Engage in a talkback with director and producer Mary Doria following a screening of her film She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry, which depicts the explosion of the women’s liberation movement during the late 1960s. The documentary spotlights some of the “outrageous, often brilliant women” who galvanized the contempor- ary struggle for women’s rights.

Brooklyn Historical Society
128 Pierrepont St, Bklyn
718-222-4111 • brooklynhistory.org

FRI MAR 20
4–10pm • $15 suggested EVENT: PERVERSIVE FEMINISMS. Milk and Night Curatorial presents a happening of performance art, spoken word, live music, photography and discussion on traditional topics of “No Wave” feminism and the role of the empowered female form in religious space.

Lutheran Church of the Messiah
129 Russell St, Bklyn
347-449-1859 on.fb.me/1M9pRz

THUR MAR 26
6pm • Free EVENT: FROM THE SANSCULOTTES TO THE ZAPATISTAS: REVOLTS, INSURRECTIONS, REVOLUTIONS. Join authors Eric Hazan and Kristin Ross for a discussion on key moments in French revolutionary his- tory and how they inspired populist, revolutionary movements around the world.

Maison Française, Columbia University
515 W 116th St, Buel Hall
212-854-4482 • maisonfrancaise.org

THUR APR 2
6:30pm • Free DISCUSSION: ATLASES AGAINST EMPIRE: A WOMAN MEASURES THE CITY. Writer, historian and activist Rebecca Solnit, who is credited with coining the term “mansplaining” in her feminist essay “Men Explain Things to Me” and is the author of numerous books about environment, landscape, community, art and politics, will pres- ent this year’s Mumford Lecture on Urbanism at City College.

City College
160 Convent Ave, Great Hall at Shepard Hall
212-650-7000 • cccny.cuny.edu

SAT APR 4
3pm • Free EVENT: PILLOW FIGHT NYC. Yep, it’s that time again — pillow fight! If you donate your pillow, Newmindspace, the organizing group, will make sure it gets to a NYC homeless shelter.

Location to be announced on.fb.me/1EsViTu

TO SEE THE WORLD ANEW: Writer, historian and activist Rebecca Solnit (pictured above, top) will speak at City College on April 2. The event is free and open to the public.

WOMEN IN POWER: On March 11, the biographers of Angela Davis (pictured above in 1974), Shirley Chisholm, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Catherine Beecher will discuss how these well-known women exercised power while advocating for changes in American society.
MNN: Manhattan’s Community Media

Manhattan Neighborhood Network is Manhattan’s public access cable network with studios in Midtown and East Harlem. We offer all Manhattan residents FREE state-of-the-art studios and equipment and media education classes in studio and field production and digital video editing.

MNN programs are created by you and reach Manhattan’s over 620,000 cable subscribers. We also stream all of our programs live online.

Visit mnn.org to learn more and for upcoming Midtown orientation dates!

Connect with MNN

The MNN El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center

The MNN Firehouse on 104th Street hosts community events and Community Builders media education training. The Firehouse is also home to the Youth Media Center, offering programs, internships, and programming for young people ages 15-24.

Email firehouse@mnn.org for more information and follow the Firehouse on facebook.com/elbarriocommunitycenter.