RUNNING ON EMPTY
GREECE. PUERTO RICO. YOUR FRIENDS...

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Exploring Race and Whiteness

The article on “white anxiety” (July Indypendent) was brilliant in multiple dimensions: providing larger context for all of us on the Doxereal phenomenon, connecting us to our racial inventions, talking about the emotional landscape and naming flavors to fears, wending through palpable history and describing the personal. So many constructs in one article — a sophisticated meal. Burn it down. — The Persian Half

This article does not deal enough with the oblivious white, the white who is “just being me,” while operating as a cog in the racist system, who does not think of self as white for days at a time. I also feel that there is too much optimism here about the coming of a minority-white United States. South Carolina had a Black majority in 1861; then there’s South Africa under apartheid. The question is power, not statistics. — Larry Yates

I wish that the basic concepts the author hit in this article could be taught in high school or middle school or even earlier. Building solid multicultural worker solidarity requires a lot of work and that requires folks to have some basic understanding of how “white race” and “racialism” were constructed to serve historically rooted economic purposes. Showing Up for Racial Justice (showingupforracialjustice.org) is a relatively new formation that explores some of this within white communities. — Muhammed Malik

Blame Blacks for Church Massacre

Here’s my theory regarding Dylann Roof and the Charleston church shooting. It wouldn’t happen without all the illegal drugs, and if thousands of Blacks did not willingly engage in distributing and selling illegal drugs to young people such as Roof. A lot of violent crime (murder, rape) goes with easy access to legal drugs to young people such as Roof. A lot of violent crime is criminal justice. It wouldn’t happen without all those Black brothers and sisters as well as offer a reasonable hope for ongoing resistance to institutional racism. Here, I want to propose that you join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an action I have taken after letting my membership lapse some 50 years ago.

The NAACP is a truly national organization whose half-million members are organized into 2,200 chapters in 49 states and the District of Columbia. One of the areas of central concern of this fine institution has been the demand for equal treatment of Black people by the criminal justice system. In our courts, legislative bodies and the arenas that mold public opinion, the NAACP is there. Not just in our nation’s capital or this country’s media centers, but in the Deep South and small towns and cities everywhere in the United States. This fact was brought home when in Ferguson, Staten Island and Cleveland, the sites of three of the most hideous recent murders, the local branches of the NAACP played important roles in presenting to the world the tragedies of the families of the deceased and their communities.

— Gerald Meyer

Inspired by Spain

My reaction to “Spain’s Democratic Uprising” (July Indypendent) is that it’s about time for the fat cats to belly-up to the table and start paying their way. I hope this movement spreads. — Jellie

Sketchy Trade Deals

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (“Why the U.S. Is Pivoting to Asia,” July Indypendent) is one more move to extend full spectrum global control. Now at the same time the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is being forced on the populations of Europe. In the end only China, Russia and India may remain independent. These countries have a sense of unique nationalism based on history and they have atomic weapons! — Itaja Muxaic
**EVENT: BOOGIE ON THE BOU**
12–4pm • Free
SUN AUG 16
Various locations
the lawn, art making, DIY vendors, in Bed-Stuy. Events include jazz on opens Saturday at Von King Park

**CELEBRATION: MOCADA SOUL**
Various times • Free
Sinergia Inc.
he refused to plead guilty to.

ized and beaten to death for a crime
years, two in solitary confinement,
fully jailed on Rikers Island for three
system. Kalief Browder was wrong-
of teenagers in NYC criminal justice
injustices, brutality and daily abuse
D’Amelio of the International Social-
brother of Kalief Browder, and Lichi

tING DOWN RIKERS. Join in a

**DISCUSSION: NYC’S TORTURE**
6:30pm • Free
WED AUG 12

**WORKSHOP: ON SQUATTING. One**
7–9pm • Free
SAT AUG 22
8pm • $10–$20, sliding scale
BENEFIT CONCERT: DAVE LIPPMAN & THE LIPP BAND. Ac-
claimed singer-songwriter-satirist Dave Lippman and the Lipp Band
will celebrate 50 years of music for justice with a retrospective concert
featuring hit songs from Lippman’s long and boisterous career. Pro-
ceeds will go to The Independent and the Gaza Community Mental
Health Program.
Brooklyn Commons
388 Atlantic Ave

**DISCUSSION: NOAM CHOMSKY:**
ON POWER AND IDEOLOGY. MIT
professor and author Noam Chom-
sky will discuss the relationship
between U.S. foreign and domestic
policy. RSVP required.
The New School, John L. Tishman
Auditorium
63 Fifth Ave
212-229-5615 • events.newschool.
edu

**WORKSHOP: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**
SCREENPRINTING & TENANTS’ RIGHTS. In conjunction with the
exhibition ‘In Search of One City: Sensing (In) equality,’ artists will
guide participants in silk-screening posters based on images from the
guide to tenants rights. In addition to artists and organizers, a housing
rights attorney will be present to answer tenants questions.
The Old Stone House
338 3rd St, Bklyn
718-768-3195 • theoldstonehouse.org

**CHILLIN’ & GRILLIN’**
This annual event will celebrate 50 years of music for
liberation and his being surveilled
his continuing struggle for human

**EVENT: ENOUGH. The Indepen-
dent will offer a free workshop on
urban gardening to children and se-
niors. Participants will be instructed
in designing, building and cultivat-
ing a garden.
Weeksville Heritage Center
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718-756-5250 • weeksvillesociety.org

**WE'RE TAKING SOME TIME OFF IN AUGUST. WE WILL RESUME PUBLISHING ON SEPTEMBER 22 WITH OUR 15TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE.**
By Heidi Boghosian

America has awakened in the past year to the epidemic of police killings of unarmed civilians, many of whom are African-American. The list of names grows longer by the week — Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Rekia Boyd, John Crawford and Sandra Bland to name just a few. Each time one of these criminal acts is committed, a cry goes up to prosecute the police officer responsible and bring justice to the victim.

Yet, in most cases the official investigation goes nowhere and killer cops are spared prosecution, much less jail time. This is often due to the close working relationship that exists between district attorneys and the police on whom they depend to gather evidence and witnesses to present their cases. The fact that many district attorneys have close personal or family ties to law enforcement or have seen their careers boosted by support from politically powerful police unions only heightens their reluctance to put a police officer on trial.

On July 8, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order making New York the first state to take away the power of district attorneys to protect police officers implicated in the killings of unarmed civilians. Under Cuomo’s executive order, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman will oversee these kinds of cases. The order lasts for one year and could be extended again next year.

Surrounded by black clergy, lawmakers and family members of civilians who have been killed by law enforcement, Cuomo argued it was necessary to address “the crisis in confidence” in the criminal justice system caused by police killings of unarmed civilians. He also boasted that his approach could provide a model for nationwide action.

Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, the Staten Island man whose death last year from an illegal police chokehold was recorded on a cell phone video that went viral but did not lead to an indictment, hailed the measure as “a step in the right direction.” The District Attorneys Association of the State of New York reacted angrily, calling Cuomo’s actions “gravely flawed.”

It’s unclear how well this new approach will work. Schneiderman may be hard pressed to stay on top of events in a state of 19.7 million people spread across 62 counties. The attorney general’s office will still have to rely on local police investigators to build his cases. Schneiderman, who is widely expected to run for governor someday, may also think twice about aggressively pursuing cases that could bring down the wrath of the police and their supporters on him.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

While Cuomo is content to make splashy announcements and reap the positive headlines that follow, he should have heeded the 1994 report of the Mollen Commission, which investigated police corruption and brutality in the NYPD. The commission called the special prosecutor’s office a “tough-sounding idea that will not solve the problem.”

Trial convictions of police officers are notoriously difficult to obtain. The rare instances when police are held accountable, it is through civil litigation and settlements that are costly to the municipality and infrequently result in changes to police practices.

Grieving family members of people slain by police officers — and Americans in general — deserve better than this inherently ineffective model. In responding to the groundswell of public outrage at police killings, Cuomo squandered an opportunity to enact innovative, fundamental reforms to the institutionalized epidemic of police violence. Rather than creating yet another prosecutorial entity, he should have heeded recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in its seminal 1981 report, “Guarding the Guardians.” In examining police practices that negatively impact communities of color, the commission called for reforms to increase police accountability and enact independent community oversight of police in order to reduce violent incidents. Such bodies would stand in stark contrast to toothless entities like New York City’s Civilian Complaint Review Board, whose rulings in cases of alleged police abuse can be overturned by the police commissioner.

Cuomo could have announced he was devoting significant funding to a statewide campaign to instill higher standards among police departments throughout the state. The campaign would focus on improving police recruitment and retention policies so police forces would better reflect the communities they work in. Creative initiatives would be designed to increase diversity, promote recruitment of candidates who have college degrees, eliminate bias in hiring, improve the promotion rates of officers of color and promote a reward system for practices that protect civil rights and reduce questionable crime prevention strategies like “broken windows” policing.

OVERHAUL TRAINING

Training would be overhauled with increased basic training on diversity issues, especially during the early years of police officers’ careers. Training, which should involve community members with differing perspectives, would emphasize cultural sensitivity, community policing, appropriate use of force and how to avoid racial profiling. It would improve the overall effectiveness of officers (and safety of civilians), especially in demanding circumstances.

Law enforcement agencies would be mandated to continually assess internal policies and practices and improve them as needed, with the exception of deadly force, racial profiling and misconduct, which should be monitored by existing external review agencies. Police officials would construct a uniform policy on the use of deadly force. Intensive training with real-life scenarios would be provided on a continuing basis to help guide officers’ discretion. Police administrators and Internal Affairs officials would be encouraged to regularly re-examine disciplinary procedures to improve the effectiveness of internal affairs divisions.

In cases in which the special prosecutor does bring charges against officers, each instance should be held out as a learning opportunity and not just punishment. Court settlements of civil lawsuits against the police should call for meaningful policy changes.

To adequately address modern-day police corruption — brutality, abuse of authority and disdain for established police procedures that increasingly result in the death of civilians — police departments must maintain and embrace internal oversight and accountability controls and a new approach among command authority to minimize the possibility of excessive use of force. Improving internal controls within the NYPD is essential in changing a culture that tolerates officers’ use of excessive force. If that can reduce the number of fatalities by officers, and if prosecutions can be brought by impartial and unbiased attorneys, Cuomo has the chance — if he stands as a leader in calling for a re-envisioning of policing standards — to help reverse a longstanding trend of violent police acting with impunity.

It will go a long way in addressing the “crisis” that Cuomo described in his announcement; for white people, that crisis is a loss of confidence in the fairness of the justice system. For African-Americans, whose daily lives are directly impacted by the specter of police abuse of authority, that crisis is the state as purveyor of racist violence.

Heidi Boghosian is an attorney and the former executive director of the National Lawyers Guild.
When I arrived in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 24 to cover the Movement for Black Lives Convergence, an all-Black radical conference, I stumbled into the Cleveland State University auditorium with my camera equipment and bag of clothes. The opening ceremony was under way. On stage were relatives of victims of police violence—including Tracy Martin, father of Trayvon Martin; Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner; Amberly Carter, cousin of Emmett Till and more—sharing their stories. Their words were ones of strength and sorrow. The audience began singing: “I pray for you, you pray for me. I love you, I need you to survive.”

Since my partner of five years took her own life last year, the memories of us sharing our love have been intermixed with images of her lifeless eyes. That year, 2014, was also marked by the image of Michael Brown Jr.’s lifeless body lying in the street in Ferguson, Missouri, along with the video images of other Black men, women and children snuffed out on YouTube repeat. For many, including myself, the Black Lives Matter movement appeared as an oasis of resistance and healing in the middle of a war against the Black spirit and body.

From the events of the very first night of the inaugural Movement for Black Lives Convergence, I could see that this conference would be different than any other I had been to. The organizers had intended to create a space where, in their words, Black people could “reflect on our histories of struggle, build a sense of fellowship that transcends geographical boundaries and begin to heal from the many traumas we face.” Only Black people were allowed to attend, so that we might have a safer space to gain relief and perspective and share blunt truths about how our Black skin is seen through the white gaze. And indeed, the conference was attended by an estimated 1,500 people, felt like a living, breathing history where we could contemplate our present conditions and begin to heal together.

It also became a place where we could take concrete action together. At the venue for the opening party, a Black trans-man was kicked out of a bathroom. In response, all of the conference participants left the venue in solidarity and brought the celebration outside. This moment represented the reality of being Black in America, the persecution and discrimination, but also the importance of community. The walkout was our way of affirming that the Black Lives Matter movement has to manifest as something more than just a structure or agenda than about situating the need for a space where academics can think. A place to allow regular working-class people to come and engage and to give their insight. It’s beautiful. It’s an amazing opportunity.”

For me, it was an overwhelming experience of love and resistance. It was a place where, as a Black man, I felt human. It was a place where my pain and my struggle to survive was a valid feeling. I haven’t felt this way in a long time.

But the real world and the dangers of being Black in a culture of white supremacy remain. As the conference ended, near the venue a 14-year-old Black teenager was being harassed by the police over an open container of alcohol. Activists marched to the confrontation. Unimpressed by pepper spray, they conducted a nonviolent direct action, forcing the officers to release the boy from custody.

And a cultural shift has begun. Three days after the conference concluded, University of Cincinnati police officer Ray Tensing was indicted on murder charges for shooting Samuel DuRose, a 43-year-old unarmed Black man, in the head during a traffic stop. A body camera video of the incident led the prosecutor to indict. In the very recent past, this indictment would never have happened, whether or not there was video evidence.

Black Lives Matter is a new Black consciousness awakened, at attention and ready to act, respond and enact justice—not in the distant future, but now.

Messiah Rhodes is a New York City-based independent journalist and filmmaker.
The Indypendent

PRIVATIZATION

Data collected by the Center for an Urban Future show that operating subsidies for the city’s three library systems — Brooklyn, Queens and the New York Public Library (NYPL) system, which encompasses Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island — declined by 10 percent from 2002 to 2014, under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The defunding of New York’s libraries has come at a time when their popularity has been surging. From 2002 to 2014, annual attendance at programs put on by libraries increased from 1.7 to 2.8 million people per year. Checkouts of physical and e-books and other items have increased by 30 percent. Altogether, the city’s libraries receive 37 million visitors per year, a number that exceeds the combined annual attendance at New York’s major professional sports events, performing arts centers, museums, historical sites, botanical gardens and zoos.

Support for the libraries has begun to increase under Mayor Bill de Blasio. However, the neglect of the Bloomberg years has left the three library systems with capital improvement needs of $1.4 billion to repair and update aging facilities, many of which lack the resources — such as outlets to plug in computers — one expects in the 21st century.

At Brooklyn Heights Library, for instance, the building’s 30-year-old heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system has been broken for about four years — a fact often cited by proponents of the library’s sale.

Instead of investing in repairs, which, according to the city’s Department of Design and Construction, would cost between $3.3 and $3.6 million, the library has cut its summer hours, opening in the morning six days a week when the heat is less oppressive and then closing at 1pm.

“They’ve let things deteriorate,” said Tom Angotti, a professor of urban planning at Hunter College and author of New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate, remarking on what he describes as the New York’s pervasive neoliberal development model, “So now they can turn around and say, ‘You see, this is not working. We’ll give it to a private company and they’ll know how to use it.’

While backers of the Brooklyn Heights Library sale areouting how a win-win collaboration between the public and private sectors, the final outcome may disappoint library supporters.

Michael White, the former city planner, points out that the $32 million from the sale will go into the city’s general coffers. For the money to be spent on Brooklyn libraries will require authorization from a city council and a mayor who have any number of other projects they may want to see that money go to.

Contradicting White, Madeline Kaye, a spokesperson for the public relations firm Berlin Rosen, spoke on behalf of BPL, insisted to The Independent that the $32 million will be spent as promised. Kaye cited a May 2013 memorandum of understanding between the city’s Office of Management and Budget and BPL that states the proceeds from the sale will go toward meeting the library system’s capital needs. Memoranda of understanding, however, are not legally binding.

OTHER LIBRARY SALES

The sale of the Brooklyn Heights Library is the latest in a series of transactions with developers involving New York’s libraries. These privatizations began under Bloomberg and have continued with de Blasio. Two prior deals between libraries and the real estate industry offer a glimpse into what the public can expect from such activity. It doesn’t exactly inspire confidence.

Plans to sell two Manhattan branches to developers — the Mid-Manhattan Library at Fifth Avenue and 40th Street, and the Science, Industry and Business Library on Madison Avenue at 34th Street — and use the funds to convert the NYPL’s iconic flagship library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue (the one with the lions out front) into a much smaller lending library were shelved last year due to public outcry. The scheme involved moving some 3 million books into storage at an expense to taxpayers of at least $300 million dollars.

The sale of the Brooklyn Heights branch most resembles a deal struck in 2007, at the height of the real estate boom, between NYPL and Orient Express Hotels. NYPL sold its Donnell Branch Library, located across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art on West 53rd Street, to a luxury hotel chain for $59 million. The property now belongs to the Starwood Capital Group, which plans to build a 46-story luxury hotel that will feature 151 hotel rooms going for upwards of $800 per night and 61 high-end residences. The building’s penthouse comes with a $60 million price tag, a million dollars more than the whole property sold for.

The building will also feature a crystal boutique shop with items costing up to $10,000.

“We’re going to marry Louis XV with the modern era,” Barry Sternlicht, Starwood Capital’s chief executive officer, told the Wall Street Journal. “We will be catering to high-end couples and business travelers who may be shopping on Fifth Avenue.”

The Donnell Library’s replacement is expected to open this winter. It will be located in the basement of the hotel.

‘RINGING THE DINNER BELL’

Library defenders like Michael White worry that the deal Community Board 2 backed on July 15 sends a signal to developers that public resources are now up for bid across the East River in the city’s most rapidly gentrifying borough.

“This is setting the banquet and ringing the dinner bell for developers,” White said. “It signals that we are willing to sell off any kind of public asset and we are willing to sell it off cheaply.”

BPL spokesperson Madeline Kaye disputed White’s claim that the property is being sold at a bargain-base ment price after what she described as “a very competitive bidding process.”

Seeking to distance the Brooklyn Heights sale from the Donnell library deal, Kaye said that BPL has a contract with Hudson Companies and “if the contractor exceeds the amount of time permitted by the city, 30 months to build the new library and 36 months to build the whole building, there is a reversion provision that would allow the city to take back title to the land and keep any and all proceeds already paid by Hudson Companies.”

Under the terms of its contract, Kaye said, Hudson will sell the city back its new library, built into the basement of the luxury hotel, for $1.

Assuming construction deadlines are met, Angotti observed, the new value realized by the luxury condo tower will ultimately go into the pockets of the developer, while most of the space that is created will be reserved for the wealthy.

“It’s a matter of community,” said Angotti. “Librarians are one of the few democratic places left in the city. You go to a local library, people are reading, going to events, socializing, people of all ages. They are places
where people can go for advice and look for information, using a variety of different media. It has a value that goes beyond the dollar value. It’s a value to people.”

The proposed deal is now under review by Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams. He will hold a public hearing on the proposed sale at Brooklyn Borough Hall on August 18 at 6pm. In a recent interview with The Brooklyn Paper, Adams said he envisions book-free libraries in the future.

“We no longer need shelves of books in libraries to look impressive,” he commented.

On the sale of the Brooklyn Heights Library, Adams remains officially non-committal.

“I look forward to reviewing Community Board 2’s recommendations and hearing from local residents about the proposed plans for the Brooklyn Heights branch of the Brooklyn Public Library,” Adams said in a statement released by a press spokesperson.

The fate of the highrise and the life of the library underneath it might just depend on the pressure that comes from below, which critics like White vow to supply.

“We’ll be talking with the borough president,” said White, who, along with other members of Citizens Defending Libraries, plans on attending the hearings Adams is holding on the sale in August. “You cannot sell off a publicly owned library like this without going through a public process, and we’re still at the very beginning of that process.”

BPL and Hudson hope construction will begin on the tower by next year. After Adams weighs in on the development deal, it goes to the City Planning Commission, followed by the City Council, before ultimately falling on Mayor de Blasio’s desk — a clear test of whether the current mayor will continue in his predecessor’s footsteps, auctioning away public space to private interests, or whether he will listen to the voices of book-loving Brooklynites seeking to preserve it.
VISION ZERO: THE ROAD FORWARD

By Janaki Chadha

It was a rainy December night in 2012 when Cara Cancelmo began the short walk from a friend’s apartment to her parents’ home on the Upper West Side. The 18-year-old college freshman was home for a holiday visit. When she reached 93rd Street and West End Avenue, she looked both ways before beginning to cross the street, just as she had learned to do from an early age growing up in New York. A moment later a taxi cab crashed into her.

Cancelmo’s right shoulder was shattered, requiring reconstructive surgery and leaving her with a visible scar. Now, 21, Cancelmo is unable to lift her right arm behind her head. Everyday tasks like getting dressed, opening a package or chopping vegetables are a challenge for her. She experiences pain that moves down from her shoulder to her elbow and wrist and then to her hips regularly.

“I’m living with this pain that doesn’t go away,” Cancelmo said, “and having to contend with that as my reality for the rest of my life is pretty anxiety-provoking.”

Cancelmo has responded by turning her pain into advocacy as a summer fellow with the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives and as a member of Families for Safe Streets, an organization comprised of people whose lives have been impacted by traffic crashes. On July 14, she addressed a crowd of hundreds of people who gathered at Union Square for a vigil to honor the memories of those who have lost their lives or been injured in traffic crashes this year on New York’s streets.

“Do we want to live in a city where when we are perfect pedestrians or cyclists, cars can still injure, maim and kill without consequence?” She asked the crowd.

The vigil, which was also attended by a number of local elected officials, was called to show public support for Vision Zero, an ambitious plan to reduce the number of traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries in New York City to zero by the year 2024. First adopted in Sweden in 1997 as a conceptual framework for ending traffic mayhem, Vision Zero was embraced by Mayor Bill de Blasio in January 2014 at the beginning of his term in office. A year and a half later, New York City remains a long way from reaching “zero.” At the vigil the names of the 127 traffic fatalities from the first six months of 2015 were read aloud, including 54 pedestrians and five cyclists. During that same time, 24,890 people were injured in traffic crashes, according to Transportation Alternatives. Of those more than 4,700 were pedestrians like Cancelmo. For advocates and policymakers, Vision Zero is a multi-pronged effort to change everything from laws and how they are enforced to the configuration of the city’s streets while transforming a culture that tolerates reckless driving.

2014 was a landmark year for Vision Zero advocates. The City Council approved 15 new traffic laws, including a bill that lowers the city’s default speed limit from 30 to 25 mph, an important move as several studies have shown that even small decreases in the speed of a vehicle can have dramatic effects on the severity of the impact during a collision. A right of way law now makes it possible to charge drivers with a misdemeanor crime if they kill or injure a pedestrian due to a failure to yield. This is a dramatic change from the long-standing practice of assessing nothing more than a fine for a traffic violation against sober but reckless drivers who kill or injure.

The NYPD has also increased its use of traffic light cameras, speed guns and summonses for speeding and failure to yield. Overall, the first year of Vision Zero saw summonses for speeding and failure to yield increase by 42 percent and 126 percent, respectively, from 2013 to 2014, according to city data. However, advocates say enforcement of the new traffic laws has been plagued by inconsistency.

“Despite some improvements made in some precincts, it’s really varied,” said Caroline Samponaro, deputy director of Transportation Alternatives.

The move toward safer street designs is also a core part of Vision Zero, particularly in terms of improving safety on arterial roadways. These heavily-used streets host high-speed traffic and witness a disproportionate amount of the city’s pedestrian and cyclist deaths, despite making up only 15 percent of New York City street mileage.

As part of the mayor’s Great Streets program, four major city thoroughfares — Queens Boulevard, Atlantic Avenue, Fourth Avenue in Brooklyn and the Grand Concourse — will undergo major capital improvement projects with the goal of preventing traffic deaths. Look for bike lanes, protected left turn signals, pedestrian islands that make it easier to cross wide avenues and more.

“Taking the street that has always been known and accepted to be the ‘boulevard of death,’ and saying ‘no, we expect and we’re going to deliver a different outcome because that’s what New Yorkers deserve’ is really powerful and important,” said Samponaro on the redesign of Queens Boulevard. “It’s symbolic but also real, tangible investment in Vision Zero that’s happening right as we speak.”

De Blasio’s willingness to use the punitive arm of the state to change driver behaviors has not been matched by the same willingness to invest money in the remaking of the city’s streets to be multi-user friendly. Samponaro voiced frustration that de Blasio was only bringing the Great Streets program to four high-profile roadways while Stephen Miller of Streetsblog.org said he was disappointed in the lack of funds in the 2016 fiscal year budget for more low-cost street redesigns.

“The most promising way to get fast results from street redesigns,” he wrote in a post, “is through ‘operational projects’ that use paint and other low-cost changes to calm traffic, rather than waiting years for the city to design and build an expensive capital project.”

Samponaro agreed, saying, “I think that’s something that next year we’ll be focused on shining a light on.”

Vision Zero has drawn comparisons to the 1980s-era crusade that permanently changed how our society thinks about drunk driving, which was once widely tolerated as a matter of personal choice and not a crime.

At July’s vigil, participants vowed to stop using the word “accident” when referring to traffic collisions. For many safe streets advocates, the frequent dismissal of traffic deaths and serious injuries as unavoidable on the part of drivers is at the forefront of what they are trying to change.

For Cancelmo, telling people she lives with a permanent shoulder disability often invites questions. “[People ask], how did that happen, how did you break your shoulder? And I tell people that I was hit by a cab and then they say, was it your fault?” She adds, “I think we definitely have a culture in this city of blaming the victim about this issue and I think that we do it because we somehow think that if it were that person’s fault, then it can’t happen to us.”

She hopes that, through her activism, along with bringing about change, she can end the isolation she’s felt. “There are thousands of people walking around who have had similar surgeries to mine, similar injuries, similar rehab processes,” she says, “If they heard my voice I hope that they would see that there are people who care, and there are people who know that this happens and are trying to make it never happen to anybody else.”
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.

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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.
Greece’s ‘debtors’ prison’

By Daniel Orsini

The government's austerity measures amount to an all-out offensive by the Greek political class to force the working class to pay for the crisis. The Greek populace is rising up in response. The government is responding with a massive increase in police repression.

NEW YORK TIMES

By Nicholas Powers

When I talk to friends about debt, I see how many of them have been enticed by the illusion that the debt will be paid back. But there is a larger contradiction, one beyond our individual involvement in the crisis. When the low payments on the mortgages increased, those collapses always disappear.

THE GLOBAL DEBT DOMINO

Leading up to World War I, European nations were military alliances across the continent. When a Viennese aristocrat assassinated the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand, it triggered a diplomatic crisis that set the stage.

Why did we get here? How did we get into this system of slavery and debt?

Daniel Orsini

By John Tamahoria

In the land where Western democracy was invented, the worsening economic crisis will require deeper cuts in public spending. The 61 percent “No” vote came in spite of thinly veiled threats to put the plan into action. By a vote of 4-2, Tsipras’s inner cabinet rejected the plan’s risks. Instead, the decision was to take the beginning proposal to deal with a debt of one.

THE INDYPENDENT

In 1993, the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP), which is aligned with the U.S. Republican Party, was in power. The governor, Pedro Rosselló González, was the most neoliberal leader in history. In 1998, the PNP government privatized what used to be one of the island’s wealthiest public corporations: Telefónica de Puerto Rico (now known as T-Mobile Puerto Rico). The Puerto Rican health system is on the edge of collapse. Doctors are fleeing the system, selling off hospitals at almost half their market value. The telephone work-ers organized a 45-day strike and vowed to continue until the nationwide strike was ended.

THE FINANCIAL TIMES

The lenders sold those mortgages to big banks, which were happy to market funds, just last year the people of the world created more than $75 trillion of treasure.

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POWER OUTAGE
WHY LEFT GOVERNMENTS FALTER ONCE IN OFFICE

By Stanley Aronowitz

Last January was an exhilarating time for the Left. In Greece an avowed left-wing party captured state power through a convincing electoral victory. In New York City one year earlier the newly elected mayor, progressive Bill de Blasio, a like-minded city council majority took City Hall from the long-time Wall Street administration of billionaire Michael Bloomberg. A victory-starved left, especially in the developed capitalist world where neoliberalism has reigned since the mid-1970s with only scant protest and resistance, basked in the sunlight of social change.

The Greek left party, Syriza, came to power on the pledge to end years of economic depression driven by the austerity mandate of Germany and its northern European allies. New York’s dark horse victor, running on the Democratic ticket after a stunning primary win, branded the slogan that he would end the “tale of two cities” by substantially closing the yawning income gap between the tiny corps of the super wealthy and the rest of us.

BROKEN PROMISES

By now many of the promises have either been broken or scaled way back. The most dramatic reversal occurred in Greece. Fresh in office, the new government led by Alexis Tsipras entered a period of prolonged and ultimately humiliating negotiations for new terms of another bailout with the troika of the IMF, World Bank and the European Commission. The final outcome was the worst austerity agreement in Greece an avowed left-wing administration could have hoped for.

Unlike Greece, where a mass movement for change operated from both inside and outside of government, de Blasio battled entirely within the legislative framework. In New York State, where New York City has not enjoyed fiscal and legislative autonomy since 1977, goading the mayor’s entreaties as well as his proposals for enhanced school funding and a moratorium on charter school construction to moderate- and low-income tenants. Cuomo, a beneficiary of the Clintons’ Wall Street connections and the long-time Wall Street darling, but he finally submitted to the charter leaders’ program of expansion, scaled back his housing program to an 80-20 formula (with only a faint hope of enforcement) and essentially gave up his early push to end stop-and-frisk — a leading demand of the black and Latino communities.

These are only the latest in a series of dubious left “victories.” In France a coalition of Socialists and Communists came to power in 1981 with the election of Francois Mitterand as president. Mitterand’s government initially carried out a program of nationalizing key industries and greatly increasing taxes on the wealthy to expand social spending. Two years later, the government reversed course on all its key economic policies and began a drift to the right that continues to this day. Elsewhere, we have witnessed leftist movements in the Global South — the African National Congress in South Africa, the Worker’s Party in Brazil, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to name just a few — that persevered against great odds to win power only to subsequently accommodate themselves to global capitalism. They continue in power but only as the empty shells of their former selves.

THE CHALLENGE OF GOVERNING

The easiest answer to this malaise is to put the blame on feckless politicians, so as to cry “betrayal.” There is some truth here but not enough depth. If Greece and New York were singular this simple expression might suffice, but the record is too long to be satisfied with that answer.

Part of the problem lies in the distinct challenge of governance. Progressive or radical governments frequently find themselves constrained by the fact that the system is the non-negotiable framework for doing politics within these institutions.

PROGRESSIVES HAVE ACCEPTED CAPITALISM AS THE NON-NEGOTIABLE FRAMEWORK FOR DOING POLITICS.

Most of their constituents out of necessity live in the short-term and must see their immediate needs addressed. Unlike their social movement counterparts, a left government has to keep the shelves stocked and the trains running, as it were, to maintain its credibility and its popular support. And a left government must do so in the face of fierce opposition of the 1% and its allies in the police, military and media who seek to destroy it or place it under such extreme duress that it abandons its commitments.

This is the bind Syriza was in when it contemplated leaving (or being kicked out of) the eurozone and not having the ability to pay for imports including food and fuel. Here in New York, a three-week “silent strike” orchestrated by the police union at the beginning of this year was enough to squelch any talk of reforming the NYPD from a mayor who understands that soaring crime rates would likely be fatal to his administration.

However, left “realism” can also become an excuse for inaction. Passivity does not have to be the only response to staunch opposition from entrenched interests. A left government can also choose to mobilize its social base to fight for its program, as Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez repeatedly did in the past decade when confronting his country’s intransigent right-wing opposition.

To these partial speculations, I would like to add my own analysis, which goes beyond immediate circumstances. Since the turn of the 20th century, European social democracy and American modern progressivism have fully embraced liberal democratic institutions as the main arenas of social struggle, which has meant accepting that the capitalist system is the non-negotiable framework for doing politics within these institutions.
then the world. Banks convulsed. Governments shoved mountains of cash into their accounts but financiers were still skittish afterward. They demanded higher interest on loans to deeply-in-the-red nations like Greece, sending them into a downward spiral.

The crisis was compounded in Greece by the troika of Europe’s leading economic institutions, which forced the nation to be a transfer hub for international creditors. They gave the country loans to pay them back for older loans. The people saw none of the money, witnessing instead more stores closing, more people losing their homes and the government planning to sell its seaports and islands.

Today the debt crisis in Greece has been momentaril cured, but it surges up in Italy, Portugal, Puerto Rico and elsewhere. And this is life during late capitalism, where whole peoples sink in a quicksand economy. They take out loans to pay for loans with less and less work available to earn real money.

The brutal experience of debt is creating a resurgent class consciousness. People who once lived quiet lives erupt in protest, in the Maoist rebellion in India, in Occupy Wall Street, in the indignados movement in Spain, in the Greek vote for Syriza. They see that capitalism has become a generational debt trap and are rising against the state and banks, flooding the streets and spilling into the halls of power.

JUBILEE WORLD
The unsaid truth of our world is that we erase each other’s debts all the time. How many times has someone owed you something and you let it go? Money, yes. But maybe you gave them a place to stay? Or clothes? Or just listening? But then you erased it because someday, you might need the same or simply because giving was all the reward you needed.

Debt is erasable. Not just in small everyday gifts but in world history. Ancient kings cancelled public debt in the Jubilee Year. In modern times, nations like Germany were forgiven huge war debts.

Strike Debt, a movement of debt resistors, has a Rolling Jubilee project in which they buy debt from banks for pennies on the dollar and then, unlike collectors, simply forgive it. There are also more radical acts, like that of Chilean artist Papas Fritas, who recently stoles records from the Universidad Del Mar and burned $500 million of student debt in what he said was “an act of love.”

We tried to talk over her song but she kept singing. We stopped and listened, reluctantly moved by an old quote we knew that phrase, “Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains.”

“I’d begun in the first few weeks of 2010, when I made the life-changing decision to release to the public a repository of classified documents that provided a simultaneously horrific and beautiful outlook on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. ... It can be hard, sometimes, to make sense of all the things that have happened to me in the last five years (let alone my entire life). The things that seem consistent and clear to me are the support that I received from my friends, my family and the millions of people all over the world. Through every struggle that I have been confronted with, and have been subjected to—solitary confinement, long legal battles and physically transitioning to the woman I have always been—I manage not only to survive, but to grow, learn, mature and strive as a better, more confident person.”

–Chelsea E. Manning (Guardian Op-Ed, 27 May 2015)
Before the island of Manhattan became the glass and concrete cityscape we know it to be today, it was inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape Native Americans. The tribe, before being displaced by white European settlers, had its home throughout areas of modern-day New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

The forced displacement of the tribe from its lands and the criminalization of Native American culture through far-ranging governmental policies fractured but did not erase its identity. Thanks in part to the influence of the Civil Rights Movement, since the 1960s the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape and other tribes across the nation have sought to resurrect their traditional cultures. In 1982 the tribe gained formal recognition from the state of New Jersey. Today, the tribe comprises about 3,000 people, with its base in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and members living as far away as Oklahoma, Texas and Ontario.

The fight, though, isn’t over. The Lenape are currently locked in a battle with New Jersey and the administration of Governor Chris Christie to renew state recognition, without which the tribe does not have access to health care grants, scholarships and the ability to sell its crafts as “authentically” Native American.

As part of the cultural resurrection effort, the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape have hosted a pow-wow in southern New Jersey every summer for the past 36 years. The gathering is an act of culture sharing that includes food, art, singing, dancing, drumming and good-natured competition. Open to members of the tribe and the public alike, it’s a time for the Lenape to honor the past and present and build for the future. These photos are from the pow-wow held on June 13 at the Salem County Fairgrounds in New Jersey.

Mayan pow-wow vendors demonstrate traditional tapestry weaving techniques.

Children take the center of the arena and dance to a rendition of Old McDonald. This year’s pow-wow featured a large youth presence.

Youth participants in the pow-wow perfect dances throughout the year to present in the arena.

The hoop dance originated from the Pueblos of the Southwest. This dance utilizes a series of small hoops that dancers manipulate into various forms while keeping the beat of the song they are dancing to. They may form the shape of a butterfly, an eagle or the globe.
By Peter Phillips

July 18 was the first day of this year’s summer camp for the world’s business and political aristocracy and their invited guests. Between 2,000 and 3,000 men, mostly from the wealthiest global 1 percent, gather at Bohemian Grove, a bucolic 2,700-acre campground 70 miles north of San Francisco in California’s Sonoma County — to sit around the campfire and chew the fat, off-the-record — with former high-level government officials, corporate leaders and global financiers.

Speakers this year giving “Lakeside Chats” include past Secretary of Defense and CIA Director Leon Panetta, former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker Jr., former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, founder of AOL Steve Case and former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill.

The Bohemian Grove summer encampments have become one of the most famous private men’s retreats in the world. Club members and several hundred world-class guests gather annually in the last weeks of July to recreate what has been called “the greatest men’s party on earth.” Spanning three weekends, the event includes lectures, rituals, theater, camp parties, golf, swimming, skeet shooting, politics, sideline business meetings and feasts of food and alcohol.

One might imagine modern-day aristocrats like Henry Kissinger, the Koch brothers and Donald Rumsfeld amid a circle of friends sipping cognac and discussing how the “unqualified” masses cannot be trusted to carry out policy and how elites must set values that can be translated into “standards of authority.” Private men’s clubs, like the San Francisco Bohemian Club, have historically represented institutionalized race, gender and class inequality. English gentlemen’s clubs emerged during Great Britain’s empire-building period as an exclusive place free of troublesome women, under-classes, and non-whites. Copied in the United States, elite private men’s clubs served the same self-celebration purposes as their English counterparts.

The San Francisco Bohemian Club was formed in 1872 as a gathering place for newspaper reporters and men of the arts and literature. By the 1880s local businessmen joined the club in large numbers, quickly making business elites the dominant group. More than 2,500 men are members today. Most are from California, while several hundred originate from some 35 states and a dozen foreign countries. About one-fifth of the members are either directors of one or more of the Fortune 1000 companies, corporate CEOs, top government officials (current and former) and members of important policy councils and major foundations. The remaining members are mostly regional business and legal elites with a small mix of academics, military officers, artists, or medical doctors.

Foremost at the Bohemian Grove is an atmosphere of social interaction and networking. You can sit around a campfire with directors of PG&E or Bank of America. Surrounded by towering redwood trees, you can shoot skeet with the former secretaries of state and defense or enjoy a sing-along with a Council of Foreign Relations director or a Business Roundtable executive. All of this makes for ample time to develop long-lasting connections with powerful, influential men.

On the surface, the Bohemian Grove is a private place where global and regional elites meet for fun and enjoyment. Behind the scenes, however, the Bohemian Grove is an American version of building insider ties, consensual understandings, and lasting connections in the service of class solidarity. Ties reinforced at the Grove manifest themselves in global trade meetings, party politics, campaign financing and top-down corporatism.

This article originally appeared at counterpunch.org. Peter Phillips is a professor of sociology at Sonoma State University and president of Media Freedom Foundation/Project Censored. He wrote his dissertation on the Bohemian Club in 1994.
member of the U.S. Republican Party and public admirer of Milton Friedman. He held up Ronald Reagan as the best president in U.S. history.

Fortuño’s most striking neoliberal maneuver was the “Special Law Declaring a Fiscal State Emergency and the Establishment of an Integral Plan of Fiscal Stabilization to Save Puerto Rico’s Credit.” No one in Puerto Rico knew the law by this ridiculous name — Puerto Ricans just called it “La ley 7” (Law 7).

Law 7 resulted in the dismissal of 30,000 public employees, the freezing of all collective bargaining agreements in the public sector, massive tax credits for corporations and more. Fortuño’s contribution to the debt was the most egregious of all — he added as much to the debt as the previous two PPD governors combined: $23.4 billion. By the time he left office, the debt of Puerto Rico stood at $70 billion.

Last but not least, the current neoliberal in the governor’s mansion is Alejandro García Padilla. He represents the PPD’s most conservative wing and has distinguished himself through his poor leadership, his marriage to the interests of national and international capital and his shameful acceptance of the notion of Puerto Rican “democratic self-government” under the terms of U.S. military occupation.

His victory in the 2012 election was based on the logic of “lesser evilism.” A lot of independentistas (people who support Puerto Rico’s political independence), nonpartisans and even the PNP’s working-class militants joined together to defeat Fortuño’s bid for reelection. But the honeymoon with García Padilla was short-lived. In a telling move, a few weeks after his inauguration, García Padilla consummated an attempt to take power over a capitalist state — he added as much to the debt as the previous PPD governor’s. The structure of the debt itself also distinguishes Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico’s debt is roughly $72 billion, which amounts to nearly 70 percent of its GDP. Greece’s debt stands at 177 percent of GDP. Besides the gap in their debt proportions, there are other significant differences to take into account. Since 1898, the year that the U.S. Navy bombarded Puerto Rico, the continuing present day, the island’s economy has existed to serve the military, political and economic interests of the U.S. empire. For example, Puerto Rico imports more than 80 percent of its consumer goods from the United States.

The Jones Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1920, meanwhile, requires that all shipping to and from U.S. ports be conveyed by U.S. vessels and crews. As Nelson Denis, author of War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America’s Colony, explained in a recent blog post:

“This includes cars from Japan, engines from Germany, food from South America, medicine from Canada — any product from anywhere. In order to comply with the Jones Act, all this merchandise must be off-loaded on a U.S. ship and then delivered to Puerto Rico. It all makes as much sense as digging a hole and filling it up again. This is not a business model. It is a shakedown. It’s the maritime version of the “protection“ racket. As a result, Puerto Rico’s imports cost at least twice as much as neighboring islands.

Added to this burden, Puerto Rico can’t establish trade relations with other countries without U.S. permission. A few years ago, former Venezuelan Hugo Chávez offered Puerto Rico a generous deal that would have brought a steady flow of Bolivarian crude oil to the island on very favorable terms. It didn’t take long for the U.S. Congress to forbid such an arrangement.

The structure of the debt itself also distinguishes Puerto Rico from Greece. Puerto Rico’s lack of sovereignty means that it cannot secure loans from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank. As a result, its debt takes the form of lines of credit and bond issues traded on the open market. In June 2015, Fortune magazine reported that more than 50 percent of the island’s debt is owned by vulture funds. These vultures have a take-no-prisoners strategy for the island, taking advantage of its economic crisis to buy up debt for cheap and pushing for severe austerity policies in order to profit.

This article was adapted from an earlier version that appeared at socialistworker.org.

PUERTO RICO
Continued from page 11

THE GREECE OF THE CARIBBEAN
Alejandro García Padilla’s rule has coincided with the most far-reaching economic crisis ever seen on the island. For good reason, Puerto Rico is now known internationally as “the Greece of the Caribbean.” Its situation, though, is unique.

Puerto Rico’s debt is roughly $72 billion, which amounts to nearly 70 percent of its GDP. Greece’s debt stands at 177 percent of GDP. Besides the gap in their debt proportions, there are other significant differences to take into account. Since 1898, the year that the U.S. Navy bombarded Puerto Rico, the continuing present day, the island’s economy has existed to serve the military, political and economic interests of the U.S. empire. For example, Puerto Rico imports more than 80 percent of its consumer goods from the United States.

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But perhaps the starkest difference between Greece and Puerto Rico at the moment is the character of the ruling political parties. The agreement of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to a new round of austerity measures has left the people of Greece and the international left with a bitter taste of betrayal after the historic July 5 referendum against austerity. Yet trying to compare Tsipras’ left-wing Syriza government with García Padilla’s PPD government would be like comparing Chile’s former President Salvador Allende to Augusto Pinochet, the general who overthrew him in a coup.

While Syriza members are arguing in workplaces and communities for social revolt against austerity, García Padilla commissioned former IMF official Anne Krueger to issue a report on the island’s economic situation and to propose solutions to the debt crisis. In keeping with the IMF’s record of further impoverishing poor countries around the world with its programs of “structural adjustment,” the Krueger report prescribes the same bitter medicine to “improve” Puerto Rico’s economic health: restoring competitiveness by lowering labor costs, including eliminating the federal minimum wage and other deregulation of labor markets; cutting federal welfare payments because they are “too generous” relative to Puerto Rico’s low wages; allowing private companies to compete with the public sector in generating electricity while keeping public electrical transmission and distribution, which are the least cost-effective sectors of the energy industry; reducing subsidies for the University of Puerto Rico; and cutting Medicaid benefits in excess of minimum standards on the U.S. mainland.

If Puerto Rico decides to impose the utterly predictable economic policy proposals of an IMF veteran like Anne Krueger, the island will most definitely follow Greece’s path toward an even-greater debt crisis. If the people of Puerto Rico, including those who have recently fled in search of a better life, don’t want the island’s destiny placed in the hands of vulture-fund managers, transnational corporations, the United States and its colonial puppet government, we must fight as the Greek people have been.

OUTAGE
Continued from page 12

discrimination and social domination. The role of the prevailing political system is integration or cooptation of the demands and often the movements’ leaders.

THE TWO LEFTS
I suggest there are two lefts: the dominant left is loyal to the system. It has refused, except sometimes rhetorically, to articulate an alternative to capitalism, imperialism and the hierarchies of the bourgeois party system. Instead, it has readily participated in the electoral process, building mass parties linked, crucially, to the labor and elements of the “new” social movements that first came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s. In this reprise, there is little difference between Communist and social democratic political formations. In their mutual fear of the right they have rallied behind liberal democracy and renounced revolutionary politics.

The second tendency may be characterized as libertarian left. Anarchists, anti-liberal Marxists and some fractions of the youth movements that periodically burst on the scene largely disdain the electoral route because they agree that, apart from contesting local office such as Podemos successfully did this year in Madrid and Barcelona, the attempt to take power over a capitalist state would prove to be a sinkhole. So, for example, Occupy Wall Street in 2011 occupied public spaces to dramatize its sharp critique of the 1% it argued ruled society. Spreading within weeks to hundreds of U.S. cities and many overseas and in Latin America as well, the Occupy movement was simultaneously an anti-capitalist and anti-electoral, at least in its practice.

The anti-capitalist left has its own problems. In most cases it is victim to the doctrine of localism. That is, we live in an era when one of the key tenets of the historical left — internationalism — has fallen into neglect or even worse, disrespect. Party formations are eschewed, leaving the field to the social democrats and electoral progressives. And we cannot ignore the disconnect between the radical left and the working class, black, Latino, Asian and white. While Syriza did have some ties in local communities, and New York is not without its coalitions, there still is no sense that either the Greeks or the rest of us have a well thought-out vision of the good life. Without that vision, movements come and go. When they are tied exclusively to specific demands (such as the $15 minimum wage movement), they tend to dissolve in the wake of political integration.

You can’t always get what you want. But if you give up what you need, the outcome of any struggle that lacks perspective and a serious political analysis is likely to be a disaster.

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).
Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and A Great American Land Grab
By Steve Inskeep
Penguin Press, 2015

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism
By Edward E. Baptist
Basic Books, 2014

By Don Jackson

Our elders taught us one thing but, practice another
Just look what happened to the Indian and the brother

— "Our Generation"
by John Legend & The Roots

"How can we end racism?" I was asked in a recent conversation. The discussion centered on the murder of nine African-American churchgoers in South Carolina by a young white supremacist as well as on the many deaths of unarmed African-Americans at the hands of cops. As the list of the deceased and the fledgling "Black Lives Matter" movement grow, it's becoming an increasingly familiar conversation. The first response that came to mind were the words of Malcolm X: "There can be no real progress in America's crucial race relations until the basic historic ingredients that created this explosive race problem are pointed out in blunt terms that both sides can see and understand."

Two recent books, Edward E. Baptist's The Half Has Never Been Told and Steve Inskeep's Jacksonland attempt to do just that. In The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism, historian Edward Baptist describes the crucial role that slavery played in creating modernity and propelling the rise of the United States to world power. Baptist's hypothesis is not new. The same conclusion was reached by Karl Marx, who wrote in 1846, "Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry... Without slavery, North America, the most progressive nation, would be transformed into a patriarchal country." Many other historians came to a similar conclusion: W.E.B. DuBois, former Prime Minister of Trinidad Eric Williams, in his 1944 book Capitalism and Slavery, and Sven Beckert, in his 2014 book Empire of Cotton: A Global History, to name a few. Baptist convincingly shows how slavery became the engine of U.S. capitalism. As the slave trade developed, it became a catalyst for business innovation and "market making." Institutions developed to bring buyers and sellers together and to facilitate the flow of information and credit. Meanwhile, as the United States acquired more territory, more than 1 million enslaved African-Americans were forced away from their families and transported to newly settled parts of the South to cultivate crops for the burgeoning global cotton market, which the United States would eventually come to dominate. And it wasn't just the planters getting rich. There were fortunes made in the South and the North, in shipping, insurance, banking and other industries linked to the forced labor of enslaved people. There was a direct and positive correlation between the growth of American capitalism and the suffering of enslaved persons. Baptist delves into the human suffering behind the numbers and does so using today's language. In his narrative a "plantation" becomes a "slave labor camp," slave is replaced by "enslaved persons" or "forced migrants." Words such as "gang-rape" and more than a few F-bombs find their way into the text, and not only in quotations. Baptist painstakingly tells the story of the tremendous sacrifices that enslaved persons made in developing new cotton-picking techniques under the pressures of what he rightly asserts was torture. Enslaved persons had quotas to meet. If they failed to meet them, they were tortured with whippings, sexual humiliation, mutilation and more. When they met their quotas, the quotas were raised. Under these inhuman work conditions, enslaved persons innovated or died trying. Of course, there could not have been slave labor camps without land to build them on. This land was systematically taken, by hook or by crook, from the

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Plegaria Muda (detail), 2004.

Atrabiliarios (detail), 1992–


Doris Salcedo, Plegaria Muda (detail), 2004–10.

Doris Salcedo, untitled.

The IndypendenT
August 2015

there’s another thing. Each stack has a dark, whitewhiteness normally befitting a tombstone. And on a hardness, a heaviness and an opaque, stony no longer soft, pliable or translucent, now taking shows that the shirts are totally coated in plaster:

The work does not present documentation, rec-
tinations, historical artifacts or even a title; what

By Mike Newton

Doris Salcedo, untitled sculptures (1989-90) start with some white button-down shirts, sitting in piles on the gallery floor. They look, at first, like ordinary dress shirts, neatly stacked and folded. A closer look shows that the shirts are totally coated in plaster:

As with much of Salcedo’s art, these sculp-
tures reflect on a particular, tragic occurrence. In

March 1988, the Colombian military murdered 20 workers at the La Honduras and La Negra farms, all of them members of a local banana workers union with suspected ties to a leftist gue-

rilla group, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL).

They were all dragged from their homes in the middle of the night and summarily executed. The work does not present documentation, rec-
tations, historical artifacts or even a title; what

Salcedo’s art — the subject of a retrospective currently on view at the Guggenheim — is focused mainly on violence in her native Colombia; sadly, she has no shortage of subject matter. In 1948, Colombia entered into a brut-
tal, decade-long civil war known as “La violencia.” Since then, between the state military, far-right groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Co-

lombia (FARC) and drug cartels, the war has never really stopped. According to a re-
cent article in The Guardian, “The conflict is the world’s longest continuous war,” having caused more than 200,000 deaths and the internal dis-
placement of over 5 million people — roughly one-tenth of the country’s population. Virtually everyone in Colombia has been affected on some level by this conflict, and no Colombian under 66 has experienced lasting peace.

Salcedo’s art exists at this intersection of daily normality and violent terror. These are two con-
ditions that you would think, or hope, to be at complete and total odds with each other, but which all too often come to inhabit the same place at the same time. Salcedo’s response is to conjure up a trenchant, mournful sense of bur-
den and bearing. Much of her work is, literally, heavy: the series of untitled sculptures made between 1989 and 2008, for example, involves found pieces of stately wooden furniture filled with metal and concrete. These works suggest a longing for a bygone way of life, a past that con-

tinually recedes into the distance.

There’s a problem that comes up whenever art-
ists try to portray the experiences of oppressed, marginalized or displaced groups: Too much emphasis on suffering can, ironically, minimize that suffering in the public imagination. That is, if a group of people is perpetually depicted as doing nothing but suffering, those represen-
tations feed into reductionist assumptions that suffering is their “natural” state of being and that it can never be otherwise. Salcedo looks into the particulars of events — she’ll even do first-
hand research by investigating sites, conducting interviews, etc. — but she doesn’t tell us how, exactly, one particular group or one particular country has suffered. Instead, she ties the sorrow of Colombia’s long-simmering war to universal themes of loss and lament. Salcedo’s art is not about war, but about the ways people experience war. Her art is about the way war feels.

As of this writing, Colombian officials are engaged in peace negotiations with the FARC, and it seems that one of the biggest obstacles to future peace is a lapsed recognition of past atrocities. According to the news site Colombia Reports, “making concessions prove[s] difficult as both parties face thousands of accusations of war crimes that according to international law may not remain in impunity. Still, there’s hope that these talks could bring an ultimate end to the conflict. With themes of death, there are also themes of recovery and rebirth. In Salcedo’s Plegaria Muda (2008-2010) — a work influenced by gang violence in both Colombia and the Unit-
ed States — pairs of large, coffin-like tables en-
case small chunks of earth, and between cracks in the tables small, vibrant blades of grass can be seen. Much like a tombstone is erected at death to honor a life, Salcedo’s work evokes ideas of both ending and beginning: the violence, and the peace that surrounds it.
Native American peoples in the United States’ nation-building drive. In Jacksonland, journalist Steve Inskeep tells a compelling story about former President Andrew Jackson and his once-ally then-adversary Cherokee chief John Ross. Jackson, in essence, created what is now known as the Deep South, personally profited from it and cleared the way for these lands to be used in the expansion of slave labor camps and the mass production of cotton.

The Cherokees submitted to changing their entire culture and way of life so long as they were allowed to keep their lands. They allied with the United States government in military actions against other tribes, and in the manner of white settlers, cultivated farms, printed newspapers and sent their children to school. Some even got involved in owning and trading enslaved persons. But it wasn’t enough.

President Jackson, an insatiable speculator and a firm believer in white supremacy, was determined to move Native American peoples to land west of the Mississippi River. When the government of Georgia threatened to seize their lands, the Cherokees decided to fight legally and took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. They won: The court ruled that the state of Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Cherokees and no claim to their lands. But Georgia officials ignored the ruling and President Jackson refused to enforce it. They lost their land anyway, 25,000,000 acres of it. On the ensuing Trail of Tears, 20,000 Cherokees were marched westward at gunpoint. Nearly a quarter died on route.

Both books show how deeply racism and white supremacy are woven into the fabric of our society. When we observe the injustices of today, we are also observing the echoes of the past. The loss of identity, culture and land still restricts the development of Native Americans. The objectification and denial of the humanity of enslaved Africans has left such a deep mark that in 2014 the most heard slogan in the United States was “Black Lives Matter.” Some who heard the phrase “Black Lives Matter” responded that “All Lives Matter.” They fail to recognize that the slogan came about in response to specific conditions that disproportionately affect Black lives and bodies, and that those conditions — violence and death at the hands of the state and vigilantes, for starters — are inherently unjust. Indeed the statement is as relevant now as it would have been in the cotton fields of 1840 Mississippi.

By examining the past and recognizing that racial injustice went hand-in-hand with the growth of capitalism and the wealth of Western imperialist powers, we can see that structural changes will be necessary to bring about a world where all humanity is respected equally. Until that day, we should keep asking, “How can we end racism?” until we have found and implemented answers that make “post-racial” a reality.
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