WAR ON TERROR AFTER 14 YEARS, DOUBLING DOWN ON A FAILED WAR MAKES NO SENSE.

BY MATT SHUHAM, P14
EDITOR’S NOTE

The Indypendent began publishing 15 years ago in the early days of the Internet. We have watched the digital tide sweep through the economy and remake whole industries, including journalism. Most legacy print publications have vanished than we can count.

During this time this newspaper has managed to survive, often to the astonishment of our supporters. It is incontestable that every day more people are online doing more things with their digital devices. Based on this, media gurus have been prognosticating print’s inevitable doom for the past decade. From our experience of watching new issues of the Indy get snapped up month after month, year after year, we came to another conclusion: A lot of people still like to read print.

But still, we have been reminded over and again that print has no future. So imagine my surprise when I recently came across a story on the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) website hailing print as the new ‘new media.’

Say what?

CJR is published by the nation’s preeminent school of journalism. It is a respected arbiter of trends and tastes in the journalism industry. And now in relation to print, words like “innovative,” “artful,” “perspective-altering” and “faithful spouse” were being bandied about.

But still, we have been reminded over and again that print has no future. Somehow the Indy had fallen so far behind the times it ended up ahead of the curve.

The CJR article noted that daily newspapers — unable to keep up with the speed of the Internet and watching their revenues be evaporated by online competitors — still face a grim future. But for print publications that have a passionate community of readers, the future is brighter.

We’ve known that for a long time too. It’s our reader support that has always carried us through. We do a single fund drive at the end of each year. The money we raise at this time is crucial to our ability to continue publishing in the coming year. In a sense it’s an annual referendum on how much our readers value the work we do. It’s one we have to pass at the end of each year to continue into the next year with the resources we need.

I encourage you to check out our back-page fund appeal and the premiums we are offering and respond generously. It may sound like a cliché, but your support really does make all the difference, whether you make a one-time gift or sign up to become a monthly sustainer. It makes possible the on-the-ground coverage of social movements, the incisive, hard-hitting analysis of the most important issues of the day and the beautiful artwork and photography you will find in the following pages.

If you are giving once again this year, thank you for your stellar support. If you have enjoyed reading the paper but have not previously given, why not make this the year you join our growing community of reader-supporters?

We look forward to doing more great work in 2016, but first we need to hear from you.

— John Tarleton

AND THE NEW ‘NEW MEDIA’ IS … PRINT?

In fact, we are told there’s a man in Mississippi who tracks the dozens of new print publications being started every month on his website.

The CJR article noted that daily newspapers — unable to keep up with the speed of the Internet and watching their revenues be evaporated by online competitors — still face a grim future.

For years, the new media vanguard has preached ‘digital first’ and ‘no one reads print anymore.’

But still, we have been reminded over and again that print has no future. Somehow the Indy had fallen so far behind the times it ended up ahead of the curve.

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ZONING TWEAKS DRAW WIDESPREAD OPPPOSITION

Who Can Afford ‘Affordable’ Housing?

By Steven Wisenia

Mayor Bill de Blasio says he has proposed “the largest affordable housing plan in the history of this city or any other city,” but it is drawing increasing opposition around the city.

The plan promises 80,000 new “affordable” apartments. To do this, it relies largely on adjusting city zoning regulations through “mandatory inclusionary zoning,” or “affordable or for rent.” It allows developers to build more market-rate housing in slightly taller buildings while requiring that 25 to 30 percent of the units built be rented at lower costs. More than two-thirds of city Community boards have recommended rejecting it, with some saying they would accept it if the amount of housing produced for people who make under $40,000 a year was increased. Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz called the plan “unacceptable,” and City Comptroller Scott Stringer weighed in against it on Dec. 2. Grassroots groups in East Harlem, East New York, and the Bronx have been organizing against it for several months.

The biggest criticism voiced is that most of the housing built wouldn’t actually be affordable. In the southwestern Bronx, the housing planned for the neighborhoods along the 4 train line on Jerome Avenue will be intended for “moderate income” people who make around $69,000 a year, says Joseph Cepeda of Community Action for Safe Apartments, but most current residents make between $8,000 and $32,000.

“You’re excluding this whole portion of the community,” he says. “You’re saying all the key words — ‘affordable housing’ — but you’re not giving us any substance.”

Opponents have also said that relying on the construction of luxury housing to create affordable housing will displace more people than it helps, that the plan is a “one size fits all” approach that is being rushed through without adequately considering the characteristics of individual neighborhoods, and that developers building the affordable units will not be required to use union labor.

The community boards’ role is advisory; the City Council will vote on the final version of the plan next year. But the level of opposition has vexed and perplexed the de Blasio administration, which argues that its inclusionary-zoning program “would be the most rigorous in any major U.S. city.” Unlike similar programs in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle, it says, developers will be required to include below-market housing. Unlike those in Denver and Los Angeles, that housing would be permanently affordable. And the amount reserved as “affordable” is by far the highest: 25-30 percent, with San Francisco second at 12-20 percent, L.A. requiring 15 percent, and Washington 8-10 percent.

The plan’s opponents are being impractical, says a spokesperson for the Department of City Planning. Requiring developers to include a higher proportion of below-market units or apartments that rent for less than $1,000 a month would not be financially feasible. They simply wouldn’t build anything, and 25-30 percent of something is better than 50 percent of nothing. Leveraging private investment to create moderate-income housing will free public funds for low-income housing, she adds.

The administration and the plan’s opponents, however, are using different definitions of “affordable.” The official definition is based on percentages of “area median income” for New York City and the three counties in its northern suburbs: 60 percent of AMI is considered “low income.” But as the median income for the city, unincorporated, says a spokesperson for the Department of Housing, says a spokesperson for the Department of City Planning. Requiring developers to include a higher proportion of below-market units or apartments that rent for less than $1,000 a month would not be financially feasible: They would have to build something better than 50 percent of nothing. Leveraging private investment to create moderate-income housing will free public funds for low-income housing, she adds.

The administration disagrees. Gentrification is already happening, and if no new housing is built, even more people will be displaced, says the DCP spokesperson. The administration has also earmarked funds to provide legal aid to tenants threatened with eviction, she adds, and while its zoning plans allow taller buildings along major streets like Atlantic Avenue in East New York, they discourage tearing down smaller residences or putting them by pushing rents upward.

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We are going to balance the market dynamics,” de Blasio said at a Dec. 10 press conference. Displacement will be “the damaging part” of the plan, responds John Medina of Community Voices Heard in East Harlem. If new housing is built that’s more than two-thirds luxury, he contends, landlords in the neighborhood will see that they can get higher rents and escalate efforts to oust current tenants. “Housing Court is going to have lines around it for days,” he says.

CVH, along with other groups like the Movement for Justice in El Barrio and CASA in the Bronx, has been organizing around the plan since last winter, holding forums, meeting with community residents and businesspeople, and trying to develop alternative ideas. In East Harlem, CVH, Community Board 11, Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and various labor unions and community groups are preparing a plan to present to DCP early next year.

Alternatives proposed include basing the rents for affordable housing on income levels in community districts, exposed by Stringer and Manhattan Community Board 12 in Washington Heights/Inwood. (DCP says there would be legal problems with not having a single citywide standard.) CASA wants the construction jobs to be union, with apprenticeships to get neighborhood residents into the building trades. Stringer wants clear anti-displacement measures.

The Association for Neighborhood Housing Development has urged that the program be revised to give neighborhoods a “deep affordability” option, in which 30 percent of the units built would be reserved for households that make less than 30 percent of AMI; these would rent for about $625 a month or less. “More than 25 percent of New York City households make less than $25,000 annually,” it notes. Another possibility would be requiring all housing built under the program to include at least 15 percent apartments for that income level.

Why has this plan, which critics agree at least makes an effort to provide a significant amount of affordable housing, drawn more opposition than former mayor Michael Bloomberg’s blatantly gentrifying rezoning schemes?

“Bloomberg got away with this, but people are waking up,” says Joseph Cepeda. “We’ve already seen it happen, so we mobilized in advance.” The public is better informed now, adds John Medina: “With more transparency and a so-called progressives, people are going to hold elected officials accountable. They’re going to exercise their right to say no.”

Of the 80,000 new “affordable” apartments promised, only 16,000 are slated for people who make less than $35,000 a year. That’s four times as many as the Bloomberg administration built in 12 years, but well below the 60,000 homeless people or the more than 270,000 on the waiting list for public housing in the city.

Unfortunately, the de Blasio Administration’s current MHI program misses the opportunity to create the guaranteed, truly affordable housing that many neighborhoods are demanding,” Association for Neighborhood Housing Development said in November. The proposal, it added, primarily targets people who make more than $50,000, “leaving out the more than 40 percent of New Yorkers that earn below these levels.”
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WHILE SILVER LINED HIS POCKETS, TENANTS LOST OUT

By Steven Wishnia

I
n the summer of 1997, my then-girlfriend moved into a studio apartment in Williamsburg, a few blocks from the Lorimer Street stop on the L line. The rent was $600 a month.

She was one of the last New Yorkers to rent an apartment before the deceptively named Rent Regulation Reform Act of 1997 went into effect. For both good and bad, that law is the biggest legacy former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver — expelled from the Legislature after being convicted on federal corruption charges November 30 — left to people trying to live in the city and its inner suburbs.

Silver, who had represented the southern Lower East Side since 1976 and became speaker in 1994, did prevent the legislation from being worse. The state Senate’s majority leader, Joseph Bruno, advocated completely abolishing rent controls, and the governor, George Pataki, backed deregulating all vacant apartments. But the compromises Silver accepted to prevent the law from expiring — deregulating vacant apartments that rented for $2,000 or more, an automatic 20 percent rent increase on vacant apartments that also rented for $2,000 or more, an automatic 20 percent rent increase on vacant apartments that also rented for $2,000 or more, including the $100 million penthouse on 57th Street.

Sheldon Silver was far from unique. Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos is currently on trial on federal corruption charges. The list of recently convicted state senators includes second-ranking Republican Thomas Libous, former Housing Committee chair Vincent Leibell and turncoat Democrats Pedro Espada, Hiram Monserrate and Malcolm Smith. Bronx Democrat Nelson Castro evaded jail time by wearing a wire for most of his four years in the Assembly, and ensnared his colleague Eric Stevenson.

Much of New York State’s corruption is completely legal. A loophole in campaign-finance law lets limited-liability corporations donate $150,000 a year, the maximum individuals are allowed. As landlords commonly set up separate LLCs for buildings, the maximum number of landlords in any one LLC is unlimited. The list of recently convicted state senators includes second-ranking Republican Thomas Libous, former Housing Committee chair Vincent Leibell and turncoat Democrats Pedro Espada, Hiram Monserrate and Malcolm Smith. Bronx Democrat Nelson Castro evaded jail time by wearing a wire for most of his four years in the Assembly, and ensnared his colleague Eric Stevenson.

Money from Glenwood was the common thread between the trials of Silver and Skelos, two of the three most powerful figures in state politics before their indictments. The third has received more than $1 million from the company since he was elected in 2010, but so far remains unscathed: Governor Andrew Cuomo.

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I t's like the Yankees are coming to Buffalo.” That's how Alain Kaloyeros, an advisor to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and president of the SUNY Polytechnic Institute, described the magnitude of a $750 million state investment in a solar panel facility for the economically-depressed upstate city. The plan, which promises to create approximately 5,000 jobs, might appear to herald a transition toward a greener energy future, but coinciding as it does with continued state bailouts for coal and nuclear plants, New York appears to be following the advice of one late Yankee in particular: Yogi Berra, who once quipped, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”

Environmentalists in New York State have won two major advocacy battles within the last year and, together with an announcement from the Cuomo administration of reforms that would put New York on track to rival California in carbon reduction targets, the future of fossil fuels in the state has begun to look a bit more precarious. But despite continued optimism, activists say the fight isn’t over.

When, in December 2014, Cuomo announced a statewide ban on hydraulic fracturing, it brought to fruition a years-long grassroots campaign involving tens of thousands of people who rallied against the natural gas extraction process and the well-funded lobbying effort behind it. Then, last month, Cuomo vetoed the proposed Port Ambrose liquefied natural gas (LNG) import facility off Long Island’s south shore. It emerged as a major flashpoint for activists who, since the fracking ban, shifted their energy to oppose the outgrowth of gas infrastructure in New York.

“The local community in Long Island stood up and made their feelings clear that they weren't going to let this be built,” said Patrick Robbins of Sane Energy Project, which helped coordinate opposition to the import facility. “We communicated with the coastal communities along the South Shore up and down the shore, fishermen, unions, small businesses, a couple of large businesses — a wide range of actors. That's why we did eventually see the governor come down the way he did on that issue.”

Now, Sane Energy and other environmental groups are looking to take the lessons they learned opposing fossil fuel development toward building environmentally sound energy alternatives.

“We know how to stop bad projects,” said Mark Dunlea of the Green Education and Legal Fund. “You just do nothing else with your life for the next five or six years. If you keep up that level of fanaticism you win. But if you don't put anything good in its place than you are just playing whack-a-mole.”

In the case of Port Ambrose, activists killed two birds with one stone. By defeating the LNG terminal, they were able to free up space for a proposed wind farm slated to be built in the same area, 19 miles offshore. The 350-megawatt facility could generate enough electricity to power 250,000 homes, according to a 2009 feasibility study conducted by Consolidated Edison and the Long Island Power Authority, and would displace 400,000 tons of carbon annually, the equivalent of removing 68,000 cars from local roads. It emerged as a major flashpoint involving tens of thousands of people who rallied behind a proposal that New York could become a leader in clean energy, with the potential to create between seven and 42 jobs along the shoreline for each megawatt generated.

Meanwhile, four massive coal-fired power plants account for 13 percent of the state’s electrical emissions, and have also benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars in state subsidies.

“The Cuomo administration’s willingness to prop up polluting energy sources stands in marked contrast to its unwillingness to make longterm commitments to growing renewables. The governor appointed Richard Kauffman, an ex-Goldman Sachs partner and advisor to former Energy Secretary Steven Chu, to chair the state’s Energy and Finance Department. Effectively Cuomo’s energy czar,” Kauffman oversees the New York Department of Public Service, the New York Power Authority (NYP A), the Long Island Power Authority and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, and is charged with meeting the carbon cutting and renewable targets outlined in REV.

In a November interview with Vox, Kauffman acknowledged that NYP A, the largest state public power organization in the nation, wouldn’t agree to purchase renewable energy in advance.

“The wind industry … would like to know that we’re going to have a certain amount of dollars dedicated to wind every year — X amount of dollars or X amount of megawatts,” said Kauffman. “[T]hat’s not really the way we want to do it.”
Instead, Kaufman says, he plans to "love in the renewable resources with the rest of the systems."

"A bolder approach can be found in 2013 study led by Mark Z. Jacobson, a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University. Jacobson found that New York has the technological capability and the natural resources to power its entire electrical grid on renewable energy by 2030. The plan requires significant capital investment in infrastructure up front, but produces savings of $3.3 billion annually to New York's economy (about 3 percent of the state's GDP) by removing the social costs of fossil fuel pollution: "mortality, morbidity, lost productivity, and visibility," as Jacobson puts it.

His plan also envisions cutting $3.3 billion per year from costs relating to climate change in the United States, such as storm damage and soil erosion. Under the Jacobson plan, transitioning off fossil fuels would result in an estimated 4.5 million jobs, 8,000 of them permanent positions. These figures dwarf the number of people — approximately 2,000 — employed in New York's bailed-out coal and nuclear plants.

Bills introduced this year in the State Assembly and Senate would implement the Jacobson plan.

Having the technological capacity to make a switch to renewable energy is one thing, Patrick Robbins cautions, but we have to be mindful about how it is deployed.

Under Kaufman's plan the PSC will create renewable energy markers that will be managed by utility companies. Utilities have traditionally collected profits by purchasing and then selling electricity to consumers. But average usage is down, thanks in part to conservation efforts, as storm damage and soil erosion.

Peak usage has increased on the hottest days of the year and during events like the Super Bowl, but the inconsistency between average and peak usage means that more electricity is being generated on the grid than is typically consumed. As a result utilities are hemorrhaging money and customers are paying inflated rates. Allowing utilities to manage renewable markets gives them a slice of the pie so that they are less resistant.

Widespread community choice aggregation (CCA) would do away with utilities altogether, by allowing municipalities to purchase electricity directly from suppliers. Communities could democratically decide what forms of energy they want powering their homes rather than relying on utility companies to make that decision for them. A CCA pilot program was launched recently in Westchester County.

"We have an opportunity to have a just energy system, one that doesn't price gouge the most vulnerable residents of New York State," said Robbins, calling it "an opportunity to generate locally controlled, locally owned energy."

Sane Energy, together with environmental groups statewide, formed the Energy Democracy Alliance in April. Their purpose, as outlined in their mission statement: to advance "a just and participatory transition to a resilient, localized, and democratically controlled clean energy economy in New York State."

When this reporter spoke with Robbins and Fraczek, they were preparing for an upcoming PSC commissioners meeting in New York City on December 17 that, by coincidence, coincides with the one-year anniversary of Cuomo's announcement of the fracking ban. The public isn't permitted to testify at PSC meetings, but as The Independent went to press, a large contingent of activists was planning on attending anyway, so that, as Fraczek put it, "they know we are paying attention."

In the battle against fracking, the governor's annual State of the State address in Albany became a focal point for environmentalists across New York demanding a ban on the controversial drilling practice. Over 80 labor, faith, community and environmental organizations, calling for the state go 100 percent carbon free by 2030, once again plan to descend on the capital on January 13, this time calling on Cuomo to take decisive action to revolutionize New York's power system.

"You could argue that REV is a bailout of the utility companies," Dunlea speculated. "In this new world of smaller, decentralized energy sources they are not making money. So it becomes a matter of how do you give utilities more of a slice of the pie so that they are less resistant."

"The Indypendent" is a daily digital news outlet that covers the environmental and social justice movement in New York City and across the state. It's supported by a network of community groups statewide, formed the Environmental Democracy Alliance in April. Their purpose, as outlined in their mission statement: to advance "a just and participatory transition to a resilient, localized, and democratically controlled clean energy economy in New York State."
Biting the Hands That Feed

More than 60,000 Immigrant Workers have Helped Make New York an Agricultural Powerhouse. How They are Treated is Appalling.

By Leanne Tory-Murphy

Maria is a farmworker who lives in a small town west of Syracuse. In the 12 years since arriving in New York, she has married, started a family and become accustomed to the four seasons of her adopted home and its long bleak winters. One day last January her husband, who is undocumented, went to do his laundry and never came home.

While waiting in his car outside the laundromat and downloading some games onto a tablet he had purchased for his 4-year-old son, Maria’s husband was approached by local police. They quickly called in the Border Patrol, which detained him on the spot. After being held in various immigrant detention centers for 10 months, he was deported to Mexico, returning to his home state of Chiasa. Maria finds herself struggling as a single mom and raising their son as a single mom. Sometimes he gets angry and refuses to talk with his father on the phone.

“I always have to remind him,” she says, “it’s not dad’s fault.”

The clear lakes and verdant fields of far upstate New York are not what immediately come to mind when people in the United States think of the “border.” Nonetheless, more than 60,000 immigrant workers like Maria who hail from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean have migrated to the region to work in its booming agricultural sector. They toil for long hours and low pay in local orchards, produce packing facilities, industrial-scale dairy farms and other low-wage industries. Yet, these immigrants’ overarching concern is with the Border Patrol and its local law enforcement partners. Their smothering presence has left them fearful and uncertain about whether they will vanish from one day to the next into the federal government’s vast machinery of immigrant detention and deportation. A farmworker who was detained after working in the United States for nine years recounts a common theme among immigrants in the region: “One has to accept that this reality is reality, the reality of one who comes to live here.”

New York, of course, is a border state with Canada, and anyone who has traveled to Montreal has passed through the orderly checkpoints on the Thruway. However, Border Patrol’s jurisdiction goes much farther, 100 miles into the interior from any U.S. land or coastal border. That’s how they got Maria’s husband. The town they live in is just south of the shores of Lake Ontario, where the international border cuts neatly through the lake. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the area of Border Patrol’s jurisdiction includes almost two-thirds of the U.S. population within it — about 200 million people.

The 9/11 Effect

The Border Patrol’s stated mission is to safeguard America’s borders. It has been redefined in recent years to include “preventing terrorists and terrorists’ weapons,” including weapons of mass destruction, from entering the United States,” according to the agency’s website. In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the number of Border Patrol agents along the northern border has increased from 340 agents in 2001 to 2,094 agents in 2014. Two hundred and eighty-eight of these agents were deployed, the number of Border Patrol agents along the northern border has increased from 340 agents in 2001 to 2,094 agents in 2014. Two hundred and eighty-eight of these agents were neutrally stationed in New York in 2014, up from 37 in 2001.

John Ghertner, a retired physician and activist who lives in New York, of course, is a border state with Canada, and anyone who has traveled to Montreal has passed through the orderly checkpoints on the Thruway. However, Border Patrol’s jurisdiction goes much farther, 100 miles into the interior from any U.S. land or coastal border. That’s how they got Maria’s husband. The town they live in is just south of the shores of Lake Ontario, where the international border cuts neatly through the lake. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the area of Border Patrol’s jurisdiction includes almost two-thirds of the U.S. population within it — about 200 million people.

EXPLOITED BY THEIR EMPLOYERS, FARMWORKERS WHO MILK COWS AND PICK APPLES ARE ALSO SEEN AS POTENTIAL TERRORISTS BY THE BORDER PATROL.

Because of safety concerns, the names of all immigrants in this story have been changed.

Feeding the Greek Yogurt Boom

New York is the top producer of goat and sheep milk in the country. Between 2008 and 2013 milk production increased sevenfold to support the growth of the Greek yogurt industry. By some estimates, in 2013 the Greek yogurt produced in New York accounted for 70 percent of all Greek yogurt sales in the United States, led by companies like Chobani and Fage.

As the industry grows, some counties, like St. Lawrence, have undergone consolidation in the dairy sector, with some operations growing ever larger and smaller family-run dairy farms going out of business. The industry as a whole is marked by pervasive health and safety hazards, extreme working hours and low pay.

When Juan first started, the workers were a mix of Puerto Rican, Mexican and Amish. He says they have phased out the Mexican workers over the last few years because of the immigration raids. Juan recalls a raid on worker housing late one night. “They came into the employee’s house at 11 o’clock at night … they saw an open door and came into the house, saying ‘This is Border Patrol, everybody to the living room!’”

Border Patrol asked the workers to go one by one to their rooms to retrieve their IDs. The occupants had not given Border...
AGRICULTURAL POWER HOUSE. HOW THEY ARE TREATED IS APPALLING.

BITING THE HANDS THAT FEED

This immigrant couple works long hours for a dairy worker in far northern New York who was a small dairy farm in the Finger Lakes region. They think you are Mexican," she notes. "My husband and well, it's something that scares you."

"When I go out with my step-daughter … she gets nervous," Cecilia adds. "In the moment that one might forget an ID or leave it at home they treat you like if you don't have anything to show them, an ID with your photo, that they'll just send you to jail, and well, it's something that scares you."

"Cecilia believes that Border Patrol sees all Spanish-speakers as being from Mexico. "Even when you say, or show them an ID, and if they don't read well that it says Puerto Rico they think you are Mexican," she notes. "My husband had that problem, they said 'No, you are Mexican.' And my husband told them 'I have an ID that says Puerto Rico, I'm Puerto Rican.'"

In 2013, Families for Freedom and the Law Clinic at NYU released another report revealing that hundreds of lawfully present individuals had been harassed, arrested or detained as a result of anti-immigrant provisions passed in Alabama. The report produced by the Cornell Farmworker Program states that, "In order for NYS to capitalize on the yogurt boom, the critical issue of reliable and sufficient labor must be addressed directly.” When anti-immigrant provisions were passed in Alabama in 2011 the state lost millions of dollars in unharvested crops.

Fruit needs to be picked or it rots. Cows need to be milked every day and most dairies run around the clock. The shifts are often 12 hours long and sometimes longer. Farmworkers often work six days per week and sometimes seven, and generally make little more than the minimum wage. Most U.S.-born citizens are unwilling to work under such conditions. As a result, some farmworkers use contractors to ensure a steady labor supply, while others ask their current employees to recruit friends and family members from home. Most immigrants arrive to the United States deeply in debt to their employers, contractors or family members, which further compounds the need to work and their vulnerability.

The vulnerability of farmworkers has been enshrined in federal law since they were excluded from New Deal-era labor legislation at the insistence of Southern congressmen who opposed giving new rights to Black agricultural workers in their home region. State law is no better in New York, where farmworkers are not entitled to a day of rest, overtime pay or collective bargaining protections. The Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act would end those Jim Crow-era exclusions in New York but died again in the Republican-controlled State Senate this year.

**PUSHING BACK**

The presence of immigration enforcement in the border regions adds a looming threat that keeps many workers fearful about speaking up about their working conditions and advocating for their rights. Rebecca Fuentes, an organizer with the Workers’ Center of Central New York (WCCNY) in Syracuse traces her involvement in immigration enforcement issues back to 2005. At the time, many immigrants in central New York were being detained in Syracuse,GENERIC0001.png

Continued on page 16

**STARTING OVER:** A dairy worker in far northern New York who was forced to leave his previous employer after the Border Patrol came to the farm following a house fire.

**DANGEROUS WORK:** A small dairy farm in the Finger Lakes region where a worker was killed due to unsafe working conditions. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration cannot inspect farms with fewer than 11 employees.
HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF ANTI-LATINO RACISM

By Linda Martín Alcoff

Jorge Ramos is one of the most powerful Latinos in the United States. A Mexican immigrant who is now a U.S. citizen, Ramos has co-anchored the evening news on Univision since 1986, achieving a level of trust with his viewers comparable to the iconic Walter Cronkite. He has won eight Emmys as well as numerous journalism awards, written best-selling books and interviewed every U.S. president since George H. W. Bush. In June, Ramos attended a press conference held by Donald Trump and asked Trump to explain how he could deny citizenship to children born in the United States. Instead of responding, Trump ordered him to “go back to Univision” and directed a bodyguard to physically eject him from the room. While standing in the hallway outside the press conference, considering what to do, Ramos was approached by an angry, red-faced white man who told him to “get out of my country.”

Attitudes toward Latinos in the United States are getting worse rather than better. As our numbers grow and we become politically crucial to elections and slightly more visible in the mainstream culture, wide public support has emerged for increasing militarism on the U.S.-Mexico border and instituting routine identity checks for people who “look like” they may be immigrants. Most Latinos, particularly Central Americans, cannot pass as white, no matter how they fill out their census forms. Latinos, particularly Central Americans, cannot pass as white, no matter how they fill out their census forms. Jorge Ramos has enough power to deflect an occasional experience with racism. In the June episode, Trump’s handlers eventually invited him back into the press conference. Ramos had been working as a Mexican and Central American day laborers waiting on sidewalks for employment across the United States have it much harder. They report not only routine verbal but also physical harassment, from having soiled food thrown in their faces to being shot at. Targeted violence against immigrants has become a routine weekly story across the country, whether instigated by high school kids or those more ideologically developed. We may gasp at Trump, but the level of acceptable violence and degradation on this population is perhaps most profoundly symbolized by the continuing re-election of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who uses Abu Ghraib-style prison practices in Arizona, including public sexual humiliation. Meanwhile, the hundreds of nameless bodies and bones found every year on our southern border go unmemorialized and largely unremarked. The people to whom they belong die trying to achieve the chance to work in the United States under conditions in which Mexicans are killed in on-the-job accidents at a far higher rate than U.S.-born workers.

This looks, feels and sounds like racism, but if Latinos aren’t a “race,” should it be called xenophobia or nativism instead? The problem with using more generic concepts like xenophobia and nativism is that they don’t explain how our specific targets are chosen. Religion and geographical origin are the principle criteria that elicit anger: being Muslim from anywhere, or being from anywhere outside of Europe.

Trump got his ideas about Mexican immigrants being rapists from Ann Coulter’s latest screed, Adios, America: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country Into a Third World Hellhole. But the essence of their views about how immigration from Latin America is an existential threat to the U.S. polity has long been argued by more putative reputable scholars, like the late Samuel Huntington, director of Harvard’s Center for International Affairs and an advisor to President Jimmy Carter on matters of national security. Huntington developed the concept of the “clash of civilizations” and his credentials lent a veneer of credibility to his claim that some cultures simply cannot be assimilated to the democratic traditions of the United States, a view one can hear widely echoed today in discourses spanning leftists such as Slavoj Žižek to right-wing pundits such as Ross Douthat. Like Coulter, Huntington placed his emphasis on the cultural threat from Mexico, arguing that Mexico has no tradition of respect for democracy, the rule of law or the Protestant work ethic.

The high incidence of worker deaths mentioned above would seem to be a contraindication of Huntington’s thesis: Mexicans are willing to work in dangerous jobs, yet the United States neglects serious enforcement of Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules that could avoid accidents. So much for the work ethic and the rule of law being on only one side of the border. Nonetheless, the problems often cited with a high influx of Central and South American immigrants is their premodern cultures, fervent Catholicism, high birth rates, violence and corruption. Every time a liberal white entertainer, such as, recently, John Oliver, makes comic reference to the trail of dictators in Latin America, this stereotype of the region’s cultural backwardness is reinforced.

The idea that some cultures are unchangeably “backward” and hence inassimilable is the basis for the new concept called “cultural racism.” Since the end of World War II, biologically-based claims about essential behavioral dispositions have lost traction. Research in the bu-
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TRAPPED IN A MODEL MINORITY MYTH

BY CYNTHIA TRINH
as told by
ALOHA MIOGUINIANA

From the discrimination faced by Chinese workers in the gold mines and railroads of 19th-century California to the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the history of Asian-Americans in the United States has been a fraught one. Today, Asians — a category that comprises more than 90 nationalities — are the fastest-growing group of new immigrants to the United States. In her recent photo series “The Model Minority Reality,” photographer Cynthia Trinh invites us to consider with the contradictions of the Asian-American experience. Racism remains rampant — Jeff Buck’s recent remarks about Asian “model citizens” are only the tip of the iceberg — and beneath the myth of the model minority are wide economic disparities within the Asian-American community, with many working low-wage and often exploitative jobs.

“Model minority” is a term that first emerged during World War II, the history of Asian-Americans in the United States has been a fraught one. Today, Asians — a category that comprises more than 90 nationalities — are the fastest-growing group of new immigrants to the United States. In her recent photo series “The Model Minority Reality,” photographer Cynthia Trinh invites us to consider the contradictions of the Asian-American experience. Racism remains rampant — Jeff Buck’s recent remarks about Asian “model citizens” are only the tip of the iceberg — and beneath the myth of the model minority are wide economic disparities within the Asian-American community, with many working low-wage and often exploitative jobs.

“What inspired me to do the series was the huge uproar in the community after the New York Times article about nail salon workers came out. It’s as if people didn’t realize that Asian-Americans are oppressed, are struggling and being exploited. I took that story to start the discussion about workers’ rights in nail salons, and it prompted New York to pass a law that basically guarantees fair wages for nail salon workers. But it’s not only nail salon workers. Now it’s time to start discussing fair wages and employee protections in a broader range of jobs. So a lot of my photos portray restaurant workers, street vendors, a whole range of different types of Asian-Americans working in the city in different capacities. I chose the medium of street photography because I wanted the images to be candid. I think it’s really important to see what kind of jobs these people are doing and what they’re doing when they’re at work, how they conduct themselves, how they’re dressed, what they do with their hands, their faces, their wrinkles, the bags under their eyes. I took the photographs mostly in Chinatown and Midtown, and for now they depict mostly Chinese- and Korean-Americans. Later, I would like to expand the series to include other Asian-American communities. When the public thinks of Asians as the model minority, the problems of the Asian-American community are ignored. There’s still a lot of racism but it’s almost never acknowledged. A lot of scholars call Asian-Americans “the invisible race.” I think it’s in part because many people put into the model minority that we’re all successful. One hand, we’re used as a standard to tell Hispanics, Blacks and other minorities that they should be like us, that they’ll get what they want by working really hard.

“Photography has always been a form of resistance in the immigrant community. We’re used as a standard to tell Hispanics, Blacks and other minorities that they should be like us, that they’ll get what they want by working really hard. But on the other hand we’re constantly teased as we don’t belong in America and criticized for being foreign, for not assimilating into American society. It’s a double standard, and the very real struggles of Asian-Americans are lost within it.”

For more on the “Model Minority Reality” project, see cindytrinh.com.
The first official use of the phrase “war on terror” — in President Bush’s speech to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001 — anticipated the term’s elasticity in the years ahead. The speech referenced “terror,” “terrorists” and “terrorism” 33 times, each time expanding the definition of the words and the consequences they carried for the world. “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make,” Bush warned. “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” Such a statement, which manipulated Americans’ fears after 9/11 into a grand inquisition of international allegiances, captures the essence of the war on terror: it is a tool, an ever-changing, universally-applicable justification for the worst steps a government can take. Saddam Hussein, we were told, was with the terrorists. And so we went to war.

The invasion of Iraq, as with many of the U.S. initiatives in the course of the war on terror, seems in retrospect to have been a long time coming. The 9/11 attacks provided the pretext for the invasion — despite the lack of any concrete intelligence tying Iraq to al-Qaeda, but President Bush and his administration had sought such a pretext long before the attacks occurred.

At Bush’s first national security meeting on January 30th, 2001, for example, Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill later remembered, the President demanded, “Find me a way to do this,” referring to Saddam’s ouster. Bush bombed targets close to Baghdad the next month. In March 2001, the Pentagon delivered a crucial report to Vice President Dick Cheney, “Foreign Support for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts.” Cheney, the former CEO of Halliburton, spoke frequently with oil company executives while in office. The day after the 9/11 attacks, as counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke recalled later, “[Bush] told us, ‘I want you, as soon as you can, to go back over everything, everything. See if Saddam did this,’” even though overwhelming evidence, then and now, pointed to Saudi-funded al-Qaeda operatives.

The invasion of Iraq illustrates a much longer trend about the economy of terror management: there are many reasons to use the war on terror as a political tool, and few incentives to end it.

Eroding Internet Privacy

For George W. Bush and friends, the incentives for going into Iraq were numerous and complex, and the war on terror provided cover for all of them. But the same is true for many politically influential groups in U.S. politics. With each additional incentive, the momentum behind the war on terror builds, regardless of the actual success of the war itself.

Take, for example, the USA PATRIOT Act, passed in the immediate weeks after 9/11. The Patriot Act is best known for its authorization of certain types of warrantless searches and seizures, bulk collection of phone and other types of metadata and enhanced intelligence sharing between federal and local officials, among many other things. How did legislators write, read and pass such a complex and lengthy bill in the immediate aftermath of a paradigm-shifting tragedy? In short, few of the ideas in the bill were new.

Through the bulk of the Patriot Act was written by Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, alongside Attorney General John Ashcroft and other members of the Bush administration, it was modeled on proposals written in 1995, months before the Oklahoma City bombings. At the time, then-Senator Joe Biden introduced the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995, known today, according to CNN, for “allowing secret evidence to be used in prosecutions, expanding the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and wiretap laws, creating a new federal crime of ‘terrorism’ that could be invoked based on political beliefs, permitting the U.S. military to be used in civilian law enforcement and allowing permanent detention of non-U.S. citizens without judicial review.”

Many of the Patriot Act’s most egregious tactics, such as “sneak-and-peek” searches, have been much more commonly used for drug, immigration and fraud investigations than terrorism cases, which constituted just 0.5 percent of such searches in 2013, according to the Electronic Frontier Foundation. One can hardly blame politicians like Biden — who worked closely with the FBI as a senator, has advocated tough Internet copyright and censorship laws and is now the Obama administration’s unofficial liaison to the law enforcement community — for capitalizing

### The Cost of War

**14**
NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE THE WAR ON TERROR BEGAN.

**1.8–2 MILLION**
ESTIMATED LIVES LOST IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN IN THE 10 YEARS FOLLOWING 9/11.

**4,486**
TOTAL U.S. TROOPS KILLED IN IRAQ AS OF 12/10/15.

**2,354**
TOTAL U.S. TROOPS WHO HAVE DIED IN AFGHANISTAN AS OF 12/10/15.

**200,000–300,000**
NUMBER OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS WHO HAVE SUFFERED FROM POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD).

**UP TO 300,000**
NUMBER OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS WHO MAY BE SUFFERING FROM POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD).

**$1.66 TRILLION**

**$8.36 MILLION**

**$65.6 BILLION**
TOTAL COST OF WAR FOR NYC TAXPAYERS SINCE 2001.

**$31,000**

**$293 BILLION**

**$598 BILLION**

**2044**
THE YEAR FORMER OBAMA ADMINISTRATION DEFENSE SECRETARY LEON PANETTA EXPECTS THE UNITED STATES TO CONCLUDE A “30-YEAR WAR” WITH THE ISLAMIC STATE.

**$20.01 BILLION**
NYC TAXPAYERS’ CONTRIBUTION TO 2015 PENTAGON BUDGET.

**$20.01 BILLION**
THE COST OF SUPPLYING 3.4 MILLION HOUSING UNITS WITH RENEWABLE ENERGY FROM WIND POWER FOR 10 YEARS.

**$20.01 BILLION**
THE COST OF PROVIDING 369,088 LOW-INCOME PEOPLE WITH HEALTH CARE FOR 10 YEARS.

**$20.01 BILLION**
THE COST OF PROVIDING FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY NATIONAL PRIORITIES TO 741,467 STUDENTS ($6,746 PER YEAR, PER STUDENT).

**— JOHN TARLETON
SOURCES:** Boston University, Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, National Priorities Project, Physicians for Social Responsibility, USA Today, Washington Post.
on the concept of a war on terror to pass laws favoring law enforcement, for which they previously could not rally enough votes.

And, with every terrorist attack, the pattern continues. After the recent events in Paris, politicians and intelligence communities worldwide called for an end to encrypted messages, a demand that is decades old, even though the attacks were openly discussed on plain old cell phones; the failure to prevent the attacks can be traced to human intelligence error, not a shortage of data. Still, where there is a will, the war on terror provides a way. The proposed “Snooper’s Charter” in the United Kingdom would eliminate end-to-end encryption, obliterating the potential for anonymity from government surveillance and making Internet users more susceptible to hacking by foreign governments, terror cells and cyber-criminals.

In the aftermath of the San Bernardino shootings, everyone from John McCain to James Comey has advocated for similar laws in the United States: President Obama called on the tech world “to make it harder for terrorists to use technology to escape from justice.” Hillary Clinton echoed his sentiment, noting regretfully that “You’re gonna hear all of the usual complaints, you know, freedom of speech, et cetera.” Donald Trump proposed “closing that Internet up in some ways.”

Outlawing end-to-end encryption wouldn’t stop extremists of all stripes or others interested in maintaining online anonymity from establishing their own encrypted networks on private computer servers. But this war rewards tough talk and opportunism, even when they make people less secure.

PROFITING FROM TERROR

The incentives inherent in maintaining a never-ending war on terror aren’t anywhere more clear than in the vast expansion of the American military industrial complex (see infobox).

In early December, The Intercept released a stunning, if not surprising, recording from the Credit Suisse Annual Industrials Conference. In a Q-and-A session, we hear a question from the audience: Given “increased activity in the global war on terrorism... how [might that] leverage Lockheed’s portfolio?”

Lockheed Martin Executive Vice President Bruce Tannor answers by citing the downed Russian jet in Turkey, an event that prompted the increased presence of surface-to-air missiles in the region, “making Syria a very dangerous place to fly. And who is flying a lot of those missions in Syria? The U.S. military.”

What goes unmentioned: the nearly $15 million Lockheed has spent lobbying Congress and the White House every year since 2011, when President Obama considered shrinking the Pentagon budget.

It’s this kind of lobbying money — which, in addition to buying off members of Congress, funds think tanks, museum exhibits and academic chairs — that creates bizarre scenes like the one that took place at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee in January:

“There has got to be a more effective and efficient method of procurement,” Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia said. “When [President] Eisenhower said ‘beware of the military industrial complex,’ man he knew what he was talking about. ... We force stuff on you all that we know you don’t want.”

Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno agreed. “We are still having to procure systems we don’t need,” Odierno said, adding that the army spends “hundreds of millions of dollars on tanks that we simply don’t have the structure for anymore.”

Despite reports from experts in military procurement that we are simply buying too much stuff, the buying continues. This war is too profitable for private contractors and our fear is too abundant. If hawkish politicians — those who raise funds from companies like Lockheed — can scare us into believing that a smaller military budget is a sign of vulnerability rather than one of sanity, we will keep buying equipment that our own military says it would rather not have at all.

BUYING VOTES WITH FEAR

The demagogue, as a political character, has thrived in the war on terror. Bolstered by the right’s fear-mongering, Islamophobes can do as well at the ballot box as the intelligence community has done with their new surveillance powers, or the military industrial community has done with their contracts.

In November, 31 governors “refused” to take in Syrian refugees — even though it’s not up to them, and they know that — in order to score political points with their constituents. The House of Representatives set aside all other business to make this same point: despite a certain filibuster from Senate Democrats, 47 Democrats and 242 Republicans voted to stop refugees from Iraq and Syria from coming into the United States, despite what is now well-known: that all identified Paris attackers were European nationals. The Syrian passport found near a dead suicide bomber is almost certainly a fake, according to the Washington Post, intended by the Islamic State to sow Western fear of refugees fleeing Syria’s civil war.

Meanwhile, Ben Carson compared potential Syrian refugees to “rabid dogs.” Donald Trump has called for an end to all Muslim travel of any kind into the United States, monitoring otherwise unremarkable mosques and executing the families of terrorists. Ted Cruz wants to see “if sand can glow in the dark” in Syria. Actually, most presidential candidates heartily endorse this latter attitude, as have leaders from around the world: Turkey, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and others are currently engaged in airstrikes across Syria.
The Indypendent
December 2015
ISIS:
United Methodist Church Human Rights & Racial Justice; recently visited refugee camps in Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan

David Wildman
United Methodist Church Human Rights & Racial Justice; recently visited refugee camps in Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan

The Commons
388 Atlantic Ave.
between Bond & Hoyt
A/C/G to Hoyt-Schermerhorn, 2/3 to Hoyt, B/Q/R to Bklyn/Br Bd
Wednesday, Jan. 13
7:00 PM to 9:30 PM
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Brooklyn For Peace
Celebrating 30 years
Wednesday, Jan. 13
9:30
BITING THE HANDS THAT FEED
Continued from page 9

Following the horrific attacks by Isis terrorists in Paris and Beirut, we have rapidly seen blatant pandering to xenophobia on a disturbing scale and scope. Leaders throughout the US and Europe have demanded that authorities stifle the flow of migrants seeking asylum, and to increase the size and depths of intelligence and law enforcement powers in the US and Europe...
I don't have all the answers – but I do know that blaming minority groups, refugees and immigrants, investing in gigantic surveillance platforms and calling for expansive legal authority and the creation of a neo-Gestapo and panopticon-style police state aren’t one of them. ~Chelsea E. Manning (Guardian Op-Ed, 25 November 2015)

WAR ON TERROR
Continued from previous page

many of them in cities where Islamic State soldiers are mixed in with civilians.
We hear about civilian casualties from drone strikes in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan. We hear about civilian casualties from airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. We’ve heard, for almost 13 years now, about the hundreds of thousands of innocent lives lost across the region from the destabilization spurred by the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. We have heard about these deaths, and yet we remain fearful of a wholly insignificant threat. These bombings are how we purchase peace of mind, and the cost in lives is astronomical.

WHERE DOES THIS END?

It goes without saying that this means the “radical Islamic extremists” are winning: the Islamic State, the most recent and deadly creation of our war on terror, has stated that they want to engage with the Western world in an eschatological struggle. The Syrian town of Dabiq is central to this narrative, according to New York Times’ Rukmini Callimachi: “The countdown to the apocalypse begins once the ‘Romans’ — a term that militants have now conveniently expanded to include Americans and their allies — set foot in Dabiq.”

As a military force, the Islamic State is growing weaker by the day. And as a government and a society, they have absolutely failed: hospitals are understaffed and new recruits must be threatened with death for abandoning their ranks, and yet they still do. But as an instrument of propaganda, the war on terror is their favorite tool: by selling a narrative of Armageddon, of Isla-mophobic Western governments and of the prospect of a never-ending war on terror, the Islamic State is using our own fears against us.

No one will stop it for us: our politicians and our governments stand to gain too much off it, as do the people perpetrating acts of terror that serve to fuel their Armageddon fantasies, with our help. The hundreds of billions of dollars we’ve spent fighting the war on terror are now investments in its continued existence.
In “losing” the war on terror — by remaining terrified of the world around us — we allow it to continue indefinitely. The only way to win it is to refuse to fight it altogether. We must task our governments with addressing terrorism just as they did before the war on terror existed: by approaching it as a style of violence like any other; a crime punishable in court.

Just as the “War on Drugs” has failed continuously for the past half century, so too will the war on terror. We must rethink our willingness to ascribe to the idea of such a war, or else it will never end.
W what lies behind Robert Dear's Black Friday shooting spree at a Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood?

Readers of the New York Times' in-depth background report on Dear's past call him a gun nut, a religious zealot, a terrorist, a Christian, not a Christian, isolated, a pro-lifer, a white supremacist, a drug user, a malcontent, bipolar and/or mentally ill. Most people posting comments are men driving forward the predictable debates about the joining of the words "Christian" and "terrorist.

But as a lawyer practicing divorce for 20 years, I can tell you that most of my male clients and the husbands of my female clients have characteristics in common with Dear, who killed three people and wounded nine.

He married and divorced multiple times. He lied and told his current love interest he was divorced when he wasn't. Then he went back to his first wife and made a baby. Like so many good Christians, he taunted against women who had abortions but excused his own pleasure and his offspring.

When Dear left his first wife for the second time, he demanded that his rights as a father be respected. But he refused to divulge his address to the mother, effectively kidnapping their child.
The IndependenT

Exploring the Future of Whiteness

Interview by Don Jackson

The Black Lives Matter movement has forced Americans of all colors to think about race and how it affects everything from politics and policing to our daily interactions. For Hunter College professor of philosophy Linda Martin Alcoff, race is something she has been reflecting on since growing up in segregated, small-town Florida in the late-1960s as the light-skinned daughter of parents of Panamanian and Irish descent.

“It’s painful to pass, because you hear white people say all this garbage you don’t want to have to hear,” Alcoff recalls. “I never had the luxury of thinking that race was not important.”

The author of numerous books that explore the intersection of race, gender and class, Alcoff has become an increasingly prominent public voice on these topics that are such a fraught part of life in the United States in the early 21st century.

In her latest book, *The Future of Whiteness*, she explores what the coming decades may hold for this country’s largest racial group as it loses its majority status.

**DON JACKSON:** What is whiteness and what motivated you to write this book at this time?

LINDA MARTIN ALCOFF: Whiteness is a historically formed racial identity, like all other racial identities. It’s meanings and its boundaries have changed over time and will undoubtedly continue to change. What is distinct about whiteness from other racial formations is that it has been supported and protected by white-dominated governments around the world to get special privileges, so that whites had an easier time to become citizens, work, build or buy homes, vote and stay out of prison. These privileges were justified on the basis of racist ideologies about racial hierarchies, ideologies that affected the formation of white identity, getting inside people’s heads. Thus whiteness has both an objective empirical aspect and a subjective psychological aspect.

However, racist ideology is not the only ingredient that has gone into the formation of white identity “on the ground,” so to speak. Most whites come from immigrant families fleeing destruction or persecution. Most today still live modest lives, and millions are living in poverty or near-poverty. Many whites struggle with discrimination based on sexuality, disability, gender, religion and so on, yet here too their whiteness affects their options for survival. We have to find a way to talk about the complexity of whiteness, without either downplaying racism or simplifying whiteness into one seamless racist ideology. Whiteness is not going to wither away, nor can it be abolished by individual acts of disavowal. I wrote the book to offer a realistic way to think about what whiteness is that can keep its complexity in view, and is neither fatalist nor naive about its future.

We are in a critical, historical moment. By 2042 whites will be the largest plurality but no longer a majority of the United States. When presidents talk about the American people, the American people are going to change. My book provides a way to think about what race and whiteness means that doesn’t go back to the old biological views that all scientists and most people today reject.

**Who do you think most needs to read your book now?**

Anybody trying to think about social justice and about how to reduce racism needs to think about whiteness. I’m really hoping white leftists will read it because there are a lot of avoidance strategies among white leftists who think that you can talk about class and avoid race. These include but are not limited to: first, thinking that capitalism can be understood apart from race (and gender), second, opposing all concepts of race on the grounds that the biological concepts of race are bogus, and third, believing that the white race can be “abolished,” as if historically formed organic identities can be wiped out of existence.

**How is understanding whiteness beneficial to all people, especially to efforts by all groups who are involved in seeking a better future for humanity?**

There are special challenges to imagining a non-racist multiculturalism in the United States that would include white people. Whiteness has been associated with being the vanguard of the human race, an idea makes it really difficult for whites to see themselves as one among others. Whiteness is an issue for all oppressed groups as well to think about in terms of how identities can get used politically in nefarious ways. And whites are not the only group whose identity is tied to histories of oppression. We have to become more sophisticated in our thinking.

**You mentioned that currently the right only talks about anti-white racism. They do not acknowledge other forms of racism.**

There is a striking number of white people who believe that anti-white racism is a big problem in the United States. It’s not the majority of whites who think that, but it’s a sizeable enough number to make you pause. The reasons for this are complicated. Some whites have experiences of being marginalized, of not being the favorite person in the room.

They are wrong because the material and political advantages still accrue more to whites than to others, but it still tells us something about the way people experience their lives and their society that we can respond to and learn from.

Ted Allen, the author of *The Invention of the White Race*, is known to have said “Don’t call me white.” And I’ve also met quite a few other Europeans who are very uncomfortable with being called white.

I respect Ted Allen’s work and his contribution very much. But I disagree with his view on this matter. It’s not up to us what race we are. No matter what you call yourself, you will still be seen and treated as a certain racial group. Your political commitments do not determine your racial identity. What determines your racial identity is history and the way you are seen in your society.

**The historian David Roediger is quoted in your book saying that race concepts are “ontologically empty.” Is this criticism valid or useful?**

Roediger says that because he’s a good historian and he knows whiteness was created out of a set of laws and practices orchestrated by the U.S. government. It was fomented by the 1 percent to get the 99 percent divided among themselves, and to get white workers to believe that their interests were more aligned with the white power structure than with people of color. Roediger is arguing that the interests of white workers are not with the white elite but with other people of color struggling for economic justice. So whiteness is ontologically empty in the sense that there are no cross-class shared white interests. But his mistake is in thinking that identity categories are constructions solely from the top down and those of us at the bottom only have the choice of accepting or rejecting these. That’s not actually true. Black and brown people, and Asian-Americans and Native Americans, have had a major role in changing how our identities are understood.

I think identities are best understood as both top-down and bottom-up, and the ways in which the top tries to control us is affected by what we do. They know they have to accept a certain amount of multicultural rhetoric because we’re just not going to accept the old bol

Continued on next page
MICHAEL MOORE, OPTIMIST

Where to Invade Next
Directed by Michael Moore
Dog Eat Dog Films and IMG Films, 2015

By Matt Shumah

It’s alright if you forgot Michael Moore made movies. Since Capitalism: A Love Story back in 2009, the documentary filmmaker, author and activist hasn’t released anything for the silver screen, until now. Asked about his lengthy hiatus in a Rolling Stone interview, Moore acted as if he was waking up from an accidental half-decade nap. “How about it’s just enough that it’d been a long while since I’d made a movie and I felt like making one?”

Fair enough. But it doesn’t seem like a coincidence that a liberal filmmaker has been sitting out a mostly-liberal presidency. Moore began his career running down the CEO of General Motors with his 1989 documentary Roger and Me, and ever since, he’s played the willing David to the Goliaths of Americancrony capitalism — guns, oil, pharmaceuticals, health care, finance — against the backdrop of whichever conservative administration was running things at the time. (He released two films in the Clinton years, Canadian Bacon and The Big One, neither documentaries.)

Growing up with Moore’s films, I saw in them an articulation of a frustrated liberalism that couldn’t seem to find a home anywhere else in the mainstream, save maybe “The Daily Show” and The Onion. Moore was always on camera, anger on his sleeve, an avatar for the anti-war protestors, the debtors, the mothers caught in administrative insurance hell. He was a big, physical guy who wasn’t afraid to do some goddamn yelling.

By contrast, Moore’s approach to them carries the film. We’re seeing footage.

But if the issues themselves are a little stale, Moore’s approach to them carries the film. We’re not asked to be angry, nor even on the lookout for Moore’s approach to them carries the film. We’re not asked to be angry, nor even on the lookout for the day. Because racism is the primary way in which the working class gets caught up in fighting each other.

Things have changed since Barack Obama took office, none more than the belief [a sacred one in 2007] that switching out presidents would end our long national nightmare, the Bush administration. With Obama’s election, Moore lost more than a villain, he lost a plot device. Where To Invade Next is Moore’s answer to this new political and narrative reality. Absent a faux-cowboy villain, our protagonist travels across the world (read: Europe and Tunisia), “invading” places and stealing their best policy ideas for America’s benefit. It’s clear why his crew nicknamed the project “The No Problems, All Solutions Movie.” It’s all solutions: from healthy school lunches in France to ample vacation time in Italy, work councils in Germany and free college in Slovenia, we see the world through Moore’s fresh pair of rose-colored glasses, in 15-minute chunks at a time.

Still, most of the policies discussed stand on pretty familiar ground. And, as the film leans heavily on the tropes Moore has come to be known for pretty familiar ground. And, as the film leans heavily on the tropes Moore has come to be known for.

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But if the issues themselves are a little stale, Moore’s approach to them carries the film. We’re not asked to be angry, nor even on the lookout for the same conspiratorial thrill that made Moore’s most successful film, Fahrenheit 9/11, so groundbreaking. There’s no one to blame for America’s failure to live up to its potential as the wealthiest country but ourselves. All of the ideas he “steals” from the rest of the world, after all, have previously been championed by American progressives, liberals and socialists.

In one of his most powerful moments on screen, Moore visits the Berlin Wall with an old friend, comparing the day it fell — after such a long time, and at the hands of a few young people with pickaxes — with similar moments in recent American history: the legalization of gay marriage, electing a black president and the stirrings of a low-wage workers movement.

Just as Moore’s films have punctuated my life, so too have the political changes he marvels at punctuated all of ours. And they really are marvelous: with the ascent of the Internet as a tool for organizing, our politics have been, ahem, disrupted. We don’t have to wait for a nonprofit to donate to, or for a political candidate to take on our cause. We’re driving this thing now. (Or at least, our hands are creeping closer to the wheel). And we have to decide what happens when the web amplifies our individual politics: the populist fascism and demagoguery of Donald Trump? The scattered good intentions of Occupy Wall Street? The urgent civil disobedience of Black Lives Matter?

Moore seems to have his own movement in mind, reserving the entire end of the film for the role of the day. Because racism is the primary way in which the working class gets caught up in fighting each other.

So what ultimately, then, do you see as the future of whiteness?

Well, I do think that there will continue to be a political polarization among white people and it’s pretty extreme. I don’t think that’s going to go away, but I think that the demographic changes will change the realistic options, for example to live or work in a white-only space.

It is true that there’s a lot of thinly disguised racism out there among liberal whites. Yet a sizeable number of whites will continue to reject vanguardist ideas and will realize that they need to learn how to get along in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic world. Almost half of white people today are significantly trying to be anti-racist. I hope my book will help.
By Beatrix Lockwood

Patti Smith
Alfred A. Knopf, 2015

Those who only know Patti Smith as a punk rock icon may be surprised that her new memoir, M Train, dwells more in libraries and cafés than in the sleazy clubs and cheap hotels that typically fill the pages of rock-and-roll memoirs. Unlike her first book of prose, Just Kids, which is set in New York City's gritty 1970s music and arts scenes, M Train contains only passing references to Smith's punk rock alter ego. Smith has said that she always considered herself a writer and that she became a rock star somewhat by accident. Yet the evolution of Smith's public image from punk poetess to bestselling author has only recently reached a tipping point. Even when she received the National Book Award in 2010 for Just Kids, some skeptics attributed her success as a writer to her top literary talents. Smith has said that she always considered herself a writer and that she became a rock star somewhat by accident.
GENTRIFICATION AS ORAL HISTORY

The Edge Becomes the Center: An Oral History of Gentrification in the Twenty-First Century
DW Gibson
Overlook Press, 2015

By Matt Wasserman

It is a truth universally acknowledged among New York City tenants that the rent is too damn high. Nor will it come as news that whole swaths of the city have been undergoing a reverse White flight. In Brooklyn, where I live, largely Black and Latino neighborhoods have been invaded by hordes of White twenty-somethings. Strewn in their wake are purveyors of artisanal sandwiches and coffee shops offering pour-overs, usually unaffordable to the previous denizens of the neighborhood. Rent stabilization and rent control have likely lessened the impact of this transformation on long-time residents, but tenant harassment and buyouts remain rampant.

In The Edge Becomes the Center, Flatbush resident DW Gibson takes readers on a tour of the dark underbelly of rapidly changing neighborhoods. In a wide-ranging series of interviews, Gibson stakes his claim as an heir to the legacy of oral historian Studs Terkel by channeling the voices of those caught up in the churn of gentrification. Intensely attuned to the complexities and contradictions of lived experiences, he brings alive what could be the subject of a dry sociology monograph. While Gibson shares the quintessentially New York fascination with real estate, his real passion seems to be for colorful characters. The Edge Becomes the Center features a veritable Greek chorus of them. His sympathies seem to lie with the low-income residents, housing court lawyers, Lower East Side squatters, left-wing professors and tenant union organizers fighting to keep squatters, and Latino neighborhoods have been undergoing a reverse White flight.

In New York, it sometimes seems impossible to step out into the same street twice. However, while change may be a constant, displacement and dispossession need not be. Each of us participates in the housing market as atomized individuals or families, pitted against one another and subject to the whims of the lords of the land. Nonetheless, we can change the choices available to us through collective action. A previous generation of New Yorkers did just that. Without some sort of larger organizing effort, this risks amounting to gentrification with a smile. The Edge Becomes the Center offers little by the way of analysis. It is loosely structured at best. And Gibson’s politics are mushy: While his affinities seem to be with the left, the closest he comes to suggesting a solution for widespread displacement seems to amount to talking to your neighbors. Without some sort of larger organizing effort, this risks amounting to gentrification with a smile. The Edge Becomes the Center is an engaging complement to the academic literature on the subject, but it mostly provides flavoring, not light. Readers interested in understanding gentrification would be better served checking out Neil Smith’s The New Urban Frontier, Sankia Sassier’s studies of the transformations in the urban landscape wrought by finance capital, such as The Global City, or Lance Freeman’s research on residents of the rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods of Harlem and Clinton Hill, There Goes the ‘Hood, to pick only some obvious examples.

The Edge Becomes the Center

Many of us share some complicity, however unwilling, in the processes of gentrification. I certainly do. But, to paraphrase Joe Hill: don’t feel guilty, organize.
The exhibition tells us that while Soviet photographers under Stalin were increasingly pressured to shoot only subject matter that glorified the state, there were fewer restrictions on how they were to shoot these subjects. Boris Ignatovich’s Bath and Alexander Rodchenko’s Dive (both 1935) each show athletic, virile young men — subjects perfectly in line with the USSR’s state-sanctioned ideology. As with so much in the Soviet Union, leaders marshaled photographic and cinematic creation — with its sweeping, dramatic power and gleaming bright lights — into the service of ‘The People,’ too often leaving actual people struggling, somewhere, in the darkness.

For example, it was Stalin’s push for industrial modernization that led, in the 1930s, to the creation of the FED. A small camera manufactured in large quantities in Ukraine, the FED was meant to give ordinary Soviet citizens the ability to create high-quality photographs, though in true Stalinist fashion, it was named after a murderous police chief and is said to have been produced using forced labor. The exhibition also includes a 1938 issue of the propaganda magazine USSR in Construction devoted to Soviet cinema. By then, the Soviet film industry was the third largest in the world. The magazine features a two-page spread in which an eager crowd has gathered to watch an exciting war film, and floating above them all is Stalin himself, gazing benevolently upon the proceedings and, perhaps, watching the movie as well.

Themes of energetic force and anonymity come up again and again in “The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film,” currently on view at the Jewish Museum. It’s a good exhibition, tidily fitting years of history into a few galleries. It even includes a small movie theater, with a rotating program of Soviet cinema classics.

The legacy of Soviet art evades easy answers or simple summaries. A totalitarian state run by a censorship-happy central government should, in theory, be absolute anathema to artistic creativity, and yet the USSR made massive contributions to modern cinema and photography, not to mention painting, literature and graphic design, among other fields. Part of this is certainly thanks to the canny abilities of Soviet artists to sneak avant-garde ideas past the censors, but the Soviet leadership also embraced elements of the artistic avant-garde. Under Lenin, radically new approaches to making art were encouraged: a revolutionary creative culture to mirror the radically shifting culture at large. Stalin, as you might expect, wasn’t as enthusiastic, but even he valued certain art forms for their powers to advance state-sanctioned ideology.

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This interplay between idealized representation and creative experimentation can be seen even more directly in photos of the Soviet military. Naturally, Soviet photographers were expected to highlight those qualities that made the Red Army so formidable: its advanced weaponry, dedicated soldiers and sheer size. Images of individual soldiers were eschewed in favor of photos that showed many soldiers grouped into imposing, orderly masses: marching across the Russian countryside, or standing rigidly at attention. Images like these, in which so many individuals are subordinated to a collectivized force, can be read not just as demonstrations of strength, but also as reflections on dehumanization and exploitation.

Georgy Petrusov’s Red Army Soldiers (1939) is carefully composed so that no one man’s face can be seen in full: a sea of outfitted soldiers where stray bits of flesh are quickly lost under waves of glinting helmets. Georgy Zelma’s 1933 images of military parades are cropped in such a way that these arrays of marching men look less like people and more like currents of natural energy; meanwhile, a 1931 Zelma photo shows soldiers dwarfed by a skeletal power line. From a contemporary vantage point, it’s easy to see such images as elements for lost humanity; it feels impossible that at the time, the photographers didn’t intend this, at least somewhat, themselves.

Amid these powerful images of athletes, locomotives, cannons and film stars, one may wonder: where are the farmers? One of the show’s most singular images, Shaikhet’s 1925 Lenin’s Light Bulb: Peasants Turn On the Electricity for the First Time shows two peasants gladly examining their new, state-issued light bulb. They look bedraggled and tired, and one question whether the last several years under Lenin have actually made things any easier (to say nothing of the Stalinist horrors to come). It’s for exactly this reason that images of struggling peasants — in all their ordinariety — were discouraged under Lenin and basically disallowed under Stalin. The relative scarcity of such imagery in this show seems to reflect a broader problem with the USSR’s approach to art or, for that matter, the problems of art-making within any censorious, totalitarian system. As with so much in the Soviet Union, leaders marshaled photographic and cinematic creation — with its sweeping, dramatic power and gleaming bright lights — into the service of ‘The People,’ too often leaving actual people struggling, somewhere, in the darkness.
THU MAR 16
$14/$10 for Students and Seniors/ Free Under 20
EXHIBITION: JACOB RII: REVEALING NEW YORK’S OTHER HALF.
A retrospective of the photographs and writing of the late-19th century newspaper reporter Jacob Riis, this exhibition chronicles Riis’ use of photography to illustrate the plight of impoverished residents of New York. Museum of the City of New York 1220 Fifth Ave 212-534-1672 • mcny.org/jacobriis

THU AUG 7
$16/$12 for Students and Seniors/ Free Under 19
EXHIBITION: AGITPROP!
A combination of “agitation” and “propaganda,” Agitprop! traces the long relationship of art and social activism, featuring historical social movements and contemporary efforts by artists engaged across mediums as diverse as photography, film, prints, banners, street actions, songs, digital files, and web platforms. Brooklyn Museum of Art 200 Eastern PKWY 718-638-5000 • brooklynmuseum.org

ONGOING
FREE
CLASS: ADULT MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING.
The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene offers these day-long training sessions specifically to non-mental health professionals. Attendees will learn to identify the early signs of common disorders and assess what to do next. Various locations nyc.gov/doh • mentalhealth-firstaid.org

ONGOING
FREE (!)
SIGN UP FOR A NYC MUNICIPAL ID!
As The Independent went to press, it was announced that the NYC Municipal Identification Card -- which is open to all New Yorkers who are at least 14 years old, regardless of immigration status -- will remain free for a second straight year. The ID comes with a slew of benefits, including free one-year memberships in more than two dozen cultural entities such as the Bronx Zoo, the Brooklyn Museum and the New York City Ballet. To make a mandatory in-person appointment to receive a card, follow the link below.

IDNYC
nyc.gov/idnyc

SUN DEC 20
1pm • Free
FORUM: FEMINIST DISCUSSION OF MASCULINITY.
This discussion is a safe space to discuss the gendered expectations placed on men and boys in a patriarchial society, and how these have affected, and continue to affect, all of us. The forum is open to all, inclusive of gender and level of knowledge of the subject matter. Bluetrockings 172 Allen Street 212-777-6028 • bluetrockings.com

MON DEC 21
7pm • Free
EVENT: CAMPAIGN FOR POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY – GENERAL MEETING.
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice invite you to attend this monthly meeting with a focus on ending discriminatory policing in NYC. The meeting will include an update on work with Communities United for Police Reform, planning future “Know Your Responsibilities” workshops and legislative advocacy. Jews for Racial & Economic Justice 330 7th Ave Suite 1901 212-647-8956 • @jref

THE DEC 31
9:45/10pm • Free
BIKE RIDE & PARTY: NEW YEAR’S EVE RIDE.
Join Times-Up for the direct action environmental organization’s annual New Year’s Eve ride and party. Bike or skate over the Williamsburg bridge and up to Central Park for a dance party. Non-riders are welcome to attend, simply meet at 11:45pm at Belvedere Castle. Dress festive (“don’t forget noisemakers and party favors”) and bring food and drink to share. 9:45pm Williamsburg Bridge at the Brooklyn entrance, OR 10pm Washington Square Park Arch, Manhattan 212-802-9232 • times-up.org

WED JAN 6
11am • Free
PARADE: 33RD ANNUAL THREE KINGS PARADE.
The Three Wise Men of the Christmas story are celebrated on this throughout Latin America and in El Barrio. The parade route runs from 108th and Lexington to 115th and Park. Attendees are invited to a celebration at El Museo del Barrio after the parade. To register to march or volunteer, see the website below. El Museo del Barrio 1230 5th Ave 212-631-7272 • elmusaeor

FRI JAN 8
8:30pm • $7 RSVP/$10 at the door/ Free for groups of three or more.
EVENT: ART LOVHER ARTIST SALON.
ArtLovHer is an evening of drink, draw, and performance in a historic artist collective space. Each event features a gallery reception, a live model to draw and a featured performance, and closes with an open mic welcome to any form of artistic expression. WOW Cafe Theatre 59-61 East 4th St 917-725-1482 • wowcafe.org

SAT JAN 9
7pm • Free
READING: COMING OUT LIKE A PORN STAR.
Contributors to Ji Lee’s upcoming anthology of essays on “coming out” about working in the adult industry will read their work. Lee’s work spans a decade of queer pornography and hardcore gonzo adult film genres. Bluetrockings 172 Allen Street 212-777-6028 • bluetrockings.com

SAT JAN 9
8pm • $18 suggested donation
PERFORMANCE: REGGIE HARRIS AND PAT WICTOR.
Join singers and guitarists Reggie Harris and Pat Wictor as they perform solo and together across a broad range of styles: everything from classical, folk, gospel and jazz to roots music, blues and country. People’s Voice Cafe 40 East 35th St peoplesvoicecafe.org

TUE JAN 12
6:30pm • Free
SCREENING AND DISCUSSION: A PLACE AT THE TABLE.
This film looks at three American families and their daily struggle with hunger and sources of food. Director Lori Silverbusch will be on hand.
Brooklyn Historical Society 128 Pierrepont St 718-222-4111 • brooklynhistory.org

TUE JAN 19
6:30pm • Free
CLASS: SEVEN ESSENTIAL STEPS IN MARX’S DIALECTICAL METHOD IN THREE NIGHTS
This three-night course will detail the seven steps in Marx’s dialectical method through explanation and practice, with the ultimate goal of helping people think, study and act more dialectically.
The Brooklyn Commons 388 Atlantic Ave marxedproject.org

TUE JAN 19
6:30pm • $16/$12 for Students & Seniors
PANEL DISCUSSION: HOUSING A PLACE AT THE TABLE.
City planning professionals including housing advocates, city officials and community leaders will lead a discussion on NYC’s affordable housing crisis, its origins and some possible solutions.
Museum of the City of New York 1220 Fifth Ave 212-534-1672 • mcny.org

FREE
CLASS: METHOD IN THREE NIGHTS
WED JAN 13
7pm • Free
DISCUSSION: ISIS: WHAT CAN BE DONE?
Phyllis Bennis, activist author of Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror: A Primer, and David Wildman of the United Methodist Church Human Rights & Racial Justice, will discuss ISIS, U.S. policy in Iraq and Syria, conditions on the ground, and the refugee crisis.
The Brooklyn Commons 388 Atlantic Ave 718-634-5921 • brooklynpeace.org

WED JAN 13, 20 AND 27
7:30pm • $25–$45/No one turned away for inability to pay
CLASS: SEVEN ESSENTIAL STEPS IN MARX’S DIALECTICAL METHOD IN THREE NIGHTS
This three-night course will detail the seven steps in Marx’s dialectical method through explanation and practice, with the ultimate goal of helping people think, study and act more dialectically.
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Challenging Complacency: Dread Scott is one of the artists whose work will be featured in Agitprop!, an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art that connects contemporary art devoted to social change with historic moments in creative activism.

The Other Half: Jacob Riis’s work highlighted the plight of children like this one who grew up with their immigrant families in filthy, overcrowded tenement buildings in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
We’re celebrating our 15th anniversary this year. Publishing a newspaper every month for 15 years hasn’t been easy. Our finances are often tenuous, but our readers have always made the difference. Now, we need to raise $30,000 in our year-end fund drive to stay on track heading into 2016. Will you help?

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- Original, on-the-ground coverage of grassroots social movements here in New York and around the world.
- Critical writing and analysis for a broad public audience on issues of race, gender and class, war and peace, the environment and much more.
- The continued growth of our arts and culture section.
- Our long tradition of training and nurturing the next generation of radical journalists.
- The interplay of words with beautiful illustrations, photography and design that a print publication makes possible.

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You’ll also get these premiums by signing up at indydependent.org/donate as a monthly donor of $10 and $20, respectively.

TO MAKE A GIFT, YOU CAN WRITE A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO “THE INDYPENDENT” AND SEND IT TO 388 ATLANTIC AVE., 2ND FL., BROOKLYN, NY 11217. YOU CAN ALSO GO TO INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE AND MAKE A ONE-TIME DONATION OR A RECURRING MONTHLY CONTRIBUTION – A GREAT WAY TO SPREAD YOUR GIFT ACROSS THE YEAR.