I ❤ BEING BLACK

BY NICHOLAS POWERS, JAMILA REDDY, VERNON ANDREWS,
BRITTANY WILLIAMS & GABRIEL LAWRENCE, P10
TELLING THE IMMIGRANT STORY

This is the story we can’t stop telling and retelling. The headline (“Biting the Hands That Feed: New York’s Immigrant Farmworkers Face Appalling Treatment,” December 2015) might have been the same for the past 10 years, but the details go beyond what we all could have imagined at the start. Please don’t be that guy still talking about “INS,” thinking you already know the story.

— GONZALO MARTINEZ DE VEDIA

Great article by Leanne Tory-Murphy about border patrol terrorizing farmworker and immigrant communities within 100 miles of the New York-Canada border. It isn’t a small problem. It’s affecting thousands of people who won’t leave their houses or the farm in fear that they’ll be picked up. Children are losing parents. We are dealing with a relatively new form of oppression and control that needs to be combated.

— NATHAN BERGER

I apologize for my fellow unenlightened New Yorkers. We here in Wayne County and the Finger Lakes area appreciate you and all the people who come here and pick our apples, milk our cows and trim our trees.

— ANDREI DIREKSEN-POST

WAR ON TERROR SOLVED

If the Saudis would get rid of Wahhabianism and the world would get off oil and coal, problems solved! (“In the War on Terror, Nothing Succeeds Like Failure,” December 2015)

— DANIEL ZIERVOGEL

RANK ANTI-COMMUNISM

The Indypendent’s review of “The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film” at the Jewish Museum (“Soviet Photo Surprises,” December 2015) is marred by rank anti-Communism. Interestingly, the wall text, captions and the gorgeous catalogue for the show do not pick up the reviewer’s take that these photos were intended to diminish the individual in order to elevate the state. The exhibition shows that Soviet photography had three major goals to encourage its citizens’ participation in the industrialization of the economy, document their larger social existence and prepare the nation for the impending war with the Axis powers. The photography projects optimism that life in the Soviet Union was getting better, and would continue to do so. Why are these disreputable/condemnable goals for photography and film in an impoverished socialist society encircled by hostile powers?

These early Soviet photos and films bring the aesthetics of high art and culture to millions of recently illiterate and downtrodden people. In some ways, they are not greatly different from the photos, posters and films produced by Farm Security Administration, the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Arts Project of the New Deal, all of which were influenced by Soviet photography and film. Neither Joseph Stalin’s ruthlessness nor Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s political dependence on a segregated South and big-city machines obviate the economic, social and cultural benefits their administration brought to the producing classes of the two allies that prevented the catastrophe of fascist triumph.

— GERARD MEYER

EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF WHITENESS

As a longtime reader of Ted Allen and David Roediger and acquaintance of both, I think this (“Exploring the Future of Whiteness,” December 2015) is the most nuanced commentary on the whole topic I have seen. I am not surprised that it comes from a person uniquely situated as someone who is seen as white unless she tells people otherwise. We will get some of the same more nuanced commentary on gender, I believe, from trans folks and others nearer the center of the gender spectrum as time goes on, and I look forward to it too.

— JOE BERRY

SECRET RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

One of the reasons that print newspapers like the Indy survive and prosper (“And the New ‘New Media’ Is … Print!” December 2015) is the unrelenting hard work and long hours put in by many people, including volunteers, who make sure each issue is delivered in all five boroughs. All this, not to mention the well-written articles and graphics. A labor of love all us readers are grateful for.

— TARAK KAUFF
COMMUNITY CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

THURS AIG 7
Various times • $15/$12 for students and seniors/free under 19
EXHIBITION: AGITPROP
A combination of “agitation” and “propaganda,” the “Agitprop” exhibit traces the long relationship between 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
Various times • Free
SIGN UP FOR A NYC MUNICIPAL ID
The NYC Municipal Identification Card—which is open to all New Yorkers who are at least 14 years old, regardless of immigration status—remains 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, see the URL below.
ny.gov/idnyc

TUE FEB 2
6:30pm • Free
DISCUSSION: STAGE FOR DEBATE: RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTIVISM.
This inaugural debate at the Schomburg Center will cover issues of Black sociocultural politics, including both responsibility and representation in regards to activism and black liberation movements both domestically and internationally. Panelists include Dr. Randall Kennedy, Dr. Brittny Cooper and Mychal Denzel Smith.
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
516 Malcolm X Blvd
917-275-6975 • nycldp.org

SUN FEB 7
2pm • Free
SCREENING: THE BLACK PANthers: VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION
The weekend of February 5–7 open house weekend at the Apollo Theater. In conjunction with Independent Lens and Thirteen, the Apollo Theater will screen Stanley Nelson’s feature-length documentary exploring the Black Panther Party. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion. RSVP is required and entry is not guaranteed without an email print-out of confirmation.
Apollo Theater
253 W 125th St
212-531-5300 • apollotheater.org

WED FEB 10
7pm • Free
BOOK LAUNCH: MURDER UNDER THE BRIDGE: A PALESTINE MYSTERY
Kate Jessica Raphael will read from her new murder mystery novel that follows a female Palestinian police detective, a gay Jewish-American peace activist with a camera and lots of attitude and an annoying Israeli police officer as they uncover secrets that point to war crimes and Israel’s thriving underground sex trade.
Bluestockings Bookstore & Café
172 Allen St
212-777-9238 • bluestockings.com

FRI FEB 12–SUN FEB 14
Various times • $25/$65
NATIONAL CONFERENCE: YSD 16: GENERATION LEFT,
Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign has gained strong support from young people who increasingly understand that capitalism offers no future for them and that it’s time to take a stand for democratic socialism.
To that end, Young Democratic Socialists from around the country will gather for a weekend of exciting speakers, workshops and socializing with fellow young activists. People of all ages are invited. Come and see what all the excitement is about.
Mayday Space
176 St Nicholas Ave
ydsusa.org

WED FEB 17
2pm • Free
READING & DISCUSSION: THIS IS AN UPRISING.
Authors Mark and Paul Engler will discuss their book, This Is an Uprising. The authors examine the modern forms of nonviolent protest and its transformative impact on contemporary issues such as climate change, immigration and more.
BookCourt
163 Court St
718-875-3677 • bookcourt.com

THURS FEB 25
2pm • Sliding scale $6/$10/$15
DISCUSSION: HILLARY CLINTON: BORN-AGAIN PROGRESSIVE OR ARCHITECT OF EMPIRE?
Doug Henwood, author of My Turn: Hillary Clinton Targets the Presidency, will discuss the Democratic presidential candidate’s attempt to recast herself as a born-again progressive and how that compares to her long history of hawkishness and service to money and imperial power.
The Brooklyn Commons
388 Atlantic Ave
marxedproject.com

SAT MAR 5
8pm • $18 suggested
PERFORMANCE: THE PEACE POETS AND FILTHY ROTTEN SYSTEM
The Peace Poets and Filthy Rotten System will raise your consciousness and energize your spirits with an evening of music.
Peoples’ Voice Cafe
40 E 35th St
peoplesvoicecafe.org

CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Gloria Joseph will discuss her biography of Audre Lorde (pictured above), the self-described black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet February 17 at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

ON TARGET: Author and journalist Doug Henwood looks at Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign Feb. 28 at the Brooklyn Commons.

FEAT MAR 5
8pm • $18 suggested
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2016 Brooklyn Public Library
3
Call for Submissions

Since 1990, the Aronson Awards have honored original, written reporting that exposes widespread injustices, underlying causes, and possible reforms. This includes exposing discrimination based on race, class, gender, religion or sexual orientation; economic exploitation; violations of human rights, civil liberties or free expression; environmental degradation; and brutality to civilians in war.

The award recognizes print journalism in profit and non-profit newspapers, magazines, newsletters and online publications. An award is also given for “Cartooning With a Conscience” to honor social justice graphics demonstrating clear, consistent ethical vision.

Individual reporters, cartoonists and publications are encouraged to submit work.

Submission deadline:
February 15, 2016

Entry Forms:
brie.hunter.cuny.edu/aronson

Awards Ceremony April 19, 2016
Hunter College, NYC

For information contact:
Tami Gold & Blanca Vazquez, Co-Directors
tamigold@ mindspring.com

Sponsored by Hunter College
Department of Film & Media Studies

FEDS CARRY OUT STEALTHY RAIDS AGAINST NYC IMMIGRANTS USE LITTLE-KNOWN TACTICS TO SKIRT LOCAL LAWS

By Alina Mogilyanskaya

At about 6:30 a.m. on the morning of March 2, Ram Sahadeo* received a phone call from a friend. She sounded shoked. “They are officers here in my house,” she said to him.

“They’re searching my place. They have a photograph of someone they want — I swear, it looks just like you.”

“It must be a mistake,” he thought. He spoke with the officer and gave her his address in Ozone Park, Queens. Minutes later, three cars pulled up outside, and immigration agents entered the house and took Sahadeo into custody, in front of his 3- and 5-year-old nephews, his wife Jan and her father. As Jan recalls, they didn’t show an arrest warrant.

“We didn’t know what was going on,” Jan remembers. “It felt like I was in a movie. They almost looked like bounty hunters.”

Seven months later, across the city in Flatbush, Brooklyn, Thomas Emmanuel was getting ready for work on a September morning when he got a phone call. The person on the line said they were an officer and wanted Emmanuel to come downstairs. He returned to the apartment a few minutes later with immigration agents in tow — they were wearing T-shirts marked “police,” his wife Rachelle recalls, and told her that they needed Emmanuel to fill out some paperwork and that he’d be back that afternoon.

Emmanuel kissed their two daughters, then 1 and 3 years old, goodbye before he was arrested. “Later that afternoon, he called and said, ‘They want to deport me,’” Rachelle says.

Sahadeo has been in the United States since he was 12, Emmanuel since he was 8. They are both now in immigration detention, fighting not to be deported to countries they haven’t seen since they were children.

HUNKERING DOWN

After Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained 121 Central American families in raids carried out in the first days of 2016, immigrant communities across the city hunkered down. People stopped going to work, picking their children up from school and seeking medical services, as concerns about ICE being in their communities — substantiated and not — spread.

New York City officials, meanwhile, joined in the national outcry against the Obama administration’s targeting of refugee families in raids. “New York City cannot and will not turn its back on our immigrant communities,” City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito said at a January 7 press conference in Corona, Queens. “Please know that we will continue to stand up for all of you.”

But city officials aren’t talking about the other raids ICE has been carrying out in New York City. In the last year, immigration lawyers and advocates have been increasingly hearing about ICE detaining people at their homes, in their neighborhoods and at or near courthouses, homeless shelters and supportive housing.

“The majority of the calls and the cases that we’re seeing are coming from home raids,” said Abraham Paulos, executive director of Families for Freedom, a Manhattan-based organization that fights deportations. Before 2015, Paulos said, between 80 and 90 percent of the organization’s hotline calls were about people being detained through contact with the criminal justice system. “It’s now more home raids than it’s been anything else. I would characterize it as an increase at an alarming rate.”

In early 2015, the city’s third round of detainee laws went into effect, forcing the shuttering of ICE’s office at Rikers and forbidding the New York City Police Department and Department of Corrections from detaining people at ICE’s request and notifying the agency about people’s release dates. The city’s Department of Probation also instituted a policy of noncooperation with ICE.

In a process that’s been under way since the first detainee laws were passed under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, ICE saw more limits placed on its access to potential deportees and continued to adapt. Immigration advocates and lawyers describe a pattern of ICE arriving at homes between 5 and 8 a.m. and using ruses to gain entry. ICE agents may first identify themselves as “police” or indicate that they need help with an investigation, which often gets them in the door. When they make their arrest, in some cases without showing an arrest warrant, they might tell the family that the person they’ve detained will be released the same day.

Advocates are quick to note that these are not the raids of Bush-era immigration enforcement — ICE does not appear to be doing sweeps of New York City buildings or workplaces or making collateral arrests. But their tactics reveal the limitations of the city’s detainee laws and other “sanctu-
ary city” policies. While the detainer laws disrupted the jail-to-detention-center pipeline, they did little to curb the data-sharing and surveillance mechanisms that allow ICE to flag and find potential targets. ICE still receives fingerprint information when an arrest happens, has access to the DMV database and court hearing schedules, talks to people’s neighbors, school personnel and postal workers, and more.

“It’s very disruptive and scary,” said Nyasa Hickey, an immigration attorney at Brooklyn Defender Services. “Unfortunately stopping ICE transfers and some information sharing is just not sufficient to really protect our communities and keep the families of New York City safe.”

AN ANGUISHED FAMILY

Sahadeo, 36, is now in immigration detention in upstate New York. He is from Guyana, and at the time of his arrest, he was in the process of renewing his green card.

“I feel helpless,” Jan said. It had been ten months since her husband had been home, and she was in tears. “I miss him. We’re a family, he’d do anything in the world for me.”

Sahadeo is a sewer line mechanic and has worked, ironically, on the sewers at 26 Federal Plaza, where ICE has its New York field office. More than that, as Jan recounts, he provides financial support and picks up medications for his elderly parents, shovels snow for his neighbors and is a loving uncle to his nieces and nephews.

Since his arrest, Jan, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Trinidad, has had to give up the lease on the couple’s small business storefront. It had long been her dream to open up a designer print shop, but she’s not able to make the rent by herself.

Emmanuel, meanwhile, is in detention in New Jersey. He is a green card holder from Haiti and makes his living as a driver. He and Rachelle are also the parents of two young daughters.

“The number one focus in his life is his children,” Rachelle said. “My daughter comes to me and asks, ‘When will daddy be home?’ It’s torturous for my kids to not have their father here.’”

In the five months that Emmanuel has been in custody, Rachelle has had to pull her eldest daughter, now 4, out of school because she could no longer afford it. Losing her husband’s income while picking up the costs of legal, commissary and prison telephone fees, she also fell behind on rent for their Brooklyn apartment.

In the eyes of the immigration system, few of these details matter. What is important is that both men have criminal convictions that qualify them as enforcement priorities for the Depart-
Eduction, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told lawmakers last year in his annual State of the State address, “is the area, my friends, where I think we need to do the most reform — This is the year to roll up our sleeves and take on the dramatic challenges that have eluded us for so many years.”

In March the governor introduced and the legislature passed the Education Transformation Act. Under the new law 50 percent of a teacher’s job performance rating was intended to be tied to state-wide standardized tests. The tests are based on federal Common Core standards for third through 12th graders implemented by New York in 2011 that link grant money to scores. However, when it came time for the exams last spring, 240,000 students in grades three through eight, or 20 percent of test-eligible New York public school pupils, opted out. By the end of the year Cuomo was singing a different tune.

“Simply put, the education system fails without parental trust,” Cuomo said in this year’s State of the State address, “is the place we need to be.”

But they’re using those tests to go after teachers and our students to see how they’re making progress. “The theory behind testing is that if you have more data, you’ll be able to figure out what works,” said Leonie Haimson, executive director of Class Size Matters, a parent-based group that advocates smaller classes and student privacy.

Under pressure from Class Size Matters, New York withdrew from inBloom in 2014. Founded with $100 million in seed money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, the nonprofit startup sought to collect not just test scores but a range of private student information — Social Security numbers, health and social service records, economic status, disciplinary records — and to store the data on cloud-based servers. The stated intention was to track students from kindergarten until graduation, but Haimson sees more nefarious motives.

“The aim of all this data collection, she said, “is to push education into private hands and generate a thriving market in education software. The Department of Education and groups like the Gates Foundation seem to feel that technology is going to solve our education problems even though there is no evidence to support that.”

Jia Lee admits that assessing student growth “is a key part of teaching” but says the results shouldn’t be used to penalize educators. “We’re constantly assessing our students to see how they’re making progress. But they’re using those tests to go after teachers and to close schools.”

Lee is running for president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) as part of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) caucus. Her supporters accuse the current union leadership of complicity in devising New York’s high-stakes testing regime. Despite public statements decrying high-stakes testing, the UFT’s current president Michael Mulgrew opened the door to the exam blitz in an agreement reached with Cuomo and Education Commissioner John King in 2012. It stipulated that test scores would account for 40 percent of teacher evaluations.

“Initially my reaction was positive,” Lee said. “In my mind I was thinking, is this really happening? But there’s still a state law in place that says we have to be evaluated by some kind of statistical metric. What that is, we don’t know.”

Students will still take the Common Core tests and the Transformation Act remains in place, meaning that teacher evaluations will continue to be based on student performance data, making it likely that tests implemented by local school districts will take the place of the Common Core exams to assess educators.

Under pressure, Cuomo plans on refusing to let her children take the tests again this year. “Opting out isn’t just done to change political policies or to get legislators to take notice,” she said. “It’s also about protecting kids from six days of testing that is completely inappropriate.”

As New York stepped back from high-stakes testing, so did the federal government. Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act, which allows states to devise their own education standards rather than follow Common Core and no longer mandates that states tie student performance data, making it likely that tests implemented by local school districts will take the place of the Common Core exams to assess educators.

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STILL OPTING OUT

We need a different level of engagement from our union,” said Lee. “It’s going to take real organizing power.”

A taste of that organizing power came during last spring’s opt-out actions, which included approximately 40,000 third through eighth graders opting out on Long Island, where Deutermann organizes, and some teachers, including Lee, refused to administer the tests. However, Cuomo’s apparent retreat has turned out to be more ambiguous than it first appeared.

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Governor Andrew Cuomo has pledged a “major initiative to return up to 50,000 illegally deregulated apartments to rent regulation,” but tenant advocates say there is less to it than meets the eye.

The governor’s plan, announced January 6, involves sending letters to the owners of more than 4,000 buildings that received J-51 tax breaks intended for rent-stabilized buildings and contain apartments that are not registered with the state housing agency. Close to half of those buildings are in Manhattan, with more than 800 in Brooklyn, 700 in Queens, 500 in the Bronx and 15-20 in Staten Island, according to the agency, New York State Homes and Community Renewal. It has instructed those owners to register all apartments in them as rent-stabilized or face having to pay treble damages if the rent is illegally high. The letters also told them to offer tenants rent-stabilized leases.

The J-51 program, created in 1935 to help landlords install hot-water systems, gives owners of rent-regulated buildings property-tax reductions that cover as much as 90 percent of the costs of major renovations, such as a new boiler. A 2012 report by the Community Service Society called it “one of the city’s most expensive housing programs.” In 2011, it cost the city about $257 million.

In 2009, in a case involving Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village, the state’s highest court ruled that it was illegal for landlords who were receiving J-51 tax breaks to take apartments out of rent regulation. About 4,300 apartments in the 11,000-unit complex had been deregulated, primarily through vacancy decontrol.

“There will be zero tolerance for those who disregard the law and reap these benefits while denying tenants affordable housing they are obligated to provide,” Governor Cuomo said in a statement January 6. The Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), which administers rent stabilization, “reserves the right to seek and impose appropriate penalties as warranted,” according to an agency spokesperson.

The problem, advocates say, is that state law offers nearly 100 percent tolerance for landlords who don’t register rent-stabilized apartments. Until 1993, unregistered apartments’ rents could have been frozen at the last legal regulated level, Legal Aid staff attorney Ellen Davidson explains. But that year, the law was changed so that owners could register apartments at any time and keep any legal rent increases. And the 1997 vacancy-decontrol law, which deregulated vacant apartments if their rent was high enough ($2,000 a month then, now $2,700), also prohibited tenants and courts from looking back more than four years to determine whether an apartment’s rent was legal.

The 1993 law “essentially made registration voluntary,” says Michael McKee of Tenants PAC. He calls the state’s initiative “very feeble.”

“It’s good that they’re doing this, but it’s ridiculous that they didn’t do anything before,” he says. It would be more effective to write to tenants in the affected buildings and tell them “you are likely being overcharged” — or to take legal action against landlords who charge too much.

DHCR says it will continue to audit data to find apartments that should still be regulated, and tenants should contact its Office of Rent Administration if they believe they’ve been overcharged. In those cases, the courts will determine how much the rent should be, based on the individual apartment’s history.

Almost 200,000 apartments that are supposed to be rent-stabilized are not registered with the state, investigative reporters at ProPublica wrote in December. The city Department of Housing Preservation and Development estimates that there were about 1,030,000 rent-stabilized apartments in the city in 2014, but only 840,000 were registered with DHCR, according to agency figures ProPublica obtained. Many of those also have illegally high rents, says Davidson.

If a tenant can prove that they were illegally overcharged and that it was “willful,” the standard penalty is triple the excessive rent. McKee says that landlords who received J-51 benefits will have a hard time proving that any overcharges weren’t willful, as they know the law, and the Stuyvesant Town decision was major news in the real-estate industry. The catch, says Davidson, is that unregistered apart-
CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Sanders could have afforded the $2,500, but it’s a thing in Texas) and organized an effort to gather the $2,500 required to buy ballot access, Sanders’ other serious candidate for president opted to pay thousands of people. As seen in Texas: While every video an advantage large donations don’t: the con-

THE SMALL DONOR ADVANTAGE

Usually, candidates who publicly decide to refuse support from super PACs and focus on small do-

FUNDING THE ‘POLITICAL REVOLUTION’ $27 AT A TIME

For a campaign that has so successfully zeroed in on Americans’ discomfort with the way we pay for our elections, Bernie Sanders’ bid for the Democratic presidential nomination has largely been a public record of his fundraising successes. With every landmark moment in his campaign, from parrying Clinton-aligned super PAC attacks to suing his own party to performing well at the first debate, the Sanders camp eagerly announced the money they raised as a result (for the record: $1.2 million, “more than $1 million” and $1.4 million, respectively).

The bragadocio points to a confidence the Sanders operation has about their system. Two years after McCutcheon v. FEC ended all aggre-
gate limits on donations to parties and candidates, and six years after Citizens United v. FEC deregula-
ted campaign spending by corporations, the fact that Sanders’ support comes mostly from small do-
nations — and without the help of any candidate-
aligned super PACs — is remarkable.

Cambridge university researchers have found that, since the campaign finance reforms of 2002, more than 22 million people have contributed to political campaigns and parties in the United States, giving an average of $27 per donation. Com-

2.3 million donations given by 1 million individu-
alists. That’s an average of $27 per donation. Com-
pared to most candidates for president, for whom

ESTABLISHMENT

CONFRONTING THE PARTY

selection he later had to renounce and a chaotic nominating convention that derailed his nation-
ally televised acceptance speech mid-speech in the morning. His fate was sealed, however, when more conservactive elements in the party, including hawkish labor leaders and the media, turned on him over his answer stance and joined in caricaturing him as supporting “abortion, amnesty and acid.”

In present-day Great Britain, last year’s upset victory the election of 66-year-old democratic so-
cialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labor Party has produced deep rifts in the party. Corbyn re-

much like Corbyn, Sanders hasn’t shied away from the narrative of a progressive outsider facing off against the establishment. After the premiere of his first television advertisement, which describes

CONFRONTING THE PARTY ESTABLISHMENT

FROM THE BOTTOM UP: Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders greets supporters after giving a speech.

THE MOVEMENT

February 2016

W27NEWSPAPER.COM
WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BERNIE SANDERS MOVEMENT IF HE LOSES?

By George Lakey

You may have heard the story of the woman who was walking her dog one night and found a man on his hands and knees, searching the sidewalk under the streetlight. “Can I help you find something?” she asked.

“I dropped my house key over there,” he replied, gesturing behind him, “and I need to find it.”

“But if you dropped it over there, why are you looking here?” she asked.

“The light is much better here,” he answered. I remember the story when I think about the many millions of Americans who know that huge changes are needed in economic and climate policy and turn to the electoral arena to find their power. They won’t find their power there because the system is so corrupted, but they nevertheless look for their power “under the streetlight,” where middle school civics textbooks tell them to look.

The corrupted system, however, does not lead me to dismiss Bernie Sanders’ campaign for the Democratic nomination for president. He and the many people working with him have already contributed mightily to the task of preparing Americans for a living revolution. How so?

First, he articulates clearly truths about our system that many Americans have figured out, but have wondered — for good reason — if they are alone. In a recent ABC/Washington Post poll, 68 percent agreed that we live in a country whose economic system favors the rich rather than the rest of us. (About half of Republicans thought this, too.) In another poll, 74 percent said they believe that corporations exert too much influence on American politics and life. As early as 2012, a poll found a staggering 75 percent of Republicans agreed there would be less corruption if there were limits on donations to super PACs.

Sanders is giving these views a voice. When Bernie asserts on national television that it is Wall Street that regulates Congress instead of the other way around, he strikes a chord that potentially enables people to resonate together — Republicans, Democrats and Democrats alike.

Second, Sanders defies the political class by portraying a vision of how our country could move toward justice. U.S. politicians are notoriously vision-averse, except for neoconservatives and libertarians. (Social justice activists are also remarkably vision-averse, even though the aversion undermines our effectiveness.) By contrast, Sanders repeatedly points to Denmark and other Nordic countries, thereby bringing vision into the conversation. While I have radical Nordic friends who are critical of their countries’ achievements, in the U.S. context Bernie is performing a remarkable service. He even makes sure to connect the dots by offering a public course on democratic socialism.

Here again, the U.S. public is way ahead of the political class (and even ahead of many social justice activists). For over 30 years Gallup pollsters have found a steady majority who agree that the United States should redistribute wealth by imposing heavy taxes on the rich. Gallup found in 2014 that even Republicans polled at 45 percent in favor of increasing taxes on the rich. The Pew Research Center found that more Republicans favored increased spending on Medicare, education and infrastructure than favored cutting those programs. The Economist worries that “Anti-capitalism is once more a force to be reckoned with.” Among Democrats, in October 2015, a YouGov poll found an 80 percent majority who approved of socialism favorably, while their approval of capitalism had fallen to 37 percent.

So Bernie’s campaign scores high in articulating both analysis and vision. He challenges other activists to stop holding back as we relate to the majority of Americans. Clearly, it is time to be bold and meet people where many of them already are.

A ‘POLITICAL REVOLUTION’?

Sanders’ candidacy is, to be sure, self-limiting. The political revolution he calls for cannot be achieved through the ballot box. Most Americans would agree with me if asked, based on their perception of the corruption of the system. I’d recommend to the remaining true believers in “U.S. democracy” a Princeton study released in 2014.

Two U.S. political scientists conducted a broad empirical study that reveals who actually has the say in public policy. Martin Gilens of Princeton and Benjamin I. Page of Northwestern examined the 1,779 specific policy issues that came to a head for national decision in the two decades between 1981 and 2002. Note: That period was before the Supreme Court made the Citizens United decision, before the billions released in the current money rush.

For each issue Gilens and Page determined from opinion polls and other evidence what the majority of the public wanted and what the political elite wanted. When those two views differed, the scholars wanted to know whose view prevailed. They took into account the fact that ordinary citizens often combine to form mass-based interest groups like the American Association of Retired Persons.

What they found was that when there was a difference, the economic elite almost always prevailed over the majority. Even the mass-based interest groups had little or no independent influence. In the scholars’ words, “In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule — at least in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes.”

Bottom line, there’s no reason to think that the election of Bernie Sanders as president, even with a congressional majority of Democrats, could possibly deliver the changes we want. Both major parties are clearly owned by the economic elite, and what they want, they get — as long as movements for change stay within the framework of electoral politics.

The good news is that we have the option of moving outside that corrupted framework. What if the Sanders campaign maintained their commitment to a progressive analysis and vision and simply acknowledged what so many Americans already know: The system is too rigged to be changed from within.

Continued on page 16
THE BLACK CHAMELEON

By Vernon Andrews

My moment of gloriously unapologetic blackness came, surprisingly, in China. In 1994, after six months of intensive study and travel in China, my time as a student there was marked with a significant and unexpected event. It was a turning point in my life, and it took me by surprise.

I was known as the PK, a term used in China to describe someone who appears to be from a higher social class than they actually are. This was a common practice among Chinese students, particularly in universities, where students from lower social classes would dress and behave in ways that were associated with wealth and status. This was not uncommon, as many students were eager to impress their peers and gain upward mobility.

I had always been a reserved and introverted person, and I was not interested in dressing like a PK. However, one day, I was approached by a group of Chinese students who invited me to join them for a night out in Shanghai. I was hesitant, as I had never been to a club before, but they were insistent and eventually convinced me to go along.

When we entered the club, I was immediately struck by the vibrant atmosphere and lively energy. The music was loud and the people were dancing and celebrating. I was nervous, but I decided to give it a try. I walked around and met some people, and we talked about our experiences in China and our aspirations for the future.

I was surprised by the warmth and hospitality I received from the other students. They were friendly and welcoming, and I felt at ease with them. I danced and bonded with them, and we shared stories and experiences. It was a unique and unforgettable experience.

In the end, I was grateful for the opportunity to experience the richness and diversity of Chinese culture. It was a turning point in my life, and it gave me a greater appreciation for the complexity and beauty of human nature.

LAUGHTER IS PROTEST

By Janice Ruby

When we were young, my sister and I would get into fights about who was who. There was nothing else we could do, so we would argue over our titles. One of us would be a “socialite” and the other a “village dweller.” As we grew older, these arguments became more intense, and we would often end up in physical altercations.

I grew up in a small town, and I was always the “village dweller.” My parents were strict, and they wanted me to be a good Christian girl. They didn’t want me to be “too stylish” or “too modern.” I was always the odd one out, and I didn’t have many friends.

But one day, my sister and I were arguing about who was who, and we started to laugh. We couldn’t stop laughing, and we realized that we were having a lot of fun. We started to see the humor in our arguments, and we began to enjoy them.

From that day on, I started to appreciate the power of laughter. It was a way for me to express my feelings and connect with others. It was a way for me to become more comfortable with myself.

Today, I still laugh a lot, and I have found that laughter is a powerful tool for protest. It can be a way to resist oppression and challenge the status quo. It can be a way to express our true selves and be ourselves.

THE BLACK SOUL

By Gabriel Lawrence

My moment of unapologetic blackness came, surprisingly, when I was in college. I had always been a reserved and introverted person, and I was not interested in dressing like a PK. However, one day, I was approached by a group of Chinese students who invited me to join them for a night out in Shanghai. I was hesitant, as I had never been to a club before, but they were insistent and eventually convinced me to go along.

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LAUGHING IS RESISTING

By Johnnie D. Wright

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A LOVE SUPREME

Continued from previous page

Whiteness was crumbling like the ice of the North Pole. Chunks of it, falling, we were chanting it down. Our lives were beginning to matter. When police used us for target practice, we flooded the cities. Holding up the faces of those killed like mirrors, we forced America to see itself. We yelled “I can’t breathe,” so loudly that it filled the sky. Black Soul, I found you in laughter. On my Bed-Stuy stoop with a dear friend, a tall brother with those Tupac-Asanti features that made me question my life. We talked about what Black is, Black ain’t. How Black Soul was not just our inheritance but also our creation. And how we had to remold it. But what was it now? New faces were on the scene. Hipster Black. Tech Black. Afropunk Black. Atheist Black. And faces that weren’t new but had been hidden by our ignorance — Queer Black, Transgender Black.

We closed our endless debates between Beosique Black and Hood, High Yellow and Blue Black, Rasta Black and Yankee Black, Church Black and Dealer Black, Tyrone versus the Sistahs, Queen Black and Basic Black. We laughed at the fault lines that ran through our people, our families and our minds. Finally, he turned to me, “So aside from skin-lightened, what kind of Black are you?” Tilting my head, I said, “Disco Black. Protest Black.” I pretended to whip myself. “Kinky Black, you know, a little S/M to honor the ancestors.”

“I’m Denzel Black,” he chortled and stroked his nose. Looking into the distance, he said, “I’m Trying to Figure This Shit Out Black.” He half smiled. “I’ll own up to it. I go full nigga. Way. Too. Much.” Eyesing me carefully, he said, “But you don’t.”

Finally, he turned to me, “So aside from light-skinned, what kind of Black are you?” Tilting my head, I said, “Disco Black. Protest Black.” I pretended to whip myself. “Kinky Black, you know, a little S/M to honor the ancestors.”

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“Oh, I have to be real in love or really angry,” I said. “Like when they say ‘Hulk Smash’ in the movie, that’s me, except it’s the ghost of W.E.B. Du Bosis saying, nigga smash.” I thrust my chest. “I smash racism.”

THE BLACK CHAMELEON

Continued from page 10

and Black and hip-hop culture. I even marketed my own barbeque sauce; there was a premium put on “being Black” and “being authentic.” I was a chameleon no more. I was Black and brash and New Zealand loved it. It took leaving the United States to find my internal home.

I left New Zealand for good in 2009, returning to attend Obama’s inauguration in D.C. in January 2009. I wanted to be here for the growth in race relations over the next eight years. I wanted to be a part of the “change” in the United States. But it hasn’t quite worked out that way, has it? We are still Black.

Happily, so am I. My Black pride means being comfortable in my own monochrome skin. I had to go abroad to realize that it’s ok to just be me, the Black kid from Oakland: Black, proud and half-crazy. Imagine that.

Vernon Andrews teaches history of sport and physical education in the Kinesiology Department at San Jose State University. His recent Kindle eBook is The Control of Black Expression in American Sport and Society.

THE FABULOUS TURN

Continued from previous page

curtain of hair to hide behind. I finally came out of mourning for my lost length when I realized how amazing my real hair was. No more fear of sudden rainstorms. Post-show I could dry my sweaty hair and just re-fluff it. I taught myself to make hair oils and how to do two-strand twists, comb coils, faux-hawks. I tricked out my ‘fro with cute hair accessories.

My moment of triumph, magical black girl glory came in the middle of a performance of a musical. I took the stage, beautifully tanned from the Hong Kong summer sun, my unruly twist-out adorned with a sequined headband made just for me by the costume department. I looked out over a sea of transfixed faces, not one looking anything like me. My heart swelled and I felt it. Damn it was fabulous being black.

Brittany Williams is an actress, writer and social media consultant. She is the principal vocalist at Hong Kong Disneyland for one year and aspires to someday win an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony.

THE PREACHER’S KID

Continued from previous page

Identity has always been something I struggled with, but around this time I first decided people would know me by the terms I chose. I braided my hair, listened to rap and jazz, kept my good grades, joined the debate team, played football, lifted weights, graduated with honors, spoke in tongues at Wednes- day night bible studies, dialogued about my experience with people who looked like me and with those who were different.

To me Black is determined, powerful, un-forgettable and carries a heavy punch. I am not ashamed of it. In fact, I unabashedly embrace it.

Gabriel Lawrence is a New York-based ac-
tor and filmmaker.

PSALM

Black Soul, rising from the Diaspora, bringing up everyone who drowned, everyone who fought or escaped, who loved and gave birth to us. A figure made of millions and millions of faces. You, world-historical being, a dark giant whose skin is a starry night. Our faces lit by new suns.

Black Soul sees the ancient Pantheon in the horizon and its stately pillars, the stage upon which the powerful talk. Standing between the white columns, it touches them. They were made from our bones. And we know it’s time, we who are born, live and die within the Black Soul, to say the name of everyone we loved and lost and failed to rescue. Singing to them, we push the pillars apart.

In that final crash, the Black Soul, with its profane halo, ceases to be and so will the weight that created it. And then a new human can enter time. A real human being. A love su-
preme. Amen.


LAUGHTER IS PROTEST

Continued from page 10

again and again. It has meant, to borrow a phrase from Hafiz, staying close to anything that makes you glad you’re alive.

The strength of being Black in this lifetime is knowing how to stay as close to your joy as you do your grief — claiming your right to pleasure with the same fervor you claim your right to rage. When I talk to a sister-friend on the phone — one member of my chosen family, my tribe — we laugh loud and hard, indulge in this ritual of release until our breath has run stumbling alongside us to catch up. This is gift of survival in this body: laughter becomes protest, feeling good becomes a gentle riot; joy: an ancient rebellion — another way to say, “I am so glad you’re alive.”

Jamila Reddy is a queer black woman from the South. Each of these identities informs the other and she likes to think, talk and write about how.

PURSUANCE

Black Soul, where do we go from here? We live going under, around, over and through walls. But we have integrated a burning house. We inhaled the smoke of ignited money. The rich sell dreams to the hungry. We see them make bread out of ash. And they blame us when their night becomes blindness.

The American Dream is dying. And this is our New Exo-

dus. We gotta leave. It’s time to go. The clock on Flava Flav’s chest has stopped. The gold in our mouths has flaked away. The math of Wall Street is Zeno’s Paradox. The nation is hid-
ing its poor in jail. Workers are borrowing from tomorrow to pay their bills today. The food we eat is plastic inside plastic. The land is being wrenched open for gas. Our water catches fire. The sky is becoming a hot blanket. The war is endless. Our names are on bombs that blast families into pools of blood.

The American Dream is dying. It is a half of cracked televi-
sions and outside it is a desert. This is a New Exodus. We gotta go. It’s time. Even if we have to eat sand. Or break the tombs of our ancestors for water. Beyond this place is a post-American world. Beyond this place is a land where Blackness is the ink with which we will re-write our names.

The covenant we make now is to the body. This ransacked vessel of the five senses, its eyes blistered from violence. Its knees worn by work. Its heart broken by loss. Its sex numbed vessel of the five senses, its eyes blistered from violence. Its heart broken by loss. Its sex numbed.

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IMMIGRATION RAIDS
Continued from page 5

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‘FELONS, NOT FAMILIES’

In November 2014, the same month that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio signed the detainee laws, President Obama announced that the focus of immigration enforcement would henceforth be on “felons, not families.” His administration instructed enforcement agencies to focus resources on the removal of immigrants with specific criminal convictions, those who arrived after January 1, 2014, and those with prior deportation orders. The directives, known as the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), replaced Secure Communities.

These new rules also figure in the apparent uptick in home raids and community arrests in New York City. “It’s hard to say how much of the difference in ICE activity in the community is related to the detainee law versus related to the PEP priorities,” said Mizue Aizeki, deputy director of the Immigrant Defense Project. Comprehensive information about the how and how much of ICE raids is scant. The agency is famously tight-lipped about its operations, and official data on these raids are not available — the Immigrant Defense Project, with the Center for Constitutional Rights, has been fighting the agency for information on home arrests since 2013.

It is telling, however, that almost 1.5 million people in New York City are non-citizens, while one in nine adults have been convicted of a crime in the last 10 years. This demographic makeup, according to Paulos, makes the city a prime target for ICE.

“A raid is a raid no matter what,” Paulos said, referring to city officials’ silence about the targeting of immigrants with criminal records. “Most of these folks are long-term New York City residents. And they’re also parents, they’re also children, they also deserve to be able to wake up with their families.”

Tenants
Continued from page 7

...ments have no paper trail documenting what the legal rent actually is. The law effectively requires tenants to enforce it themselves, she says, and landlords have been evading it for years. “When it’s in their business interests to ignore the law, they do,” she says, “and there are no consequences.”

If you believe your apartment was illegally deregulated, DHCR has placed a notice on its website, nyshcr.org, with instructions for how to find out more. It contains links to city sites where you can obtain your building’s block and lot number and use that to find out its J-51 tax benefit status. You can then ask for a rent history of the apartment by e-mailing rentinfo@nyshcr.org or calling 718-739-6400.

If you don’t get any notification from the landlord within the next couple months, Ellen Davidson recommends that you think about filing an overcharge complaint.

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EATING DISORDERS TAKE CENTER STAGE

Interview by Alina Mogilyanskaya

So, how do you feel about your body? This is one of the questions posed by Embodi(ED), an upcoming documentary theater and dance piece about body image and eating disorders. The play is written and performed by Girl Be Heard, a collaborative theater ensemble that aims to empower young women to tell their own stories, and the young women behind it intend to break the silence around eating disorders and the system that drives them. Ashley Marinaccio, director of Embodi(ED) and cofounder of Girl Be Heard, recently shared her thoughts with The Independent.

ASHLEY MARINACCIO: There’s a lot of shame and stigma attached to eating disorders and negative body image, and we want to break the silence. We also really want to show audiences that they’re not broken, rather, they’re part of a system that is working to keep them feeling broken.

Capitalism, body image and the diet industry are deeply interrelated. The capitalistic drive to make money perpetuates the multibillion dollar diet industry — there’s a lot of money in making people feel inferior, making people feel less than, making people keep buying makeup, diet pills, workout regimens.

Girl Be Heard is a collaborative theater-writing project. What is your process like?

The girls, who are all in their teens and early twenties, will come in and bring a piece that they’ve written related to the topic. And we listen to all the pieces in conversation with each other and see what comes up. Then we bring all the girls together and start the process of building a show. We ask them at the beginning what do you want to say with this show? Then it goes from there.

What are some of the most poignant stories that the girls have written about in their plays?

There’s a piece about a young woman who at 8 years old was told not to eat doughnuts because they’d make her fat. We have another piece about a young girl whose parents would only buy her jeans up to a certain size — with the thinking being that if she goes over that size she’ll be “big.” They don’t want to buy her “fat girl” jeans. Then we have a piece about a woman whose father has been taking her to see doctors about her weight from a young age. When she was 12, he found a doctor who would do a tummy tuck on her. The piece is about how she worked really hard all her life to try and make her father love her and be proud of her by being skinny.

I imagine there are common threads in the young women’s experiences of how their bodies are policed by society. How have these come up?

The girls’ perception of the female ideal is that it’s tall, thin and white, with large breasts. It’s what’s been shoved down peoples’ throats.

We talk a lot about race and whitewashing. Race is connected to everything that we do because race is a part of everyone’s story, everyone’s affected by the way that our country has been built on racism. Racism is inherent to the diet and beauty industries and their standards are made through whiteness. They’re driving people to try to be as white as possible, in their body shape, skin, hair.

All this work we’re doing has a feminist lens to it, and at the same time, it’s not just about women. The girls did lots of interviews with people of all gender identities and the show explores the struggle across the board. Everyone has a different relationship to their body, and everyone comes in with a lived experience of loving and hating their bodies at different moments. Everyone’s on a journey to finding love and peace with it, everyone’s still in process.

You’ve struggled with body image and eating disorders yourself. What has that been like for you?

Where do I begin? I used to dance, and I struggled for years because I was a dancer and I had breasts and big hips. I was pressured to lose weight and there was a stigma around my body because, you know, I just wasn’t thin. I think I internalized that and started equating body and eating with worthlessness. So when something hard would happen, I would starve myself, or binge and purge.

These days, it’s still a struggle. It’s still something that I really have to be mindful of. Plus, here I am, the cofounder and artistic director of this feminist political organization. But yet I am entirely consumed and crushed at moments by an eating disorder. My experience has been that a lot of people look to me and are like, how did you get through it? And I think they’re disappointed when I say, you know, I don’t know if I ever did.

How do you reconcile that tension between body image and feminist and progressive politics?

I grapple with it. There’s an ideal, I think, on the left about what it means to be an activist. For me at least, that ideal includes being proud of and loving who you are, and I find that to be antithetical to people’s real struggles with body image. How do you even start the conversation about that tension among progressives, where are the spaces to have it?

As you mentioned, Girl Be Heard and this play, Embodi(ED), both have strong feminist underpinnings. Can you talk about how your engagement with feminist ideas happens in Girl Be Heard space?

We are questioning our participation in a very specific system. There’s a certain amount of the game that you have to play in order to be successful or even to just function in our society. And oftentimes it conflicts with what your politics may be, and I think the body image work really brings that to light and then raises the question of what can we do about it.

We talk a lot about what the process is of creating a space to discuss this. Just that space in and of itself. I think for the performers, what they’re getting out of this is that they’ve been able to think critically about these questions of body image, and read, process, write and do their own work around their relationship with their body, and then connect that back with how society views the body.

Embodi(ED) will run February 11–21 at HERE. For more information and tickets, see girlbeheard.org.
AGITPROP FOR EVERY ERA

Agitprop!
Brooklyn Museum
Through August 7

By Mike Newton

Let’s start with some basics: the term “agitprop” means “agitation and propaganda,” and generally refers to art and media promoting leftist ideas. The concept of “agitprop” is most strongly associated with the robust, colorful graphics produced in the USSR, but it can refer to pretty much any artwork with a strongly politicized stance.

The title of the exhibition “Agitprop!,” now on view at the Brooklyn Museum, is intentionally open-ended and imprecise. “Sure,” one might ask, “but what kind of agitprop?” The answer is all of it, sort of. “Agitprop!” is a show that feels at once both small and sprawling, with a strong emphasis on the role of women in Communist societies. It’s a refreshing take on well-worn cultural touchstones. Early Soviet propaganda posters, for example, relate specifically to the role of women in Communist societies. The show also includes the poster art from the NAACP's 5th Avenue headquarters: in heavy, angular type, it reads, “A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY.” Naturally, looking at this photo now, it’s easy to see parallels with the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Similarly, a photograph of a 2014 piece by Black American performance artist Dread Scott shows the artist plaintively raising his hands while caught in the jet of a powerful water cannon. The water cannon recalls the aggressive U.S. police suppression of Black protest, and Scott’s outstretched gesture evokes Christ and the actions of #BlackLivesMatter protestors raising their hands and chanting “Hands up, don’t shoot.” This was, of course, a response to the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri: an unarmed Black man, shot by a white police officer after Brown had already put his hands in the air. Not one to pull any punches, Scott’s piece is called On the Impossibility of Freedom in a Country Founded on Slavery and Genocide.

Other noteworthy elements in this show include Tina Modotti’s somber 1920s photos of Mexican revolutionary artificats, and a simultaneously lively and mournful piece by the Futurefarmers collective — Soil Procession (2015) — in which Norwegian farmers carried buckets of their own soil through the streets of Oslo. The avant-garde performance collective Chito Delavi’s Angry Sandwich People or In Praise of Dialectics (2006) includes protestors in sandwich boards printed with Brechtian poetry, bringing classic Marxist intellectualism to the former site of St. Petersburg’s Winter Palace. There’s also one of my all-time favorite artworks, American conceptual artist Jenny Holzer’s Inflammatory Essays (1979–82).

To some, “Agitprop!” may feel frustratingly superficial, with its brief, scattered glances at major social movements and a curatorial aesthetic ping-ponging from time to time and place to place. But then, a more in-depth show probably wouldn’t be as exciting in the moment. When I went on a recent weekend, the crowd’s energy felt youthful and animated, with teenagers avidly taking notes and snapping pictures of their friends among the art.

The semi-hidden mission of “Agitprop!,” it seems, is to introduce a younger generation to the heady, fiery realm of progressive, politicized artworks. Rather than giving older, more experienced types a full-field view of any particular movement, “Agitprop!” gives to novice viewers a bright, exhilarating burst of handpicked favorites; the show is skinny-dipping rather than scuba diving.

So, to go back to our initial definition, what is agitprop? As a sort of guide to the concept, “Agitprop!” the exhibition gives an historically dissonant but thematically consonant overview. Across these works, there’s an impulse toward justice and freedom, a concern for the individual lives unfairly pitted against oppressive systems. The point here is that such concerns reappear from age to time to place to place. But then, time to time and place to place. But then, we are, right now, in the thick of it.


The Independent of Seattle and the subsequent resurgence of larger-scale trainers and manual-writers helped keep the direct action the support they deserved because the electoral streetlight direct action. Greenpeace and the Rainforest Action Network by stopping the spread of nuclear power with nonviolent color lines. Environmentalists won their largest victory groups like ACORN, with little support across class and campaigns in the 1970s and ‘80s through unions and did a day of service in his life. That involved the most people and had the largest impact. and Black Panthers, thereby ignoring the main events of love,” or a violent time of the Weather Underground. The ‘60s were characterized as either a hippie “summer Capitalism didn’t invent inequality. Worse systems preceded it. It does thrive on it, though. What Marx saw as different about capitalism, and what Katch sketches so cleverly and so accessibly for a new generation of readers, is its contradictory nature: capable of revolutionizing social relations and ending scarcity through mutual aid in the mass production of things and services but incapable of ramping down increasing poverty for the many. Katch writes, “Even the U.S. government, powerful and destructive as it is, is a servant of the black oozé of capital, which has no master plan, other than making more of itself.”

So how do we put in charge people who can think past a spreadsheet’s bottom line? This is where the book is both uplifting and just the beginning of wokeness. Katch makes the inspiring assertion that “the essence of socialism” isn’t just a changing of the palace guard but a society remade so that “workers can use their collective power to keep him from going after someone he has absolutely no intention of fighting.” True as that may be, movements that have no political analogue are doomed, and leaving organizations that leave it at “Democrats bad; you’ve been warned!” are in their own way narcissistic if not defeatist. Perhaps Katch’s next book will give the political project we need as thorough and creative a treatment as he does this time for the many good reasons to bring it into existence.

Continued from page 9

WHERE POWER ACTUALLY RESIDES

It’s no accident that schools and the mainstream media urge us to look for empowerment in the wrong place: “Over here, under this streetlight!” For the 1 percent the 1960s was a truly dangerous decade. Too many people at that time discovered their power. Cultural influencers in the mass media and academia therefore minimized and even ignored what people had learned about power through their nonviolent campaigns. The ‘60s were characterized as either a hippie “summer of love,” or a violent time of the Weather Underground and Black Panthers, thereby ignoring the main events that involved the most people and had the largest impact. Martin Luther King, Jr. was caricatured as the “Day of Service” guy — even though, as far as I know, he never did a day of service in his life. Despite this, working-class and poor people did wage campaigns in the ‘60s through mass movements and groups like ACORN, with little support across class and color lines. Environmentalists won their largest victory by stopping the spread of nuclear power with nonviolent direct action. Greenpeace and the Rainforest Action Network kept nonviolent campaigning alive, but failed to get the support they deserved because the electoral streetlight remained so appealing. Under the radar, Movement for a New Society, War Resisters League and other clusters of trainers and manual-writers helped keep the direct action craft in circulation, laying the groundwork for the Battle of Seattle and the subsequent resurgence of larger-scale nonviolent direct action.

Throughout the period covered by the Princeton study, 1981-2002, and since, many continued to cling to electoral politics despite the onslaught of what billionaire Warren Buffet later acknowledged to be a successful class struggle initiated by his class. Over and over, middle-class liberal Democrats legitimated an arena that couldn’t work for them, acting against their own interests as the wealth gap grew. Some are now noticing that looking under the streetlight is the wrong place to find their power.

WHAT WOULD PLAN B LOOK LIKE?

The Sanders campaign is doing fine work in projecting analysis and vision so people can recognize they are not alone, then claim it and work side by side with those who share it. The question of strategy remains. When the electoral terrain reveals itself to be an instrument of the 1 percent, where will the Sanders movement go? Will people accept the lessons of their own experience, integrate the Princeton study into their worldview and re-form to claim their authentic power: nonviolent direct action? Veteran campaigner Antje Mattheus suggests that the Sanders movement take a part of the vision that has the most potential and form a nonviolent direct action campaign to fight for it. Why not a national fight for free higher public education, say? Or fight for federally-guaranteed green jobs for all, a goal that would combine economic and racial justice with the climate justice imperative and expose the utilities and fossil fuel companies that try to stand in the way? Such a campaign could attract majority U.S. support across class and race lines and support us once again to go on the offensive for change.

When we don’t find our power under the streetlight, we need to shine a light of our own.

George Lakey has authored seven books on nonviolent social change, peace and organizational development. This article originally appeared at wagingnonviolence.org.
y the late 18th century, the colony of Saint-Domingue was the jewel crown of the French empire, producing 40 percent of the sugar consumed by Europe and 60 percent of its coffee. Saint-Domingue’s wealth was extracted with inhuman cruelty from as many as 800,000 enslaved persons of African descent who made up 90 percent of the population.

The colony’s small white population was sleeping on a volcano. With Jacobin revolutionary ideas back in France clamoring for “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,” the volcano erupted in August 1791 as the en-slaved persons of African descent rose up across the island and against the island’s white population.

The 13 years of warfare that followed saw the Africans form an army and alternately oppose and ally with the French, the British and the Spanish and ultimately defeat them all. On January 1, 1804, the Haiti was a touchstone. For Saint-Domingue was born of a slave revolt. It was also an increasingly paranoia South. Brown had studied the Haitian Revolution in advance of the raid. Flags were flown at half-mast in Haiti when Brown was executed and to this day John Brown Avenue is one of the main thoroughfares in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

Already alarmed by Brown’s brazen plot and the outpouring of public support for him in the North, the South greeted news of Abraham Lincoln’s 1860 election to the presidency by opting to secede from the Union. It would turn out to be a disastrous choice. The North prevailed in the Civil War, with 200,000 Black soldiers in the Union Army and Navy playing a decisive role. In addition, many African-Americans served as spies, scouts and agents for the Union.

In the United States, as in Haiti, the abolition of slavery was not granted, it was fought for and won. The version of history we are taught in school very often presents the past as a series of separate and unrelated happenings. No wonder it’s hard to see historic events like the end of slavery in Haiti and its subsequent demise in the United States as being interrelated. But thanks to books such as Confronting the Black Jacobins, we no longer have an excuse for such limited understanding. As Horne puts it, “Africans in particular and the international working class in general owe a massive debt of gratitude to the Black Jacobins of Haiti.”
The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe

David Kertzer
Random House, 2014

By Bennett Baumner

God’s Bankers: A History of Money and Power at the Vatican

Gerald Posner
Simon & Schuster, 2015

The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe

Mussolini’s Gift

Jesus may have told his followers that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but it was Italian financier Bernardino Nogara who advised Pope Pius XII to create the Vatican bank.

The original seed money was $92 million provided by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in the 1929 Lateran Pacts that codified the Vatican’s relationship to the modern Italian state.

David Kertzer’s The Pope and Mussolini is a deep dive into the political maneuverings between the Vatican and fascist Italy, while God’s Bankers explores the Vatican bank’s role in laundering Nazi money and the historic influence of anti-Semitism on church practices.

The arrangement reached with Mussolini—which continues in force to this day—compensated the Vatican for lost income and destroyed the Vatican City as a sovereign entity. The church in turn agreed to curtail Catholic political parties that were critical of Il Duce’s fascist state. A common theme in both books is the church’s loss of autonomy in both political and financial matters.

MOUNTING LOSSES

Bad bets on currency speculation sparked the failure in 1974 of Long Island–based Franklin Bank—then the United States’s 19th-largest bank—which was controlled by Sindona. Franklin’s collapse became an international scandal and the Vatican bank lost an estimated $56 million. Sindona’s business empire in Italy subsequently unraveled as well. He paid the Mob to murder an Italian prosecutor who was hot on his case and blackmailed Calvi for his compromised financial dealings.

The Vatican bank suffered further losses and embarrassment in 1982 with the collapse of Banco Ambrosiano, of which the church was the main shareholder. No church officials ever faced criminal charges but the Vatican did acknowledge its “moral involvement” in the fiasco and paid out $244 million to its creditors.

There were more plot twists to come. Sindona would die in prison from drinking cyanide-laced coffee, and Calvi? He was the banker found hanging from a London bridge—suicide or murder? On the dead man’s wrist hung a $15,000 gold watch. There are plenty of skeletons in the Vatican’s closet, both literally and figuratively. God’s Bankers digs up these skeletons but focuses on the Vatican bank, known by its Italian initials, IOR. The book reads like a thriller but teaches like a history book and an investigative magazine piece.

It comes at a time when Pope Francis has garnered headlines because of his turn away from previous popes’ stern conservatism, acknowledgment of crimes against children, more tolerant attitudes toward gay people and interfaith congregations and of course his critique of wanton environmental destruction and climate change. Less publicized are his efforts to clean up the scandal-tainted Vatican bank, a $6.5 billion institution that has served as a convenient laundromat for mafiosi, corrupt Italian politicians and other less than saintly characters.

Prior to the bank’s 1942 founding, the Vatican had been reliant on tithing and to the Jewish Rothschild banking family. Overreliant on tithing and taking money laundering by mafiosi, corrupt Italian politicians and other less than saintly characters.

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LONG LIVE THE GOBLIN KING

By David Meadow

The Goblin King is dead. Long live the Goblin King.

My first substantive experience with David Bowie — that is, beyond hearing a hit song at a party — was watching him as the big-haired, Spandex-clad, humanoid Goblin villain in Labyrinth. I didn’t know much about Bowie going into that cult film, but I was clearly seeing the work of a consummate performer. Every sinister cock of the eyebrow was studied, every baring of the lower teeth was pur- sinerous and every swooping vocal interval drew on years of practice, all to create an aura of forbidding glee. For some people, it was much deeper: my acquaintance in college gushed, “I loved his androgyny — that is, beyond hearing a racial record,” of course, is mixed. He stained that record with bizarre statements in which he appeared to endorse fascists and Nazis (and also appeared to be dragged out of his mind), but later formed the group Tin Machine, which cut an album warning about neofascism. There’s also his cringe-inducing “China Girl” video, visually groundbreaking but full of dated stereotypes. On a subtler level, Bowie probably sensed his own participation in a grossly unfair pattern of white profit from Black creations, and sought to push back by championing current Black and Latino artists (check out the Today Show interview from ’93 touching on hip-hop) and celebrating the cross-pollination.

Speaking of mixed records, there are the claims that recently resurfaced — that Bowie once committed statutory rape on the then-14-year-old groupie Lori Mattix (check out the Today Show interview from ’93 touching on hip-hop) and celebrating the cross-pollination.

An article on MTV.com, “11 Rap Songs You Didn’t Know Sampled David Bowie,” chronicles how household-name rappers (check out the Today Show interview from ’93 touching on hip-hop) and celebrating the cross-pollination.

Whatever his personal shortcomings, Bowie has the distinction of inspiring — and healing, vexing and amusing — multiple generations. He was a complete artist and a fairly complete world citizen, and it’s good that we’re having these discussions and holding our idols accountable, not a minute too soon.

None of this occurred in a social vacuum. I’ve read and heard countless stories of how Bowie gave people the courage to be themselves, as he defiantly wore a succession of dresses, space suits, jumpsuits, double-breasted suits, lightning bolts, lip-stick/eye shadow schemes and historical costumes. Granted, there are competing narratives about what kind of underlying queerness all these getups reflected. Bowie unabashedly mentioned relationships with men and women, but when asked to assign himself a label, he often played coy (as was his right). He loved saying he and his first wife Angie met while “fucking the same bloke,” but later claimed he regretted calling himself bisexual. Still, dare we police the identity of anyone with the guts to push the envelope that much — and anyway, is ambiguity such a bad thing? Surely, Bowie was instrumental in increasing our comfort with it.

Besides blurring gender and sexual lines, Bowie was among the more outspo- ken white musicians in advocating against racism. Witness his 1983 MTV interview criticizing the channel for marginalizing Black artists. Few whites, even now, are this direct about the problem, and this adamant in rejecting excuses.

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MNN: Manhattan’s Community Media

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

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

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

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The MNN El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center

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

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