VICTORY AT INDIAN POINT, P2

MURMURS OF A GENERAL STRIKE, P12

MEXICO VS. TRUMP P14

SOON TO BE DEPORTED?

DONALD TRUMP HAS VOWED TO DEPORT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE. NYC IMMIGRANT RIGHTS LEADER RAVI RAGBIR COULD BE AMONG THE FIRST, P4

BY RENÉE FELTZ
A VICTORY 50 YEARS IN THE MAKING

After decades of protest, Indian Point to be closed

By Alice Slater

A decades-long drumbeat of lawsuits, petitions, letters and public testimony has forced the closure of the Indian Point nuclear facility outside of New York City. Gov. Andrew Cuomo — together with Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and the environmental watchdog Riverkeeper — struck a deal in January with Entergy Corporation to shut down its two nuclear reactors at Indian Point. One reactor will go offline in 2020 and the other in 2021, with a possible extension to 2025.

“It’s a win for the safety of our communities, a win for the Hudson River and all the rich variety of life within it, and a win for a clean, sustainable energy future,” said Riverkeeper president Paul Gallay while local officials expressed concerns about the impact of the closing on workers and the area economy.

Licenses for the power station had, in fact, already expired in 2013 and 2015, respectively, but the reactors continued to generate electricity under a Nuclear Regulatory Commission rule that allows operators to continue running reactors while their applications are under review. Under the new deal, Entergy abandoned efforts to re-license the reactors, which would have permitted them to operate for 20 more years.

In return for the promised shutdown, New York State and Riverkeeper agreed not to object to Entergy’s application for a six-year license extension through 2025, and to drop their active lawsuits against Entergy for various safety and environmental violations. The state will maintain legal authority to bring new cases, if needed.

The increased utilization of wind, solar and hydroelectric power, together with energy efficiency measures, mean the plant closure will have little to no effect on New Yorkers’ electricity bills and would create no increase in carbon emissions.

Entergy also agreed to establish a $15 million fund for environmental restoration. Also under the terms of the deal, Entergy will provide continued employment through the closure process and offer workers jobs at other facilities. New York State will assist workers seeking jobs at other power facilities and the state’s Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) will provide training in new skills in renewable energy technologies.

Most critically, the agreement provides for vigorous continued state inspections and a long sought directive to transfer irradiated spent fuel rods from vulnerable cooling pools to dry cask storage containers.

Spent fuel rods exit reactors with more lethal radioactivity than a public swimming pool. The ponds must constantly be replenished with cool water from the Hudson River to prevent a Fukushima-like meltdown — a process that winds up killing more than a billion fish and their eggs every year, as heated water is recycled back into the river.

Spent fuel remains lethally toxic for some 300,000 years and putting the rods in guarded dry cask storage is considered the safest possible option at this time by most nuclear experts.

The agreement was enthusiastically welcomed by activists spanning generations. Beginning in 1962 when Indian Point first went online, tens of thousands of people marched, petitioned, sang protest songs, met with their elected officials, organized town halls and benefit concerts and testified in court and at regulatory hearings. They raised alarms over the leaks, incidents of radioactive contamination and exceptionally high rates of cancer, leukemia and birth defects that have plagued Indian Point for decades.

Now, environmental groups are calling on Gov. Cuomo to stop the Spectra gas pipeline, which will to run right past the Indian Point reactors — buried less than a mile away at some points.

And while the governor was instrumental in Indian Point’s closure he has also offered $7.6 billion in subsidies to keep three Upstate nuclear power plants along Lake Ontario running: Exelon Corporation’s Ginna and Nine Mile Point plants and Entergy’s James A. FitzPatrick plant. Entergy and Exelon Corporation announced plans to close the facilities last year as they were no longer profitable. Cuomo’s cash infusion will keep them online.

Alice Slater serves on the Coordinating Committees of People’s Climate NYC and World Beyond War and as the U.N. NGO Representative of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.
SOME PLACES YOU CAN FIND

THE INDYPENDENT

THE INDYPENDENT

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn Borough Hall
209 Joralemon St.

Brooklyn Commons
388 Atlantic Ave.

Times Plaza Post Office
542 Atlantic Ave.

Brooklyn Heights Library
260 Cadman Plaza West

Carroll Gardens Library
398 Clinton St. @ Union

Cousin John’s Cafe & Bakery
70 7th Ave.

Key Foods
130 7th Ave.

Community Book Store
143 7th Ave.

Beacon’s Closet
92 5th Ave.

Pacific Street Library
25 Fourth Ave.

Brooklyn Works@159
159 20th St.

Connecticut Muffin
429 Myrtle Ave.

Dekalb Library
790 Bushwick Ave.

May Day Space
178 St. Nicholas Ave.

Wyckoff Starr Coffee Shop
30 Wyckoff Ave.

Bushwick Library
340 Bushwick Ave. @ Sigel

Swallow Café
49 Bogart St.

Little Skips
941 Willoughby Ave.

Metro Community Laundromat
561 Metropolitan Ave.

Williamsburg Library
240 Division Ave.

GREENPOINT LIBRARY
107 Norman Ave.

Kaisa’s Café
148 Bedford Ave.

Bedford Library
496 Franklin Ave.

Crown Heights Library
560 New York Ave. @ Maple

Flatsbush Library
22 Linden Blvd. @ Flatsbush

Tugboat Tea Company
546 Flatbush Ave.

OUTPOST CAFE
1014 Fulton St.

Red Hook Library
7 Wolcott St.

Hope & Anchor
347 Van Brunt

Jalopy Café
317 Columbia St.

ALIGN BROOKLYN
579 5th Ave.

Dunwill Donuts
222 Montrose Ave.

Cobra Club
6 Wyckoff

Starr Bar
214 Starr St.

Jamaica Bay Library
9727 Seaview Ave.

QUEENS

Court Square Diner
45-30 23rd St.

Court Square Library
2501 Jackson Ave.

Long Island City Library
37-44 21st St.

Queens Diversity Center
76-11 37th Ave. Suite 206

Jackson Heights Library
35-51 81st St.

BRONX

Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.

Hunt’s Point Library
877 Southern Blvd.

The Point
940 Garrison Ave.

High Bridge Library
78 W. 168th St.

Latino Pastoral Action Center
14 W. 170th St.

New Settlement Community Center
1501 Jerome Ave.

WANT TO HELP
Distribute The Indy?
Call 212-904-1282 Or
Email contact@indypendent.org.

ORGANIZING 2.0

The annual training in
digital organizing,
fundraising,
and direct action!

At The Murphy Institute
New York City

April 7-8

organizing20.org
**WALK WITH ME**

**IMMIGRANT ORGANIZER RAVI RAGBIR WANTS ALLIES TO OFFER SANCUTARY NOT JUST IN CHURCHES BUT AT CHECK-INS WHERE PEOPLE LIKE HIM FACE DEPORTATION**

By Renée Feltz

On March 9, Trinidadian immigrant Ravi Ragbir is scheduled to appear for his annual check-in with a deportation officer at the federal building in lower Manhattan. “I will go in,” he says. “Even though I suspect this may be the day I won’t be coming out.” No matter what happens, he will not go alone.

“You can easily disappear,” he notes. “So it’s best to have people witness.”

Ragbir knows the power of accompaniment. As executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, he has worked to connect members of 30 congregations, faith communities and other groups with hundreds of undocumented immigrants seeking refuge and support.

“It’s not about the church, or the physical space,” he explains. “We are teaching people to literally walk with those in deportation proceedings.”

As an outspoken immigrant rights activist, Ragbir knows he can set an example for thousands of others facing similar check-ins.

“I don’t want to be a role model, but think I am at the moment,” he says, “especially for immigrants who are saying, ‘We’re terrified. But if you look at what Ravi is doing you can understand where you are, and also fight to make change.’”

• • •

Ragbir legally immigrated to the United States from Trinidad and Tobago more than 25 years ago, but a 2001 wire fraud conviction made his green card subject to revocation. Even though he is married to a U.S. citizen and has a U.S.-born daughter, the government refuses to normalize his status.

Instead, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has exercised prosecutorial discretion to grant him a stay of deportation. His current stay lasts until 2018. But his 15-year-old criminal record makes him an easy target for removal under the Trump administration.

“After Donald Trump’s election I basically cried for days,” recalls Ragbir’s wife, Amy Gottlieb, who is an immigration advocate with the American Friends Service Committee.

“I was totally devastated both because it was going to impact our lives directly, and also because the work I’ve done for the past 20 years is about struggling for humane immigration policies.”

Gottlieb has accompanied Ragbir to almost every one of his check-ins since 2010. This included a period during which he wore an ankle monitor and had to report in periodically.

“Many decisions come down to the discretion of individual officers handling the case and whatever the person is feeling that day,” explains Barron. “It helps if you can show you have backing from the community.”

She says such support is key for immigrants who lack a lawyer, and have undocumented family members or friends who cannot come with them to the ICE office.

“Now a student at NYU’s School of Law, Barron is also a member of Ragbir’s support committee, where she draws on lessons from her grassroots activism and combines them with legal strategy.”

“It’s interesting to see how all the pieces fit together,” she says, “when we are pushing back on the business as usual immigration policies, and trying to see the creative ways to work within and also push the boundaries of the system.”

• • •

It was in prison that Ragbir learned how to think creatively about achieving one’s freedom in the face of extreme odds.

“They control when you eat, what you eat, when you get up and sleep, when you have access to the phones and TV and law library, your letters, what you wear,” Ragbir recalls. “At one time I remember they only gave us one jumper. So when you wash it, what do you wear?”

He came to the realization that, “You can determine how you respond, your thoughts. If you do that instead of becoming anxious and fearful, then you can start to ask: ‘this is where I am, but where do I want to be?’”

After serving a two-and-a-half year sentence, he was transferred to immigrant detention, where he successfully fought for his release after another two years.

“You still have control over who you are,” Ragbir says, “and that becomes the force that makes the change.”

In the basement of Judson Memorial Church, a note posted on the wall above his cluttered desk conveys this approach. After hundreds of conversations with immigrants facing deportation because of drug-related offenses, he now advocates for policy changes like the decriminalization of marijuana even as immigration reform remains stalled in Congress.

“If marijuana is legalized and not a controlled substance, then we can stop the double jeopardy,” he notes.

Another wall in his office has a blackboard with a list of names of Central American asylum seekers who had been stalled in Congress.

**QUESTIONS & DEMANDS:** (From left to right) Kyle Barron and Amy Gottlieb join Ravi Ragbir at a support committee meeting to prepare for his check-in with a deportation agent. “It’s hard to plan because we don’t know what will happen,” someone observed. “My mother is coming” Gottlieb responded, “so they better be ready to answer questions.”

**PRESENTE:** Demonstrators gathered outside of a federal immigration court in Lower Manhattan on Thursday, Feb. 16 to protest ICE detentions. The protest coincided with a national “Day Without an Immigrant” strike.
paired with coalition volunteers the week before. Many were young mothers with no lawyer.

“They come in on Tuesday nights and we pair them up with English-speaking volunteers and an interpreter,” he says. “The place is packed.”

The small groups prepare enough of the necessary evidence in each woman’s case that when she goes in the judge says, “The place is packed.”

She saw first hand the impact Ragbir had on the lives of others when she accompanied him to his ICE appointments.

“I have seen him, even during his own regular check-ins ... reach out to other immigrants scared and alone, to tell them about our programs and encourage them to have hope,” Rev. Schaper recalls.

Now, Rev. Schaper and other faith leaders may walk with Ragbir when he attends his check-in. Politicians Ragbir has worked with over the years may show up as well.

The weekend this issue went to press Ragbir was recognized with the Immigrant Excellence Award by the New York State Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators, given to those who show “deep commitment to the enhancement of their community.”

City and other elected officials at all levels of government can support the residents of their city or district as they go through this process by showing up at check-ins, and reaching out to ICE,” says Ragbir’s lawyer, Alina Das, who is co-director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic at NYU School of Law and has worked on his case for the past eight years.

In the meantime, Ragbir continues to urge everyone who knows an immigrant going through this process, or who wants to support someone who is, to walk with them.

“Everyone is my family right now,” Ragbir says. “I ask them to come with me because maybe it can make a difference, and you may not see me March 10.”

“Over the years Ravi has steadfastly and humbly expanded the reach of our programs,” says Reverend Donna Schaper, Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church and co-founder of the New Sanctuary Coalition.

She saw first hand the impact Ragbir had on the lives of others when she accompanied him to his ICE appointments.

“I have seen him, even during his own regular check-ins ... reach out to other immigrants scared and alone, to tell them about our programs and encourage them to have hope,” Rev. Schaper recalls.

Now, Rev. Schaper and other faith leaders may walk with Ragbir when he attends his check-in. Politicians Ragbir has worked with over the years may show up as well.

The weekend this issue went to press Ragbir was recognized with the Immigrant Excellence Award by the New York State Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators, given to those who show “deep commitment to the enhancement of their community.”

City and other elected officials at all levels of government can support the residents of their city or district as they go through this process by showing up at check-ins, and reaching out to ICE,” says Ragbir’s lawyer, Alina Das, who is co-director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic at NYU School of Law and has worked on his case for the past eight years.

In the meantime, Ragbir continues to urge everyone who knows an immigrant going through this process, or who wants to support someone who is, to walk with them.

“Everyone is my family right now,” Ragbir says. “I ask them to come with me because maybe it can make a difference, and you may not see me March 10.”

**RESOURCES**

THE NEW SANCTUARY COALITION OF NYC

www.newsanctuarynyc.org

(646) 395-2925

The NSC aims to activate congregations and other allies in their “Accompaniment Program,” and offers a weekly legal clinic to help those facing deportation to manage their cases.

MARCH 9 — JERICHO WALK

9–11am, 26 Federal Plaza

Through the Jericho Walk, the NSC brings together faith leaders, immigration activists, and supporters to march in silence and pray in solidarity with those in the immigration system.

ACTION NYC

(800) 354-0365

Multilingual hotline for general information & referrals to free immigration legal services.

FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM

FamiliesForFreedom.org

(646) 290-9720

Deportation Hotline: (646) 290-5551

A New York-based multi-ethnic human rights organization by and for families facing and fighting deportation.

IMMIGRANT DEFENSE PROJECT CRIMINAL-IMMIGRATION HELPLINE

(212) 725-6422

Offers advice on immigration consequences of criminal charges and convictions.

LEGAL AID SOCIETY IMMIGRATION UNIT

(212) 577-3300

(212) 577-3456 (Detention Hotline, Wednesday–Friday, 1–5pm. Collect calls from detention accepted)

Referred to free immigration legal services.

www.newsanctuarynyc.org

THE NEW SANCTUARY COALITION OF NYC

MARCH 9 — JERICHO WALK

9–11am, 26 Federal Plaza

Through the Jericho Walk, the NSC brings together faith leaders, immigration activists, and supporters to march in silence and pray in solidarity with those in the immigration system.

ACTION NYC

(800) 354-0365

Multilingual hotline for general information & referrals to free immigration legal services.

FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM

FamiliesForFreedom.org

(646) 290-9720

Deportation Hotline: (646) 290-5551

A New York-based multi-ethnic human rights organization by and for families facing and fighting deportation.

IMMIGRANT DEFENSE PROJECT CRIMINAL-IMMIGRATION HELPLINE

(212) 725-6422

Offers advice on immigration consequences of criminal charges and convictions.

LEGAL AID SOCIETY IMMIGRATION UNIT

(212) 577-3300

(212) 577-3456 (Detention Hotline, Wednesday–Friday, 1–5pm. Collect calls from detention accepted)

Referred to free immigration legal services.
IN BIG BROTHER’S GAZE
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES WORRY INITIATIVES BACKED BY OBAMA WILL BE INTENSIFIED BY TRUMP

By Alex Kane

O n the campaign trail, and up until the last days before the election, Donald Trump called for increased scrutiny of Muslim-Americans. He mused about establishing a registry for Muslims, voiced support for surveillance of mosques and demanded a ban on Muslim immigration. He said the United States may have “no choice” but to shut down mosques, and told an interviewer, “I think Islam hates us.” So far as president, Trump has ordered a ban on refugees and travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations, a move that shocked Muslim-Americans and sparked an outpouring of protest. (Federal courts have temporarily stayed enforcement of the order.) He has also brought anti-Muslim ideologues like Steven Bannon into his inner circle.

Now, as Trump moves to consolidate power and enact his agenda, Muslims are concerned that Trump will indeed intensify scrutiny of their community — which are already infiltrated by informants in mosques and encouraged to join anti-extremism programs that some worry are a cover for spying on Muslims. “Things are already bad,” said Fahd Ahmed, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations’ project to combat Islamophobia, the FBI’s informant program “impedes First Amendment-protected conversation. So people are afraid to have an innocent conversation about politics, because they might say something wrong.”

“The FBI was not the only agency to infiltrate Muslim communities,” according to a 2011 NYU study. “They spy on us everywhere. In the street, in the mosque — everywhere,” Rimawi told The Intercept, “They are afraid. They are waiting for the worst.” But the Muslim community has not been paralyzed by fear. Since Trump’s election, Muslim-Americans have mobilized in large numbers. They have lead protests at airports against Trump’s executive order barring refugees and people from seven Muslim-majority countries. They have carried out strikes, like the daylong action, on Feb. 2, that closed up the Yemeni-run bodegas that fueled New York City. And they have rejected federal grants that they see as tainted by a Trump White House.

These federal grants, which total $10 million, were supposed to fund the Countering Violent Extremism Program, a U.S. government effort to get local communities involved in combating radicalism. Under the Obama administration’s anti-extremism pilot program, which was eventually expanded nationwide, hundreds of thousands of dollars flowed to community groups working to stanch the appeal of violent ideas. But while the Obama administration insisted it wanted to focus on all types of extremism, civil liberties groups complained it largely focused on Muslims, stigmatizing a vulnerable community. There were also concerns that the information collected by nonprofit groups could be turned over to federal law enforcement, and used to go after young people thought to be influenced by radical ideas. Those fears were not unfounded; documents obtained by the Brennan Center for Justice revealed that in 2009, a law enforcement-led community-outreach program to Somali Muslims in St. Paul, Minnesota, was also meant to “identify radicalized individuals.” One community leader told The Intercept that local law enforcement repeatedly asked him for a list of people who participated in the outreach effort.

Under Obama, the anti-extremism program proved controversial, though some Muslim groups accepted the money anyway. But under Trump, accepting the federal grants is increasingly untenable. In February, four groups that work with Muslim and Arab youth declined to accept the federal cash, a move they made after news outlets reported that the Trump administration was considering changing the name of the program to Countering Radical Islamic Extremism. Reuters reported that the Trump administration was thinking about halting efforts
Last year, New York began rolling out LinkNYC kiosks, replacing defunct analog phone booths with 9.5-foot-tall, digital monoliths. The goal, according to LinkNYC’s website, is to make free, high-speed wi-fi available to all New Yorkers by deploying 7,500 kiosks across the city over the next eight years.

Critics, however, warn that the launch of LinkNYC does more to empower the surveillance state than the average New Yorker, who will be at risk of having their privacy violated every time they walk near one of the stations with a smartphone in hand.

“Basically, Links is corporate-owned, not community-owned,” said Adsua Amani of Rethink Link NYC, a pro-privacy group which held the first public protest against the creepy kiosks in January.

LinkNYC and public wi-fi in general track the IP address and cookie IDs of every connected device. While there are legal statutes protecting so-called anonymized data, companies, government and hackers alike have developed and utilized various de-anonymization methods to link individuals to their personal data.

LinkNYC is a public-private partnership between the City of New York and CityBridge — a consortium of private companies that includes Sidewalk Labs, a subsidiary of Google run by Dan Doctoroff, a former deputy mayor in the Bloomberg administration. Under the 12-year franchise agreement CityBridge signed with the de Blasio administration, LinkNYC anticipates generating hundreds of millions of dollars in ad revenues that will be split equally with the city.

The agreement also stipulates that CityBridge will not share “personally identifiable information” with governmental authorities except under subpoena, in which case the company will make “reasonable attempts” to inform users when their information is accessed by the authorities.

This is not enough for privacy advocates who insist the deal sells off valuable public space — both physical and digital — to a corporate consortium whose business model is based exclusively on data collection.

Attorneys with the New York Civil Liberties Union penned an open letter to the de Blasio administration in March. They raise concerns over CityBridge’s indeterminate data collection and retention policy, government access to user information and whether users will receive timely notice if their information is shared with authorities.

“‘Surveillance has never been color-blind,’” noted Jonah Bossewitch of Rethink Link.

As LinkNYC spreads outward from the center of Manhattan, the likelihood that it will be misused in predominant-ly people of color neighborhoods that it will be misused in predominant-ly people of color neighborhoods that have a history of being over-policed also grows.

“Surveillance has never been color-blind,” noted Jonah Bossewitch of Rethink Link.

Email bfp@brooklynpeace.org or call us to get involved!

With your help, we are determined to resist!

Show your support for our neighbors!

Join our postering campaign!
“Recognized Steve Croman from his mug shot,” a Lower East Side woman said after encountering her landlord in the hallway of her building on Jan. 24. He immediately turned to shine his cellphone flashlight in her face to blur the pictures she was taking.

The owner was in the building, 159 Stanton Street, because City Department of Buildings inspectors had issued two orders that all construction work there had to stop immediately — one, because the superintendent had refused to grant them access to the vacant apartments the day before, and one citing “illegal activity — tenant harassment.”

“It’s a big win,” says Sherief Gaber, an Urban Justice Center lawyer representing the tenants in a lawsuit they filed against Croman in December. “It’s a good sign that the Department of Buildings is taking construction as harassment seriously.”

Croman, who owns more than 150 buildings in Manhattan, is the poster boy for “construction as harassment,” the increasingly common landlord tactic of trying to drive out rent-stabilized tenants by renovating vacant apartments in a way that makes their lives miserable. If they move out, their apartments can also be renovated and rented out for thousands of dollars more.

He is facing a civil lawsuit by state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman for harassing tenants, and criminal charges alleging that he scammed banks into giving him loans by claiming he was getting tenants out and raising rents faster than he actually was.

Croman bought 159 Stanton Street in 2013 and began gutting the vacant apartments in the summer of 2015. His workers ripped out windows, walls and floorboards. One woman’s ceiling collapsed, and a cracked pipe leaked sewage all over one man’s kitchen. Meanwhile, Croman minions aggressively and repeatedly offered tenants money to leave. But the work stopped that fall, leaving eight apartments empty, some with ripped plastic sheets instead of doors.

Construction as harassment has become a major issue in the city over the last decade. The East Village and Lower East Side have been hit hardest, with landlords like Croman, Ben Shaul, Raphael Toledano and Stone Street Properties using it as a business model.

In one deal, Shaul bought seven East Fourth Street buildings in 2010 and 2011 for $2.5 million and, after clearing out most of the rent-stabilized tenants, sold them to Jared Kushner, Donald Trump’s son-in-law, in 2013 for $49 million. While Kushner has used construction as harassment in some buildings, most notoriously 170 East 2nd Street, he generally prefers to buy properties after other owners “have done the dirty work,” as one Fourth Street tenant put it in January.

Now, it “is a citywide pattern,” says Roland Guzman of the St. Nick’s Alliance in northern Brooklyn. “Over the past five years, it has become a trend.” The group first received complaints about it from tenants in Williamsburg and Greenpoint, but is now seeing it more in Bushwick, and has heard about it in Ridgewood, East New York and Sunset Park.

“As neighborhoods become hotter, there’s more pressure for rent-stabilized tenants to be pushed out,” he says.

In January, more than 100 people attended meetings in Manhattan and Brooklyn about construction as harassment. They were organized by Stand for Tenant Safety, a coalition of more than 20 housing, neighborhood and legal services organizations, and borough presidents Gale Brewer and Eric Adams.

The coalition is backing a package of 12 bills in the City Council intended to reduce construction as harassment. They include measures that would require the Buildings Department to do a full inspection before allowing construction in a building that’s partially occupied; increase fines for violations and enable the city to put liens on property when owners don’t pay them; and concentrate enforcement on buildings, owners and contractors with a history of violations.

The bills were introduced in the fall of 2015, with sponsors including Antonio Reynoso of Brooklyn and Ben Kallos and Margaret Chin of Manhattan. The Council has held hearings on seven of them, the most recent last April, and taken no action on the others.

“Stand for Tenant Safety is calling on Jumaane Williams and [Council Speaker] Melissa Mark-Viverito to pass the bills,” says Roland Guzman, Williams, who chairs the Council’s Housing Committee, “is in continued discussion with the Speaker and sponsors of the bills on the package,” a spokesperson told The Indypendent.

DUE TO TENANT PRESSURE, THE CITY IS STARTING TO TAKE HARASSMENT BY CONSTRUCTION MORE SERIOUSLY.

Councilors have also launched a campaign to encourage cities across the country to limit their local police department’s cooperation with the FBI on counter-terrorism. Called Stop TrumpNetPro Now, a play on COUNTELPRO, the campaign, which includes the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Asian Law Caucus and others, wants to build on a recent victory: convincing the San Francisco Police Department to halt cooperation with the local Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTFJ), a program that combines local police and federal agents to fight terrorism. The police department said it was stopping cooperation because confidence in the program had been “shaken,” though it may rejoin the program in the future.

The halt in cooperation came after another local victory in San Francisco. In 2012, a coalition of groups in the city successfully pushed for a local law mandating that police only cooperate with the task force if their activities are in line with state and local laws, which are much more stringent than the FBI’s guidelines on racial and religious profiling. Now, the coalition wants to export that model nationwide.

“If we make clear across the country that our local officers have to follow our local laws, even if they work with the JTFJ, the FBI’s partnership, that means that local officers will no longer be able to do FBI work that involves, for example, surveilling just because they’re Muslim,” said Christine Sinha, who co-leads the National Security and Civil Rights Program at Asian Americans Advancing Justice Asian Law Caucus.

In the week after it launched, Sinha said, organizers in several cities contacted the coalition, though she would not name them because they had not yet gone public.

“If they can’t commandeer our local resources the way they need to, that does stop the FBI in its tracks a little bit,” Sinha told The Indypendent. “I’m not naïve. That’s not going to stop the FBI wholesale. But it at least puts a brake on what the FBI wants to do at a local level.”

MUSLIM SURVEILLANCE

Continued from page 6

that focus on white supremacists, and solely</ref> <ref>on Muslim radicals.</ref>

“It all came down to principle. Five hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money, especially if you’re a non-profit,” said Mohamed Farah, the executive director of Ka Joog, a group that works in the Somali community in Minnesota that rejected a federal grant. “At the end of the day, we work with immigrants, we work with refugees, we work with Muslims and we believe this administration doesn’t stand for what we stand for.” Farah added that there was also concern among Somali-Americans that the anti-extremism program could be used for surveillance.

Muslim groups, along with civil liberties advocates, have also launched a campaign to encourage cities across the country to limit their local police department’s cooperation with the FBI on counter-terrorism. Called Stop TrumpNetPro Now, a play on COUNTELPRO, the campaign, which includes the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Asian Law Caucus and others, wants to build on a recent victory: convincing the San Francisco Police Department to halt cooperation with the local Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTFJ), a program that combines local police and federal agents to fight terrorism. The police department said it was stopping cooperation because confidence in the program had been “shaken,” though it may rejoin the program in the future.

The halt in cooperation came after another local victory in San Francisco. In 2012, a coalition of groups in the city successfully pushed for a local law mandating that police only cooperate with the task force if their activities are in line with state and local laws, which are much more stringent than the FBI’s guidelines on racial and religious profiling. Now, the coalition wants to export that model nationwide.

“If we make clear across the country that our local officers have to follow our local laws, even if they work with the JTFJ, the FBI’s partnership, that means that local officers will no longer be able to do FBI work that involves, for example, surveilling just because they’re Muslim,” said Christine Sinha, who co-leads the National Security and Civil Rights Program at Asian Americans Advancing Justice Asian Law Caucus.

In the week after it launched, Sinha said, organizers in several cities contacted the coalition, though she would not name them because they had not yet gone public.

“If they can’t commandeer our local resources the way they need to, that does stop the FBI in its tracks a little bit,” Sinha told The Indypendent. “I’m not naïve. That’s not going to stop the FBI wholesale. But it at least puts a brake on what the FBI wants to do at a local level.”
LOW-INCOME TENANTS WIN RIGHT TO LAWYER AT HOUSING COURT

BY LAUREN KAORI GURLEY

In December 2008, Carmen Vega-Rivera received a white index card in her mailbox notifying her that she had 72 hours to report to Housing Court to answer charges that she had not paid her rent, or face eviction from her rent-stabilized apartment, a few blocks away from Yankee Stadium in the South Bronx.

Vega-Rivera, then 54, had been dutifully paying her rent since 1981, when she first moved into the Art Deco building on the corner of Grand Concourse and 161st Street. But in recent months, she noticed that her landlord, Tiny Fiesta Realty, had stopped depositing her rent checks, and so she began cancelling them. Vega-Rivera, who is the president of the building’s tenant association, suspected that her landlord was retaliating for her complaints about the building’s broken heating system, rodent infestation, defective elevator, and leaky and moldy walls.

“The boiler has just not been working for almost 25 years,” she says. “I was demanding repairs and exercising my rights as a tenant, and they weren’t depositing my checks.” Refusing to deposit tenants’ rent checks and then trying to evict them for nonpayment is a common harassment practice New York City landlords use.

Vega-Rivera, who is disabled and unemployed, could not afford a lawyer, and was left to navigate the labyrinthine proceedings of Housing Court alone. “I was there representing myself,” she says. “No one can help you. Everyone’s yelling at you. There’s no navigation. There’s no brochures. There’s no [language] interpretation and I’m bilingual.” She终于 won the case in August 2011.

“My job is to get rid of the people who are there, and charge higher rent,” says Ezi Ukegbu, an attorney at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, who has represented hundreds of low-income tenants in gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn.

In 2013, de Blasio established a pilot program that increased funding for housing legal services from $6 million to $62 million annually, providing representation for residents of 10 ZIP codes with a high eviction rate. According to the New York City Office of Civil Justice, eviction rates in the city dropped 18 percent within a year, and now are at their lowest levels in a decade.

“When Randy Dillard, a disabled single father of five in the Norwood neighborhood in the Bronx, received an eviction order for nonpayment of rent in 2012, he feared that he and his children were headed into the city’s homeless-shelter system. But the order was unwarranted: Dillard receives federal Section 8 rent subsidies, and the program had stopped paying the subsidies to his landlord, a city police detective, after inspectors found the building had serious housing-code violations.

“The windows were not insulated. We had to put water on the stove to heat our home. He was a shamlord,” says Dillard, a former union bricklayer who has been unemployed since he was diagnosed with a chronic lung condition 15 years ago. Thanks to the advice of a friend, he found a pro bono lawyer at Part Of The Solution, a Bronx nonprofit. The lawyer “informed me that my landlord had no right to take me to court,” Dillard says. “Section 8 owes [my landlord] the money.” The attorney eventually paved the way for Dillard to move into a new building.

Dillard’s apartment, like Carmen Vega-Rivera’s, was rent-stabilized. Landlords increase their profits by evicting tenants in rent-stabilized apartments and raising rents, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods. “If there’s a demand in the neighborhood, it’s always in the landlord’s interest to have a vacancy,” said Bill Bryan, an attorney at the Brooklyn Public Defenders Office. Landlords can legally increase rents by 20 percent on a vacant apartment, more if they renovate it, and they usually can get away with illegally charging even more. Under state law, tenants are not allowed to challenge rent increases more than four years old unless there is clear evidence of fraud.

“There are lots of recent graduates who would be happy to pay $1,400 a month for a one-bedroom... and wouldn’t think to go and see the rent history for the apartment and try and find out if the rent they are being charged is legal,” says Raun Rasmussen. Vacant apartments where the rent has reached $2,700 are deregulated. The city has lost almost 175,000 rent-stabilized apartments in the past 13 years.

Landlord groups testifying against the right-to-counsel bill at a Council hearing in September noted its costs to taxpayers and argued that there are few benefits to drawing out eviction proceedings for tenants who cannot pay their rent. “Counsel serves merely to prolong the inevitable through frivolous delaying tactics so that their client can remain with a roof over their head for as long as possible when there is no justification for their continued tenancy,” said Mitchell Posilkin, general counsel for the Rent Stabilization Association.

Yet, the bill received fervent support from politicians and activists across the city. It was cosponsored by 42 of the 51 City Councilmembers, and a New York Times editorial endorsed it. If it is enacted, New York City’s Right to Counsel will be a triumph for the city’s most vulnerable communities, and could serve as a model for other U.S. cities ensnared in cycles of eviction, displacement, and gentrification.
SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATION & STRUGGLE CAN STOP TRUMP

By Sherry Wolf

The Trump administration is a train wreck barreling toward us, threatening to destroy everything in its path and we need to develop a strate-...
A number of citywide general strikes took place during the first half of the 20th century, in Seattle, San Francisco, Oakland, Minneapolis, Rochester, New York, and Stamford, Connecticut among others. Another happened in Oakland in 2011, at the height of the Occupy movement. But there has never been a nationwide general strike or, for that matter, a gender-wide strike, in the United States. With just 11 percent of the U.S. workforce unionized, down from 20 percent a quarter-century ago, calls for a general strike today are more aspirational than practical, but organizers of the upcoming strikes are basing that the national wave of revulsion to Trump will inspire people to act. They note that 200,000 people were expected at the Jan. 21 Women’s March in Washington, and more than twice that number arrived.

“We’re trying to see new forms of struggle emerging and new ways of conceiving of these struggles,” says women’s strike organizer Kate Doyle Griffiths, an adjunct professor at Hunter and Marymount colleges. “I hope that people who are organizing in their workplaces will take this call as a time to do a shop floor action, to walk out of work, to help build their networks in their workplaces.” People who aren’t already engaged in workplace organizing can use the strike as an opportunity to start, Griffiths added.

According to Jeremy Brecher, author of more than a dozen books on labor and social movements, the power in simply raising the specter of a national walkout. The idea of a general strike shows, “Oh yeah, well of course, if everybody stops working, obviously they would have a tremendous power to determine what’s going on in society,” he says. Putting it out as an idea, “even if it’s not an immediately realizable strategy,” is a crucial step to making a general strike a reality.

Brecher describes the organizing efforts underway now as an attempt at performing “exemplary actions”—relatively small groups of people deciding that they’re going to do something and doing it in a way that gives other people the idea, ‘Hey, we could do that, too.’”

These general-strike calls are not coming from traditional unions, from already existing organizations, or even from specific movements, other than what might be broadly defined as “the resistance.” Some of the people involved are veterans of past social movements — Occupy, Black Lives Matter, opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline — but others are not. As news of the “Day Without an Immigrant” and Strike4Democracy spread on social media, it prompted people to talk with their coworkers and to participate in the strikes, with little advance planning.

Not unsurprisingly, traditional labor unions were largely absent. The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, commonly known as the Taft-Hartley Act, forbids political or sympathy strikes. It also requires unions to give employers advance notice before walking out.

American workers want to flex their political power beyond the confines of Taft-Hartley, Brecher says, one direction they will have to explore is a strategy long championed by anarchist groups, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). It entails creating informal unions that act as unions structurally but refuse to sign contracts, to avoid the ensuing legal restrictions.

“You can already see it in unions in ‘right-to-work’ states where union rights are severely restricted; in a lot of experiments with unions that are not certified under the National Labor Relations Board procedures,” he says. “And you definitely see it with the Fight for $15 in a way that’s quite reminiscent of the IWW. I know in some of the Fight for $15 organizing efforts, in Chicago in particular, they actually have informal unions, working within fast-food enterprises and other low-wage employers.”

That informal-union strategy might become more pertinent in the years ahead. Since 2011, six states, all
JOIN THE RESISTANCE
10 THINGS YOU CAN DO

By Independent Staff

CALL YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS
Elected officials want to keep on getting elected. So when they hear from large numbers of their constituents on an issue, it has an impact. With the help of websites like Scalls.org, you can locate your local representatives and receive phone numbers and scripts so calling is easy. For busy people who don’t have lots of free time, this is an easy way to stay engaged and make a difference.

TURN OUT FOR PROTESTS
Feeling overwhelmed by all the scary, bad news? Getting out from behind your computer and into the streets with other people who share your hopes and concerns is cathartic and often makes a real impact. Better yet, bring along friends or family members.

VOLUNTEER WITH POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS
Whether knocking on doors or making phone calls to prospective voters, this is a great way to listen and learn from other people while working to elect officials who represent your values. In NYC, the Mayor and all 51 City Councilmembers are up for re-election this year. Across the Hudson River in New Jersey, voters will be choosing a successor to Gov. Chris Christie who was an early Trump supporter. In 2018, Congress will be up for grabs along with governorships and state legislatures across the land.

EXPAND YOUR MIND
Read widely and develop a deeper sense of history, politics, literature, economics, etc. This will make you a more effective advocate for the causes you believe in.

JOIN A READING GROUP
Consider joining a reading group or starting one of your own. Reading and studying with others is a great way to meet new friends and learn not only from the reading material but other people’s insights and life experiences.

JOIN (OR START) AN ORGANIZATION
Whether it’s joining a local grassroots group, the local chapter of a larger national organization or becoming an active member of a political party, working in concert with others allows us to build the power we need to affect change.

BE GENEROUS WITH YOUR MONEY
Sick of Trump’s over-the-top lying and “alternative facts”? Notice how the White House has declared the media to be “the enemy of the people.” Give generously to support independent media. The media outlets we will need the most are the ones that will have to be funded by all of us.

COMMIT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE
Deliberately breaking the law and getting hauled off to jail is not for everyone. No one should be pressured into participating in such an action. But when done at the right time and place with a clear message and demands, civil disobedience can be a dramatic and effective form of protest.

SUPPORT THE GENERAL STRIKE
Okay, we don’t know when or if we’ll ever see this happen here in the United States. But if it comes, you know what to do. Shut it down!

BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER
The coming years are going to be a marathon not a sprint so let’s be there for each other and carve out time to enjoy the beautiful things in life.
MEXICO CITY — Those who thought that Donald Trump’s Mexico-bashing was just a campaign strategy have been roundly proven wrong. The stroke of a pen and the sending of a tweet, Trump has brought to a head discontent with Mexico’s domi-
nant political and economic systems. From last August, when President Enrique Peña Nieto invited Trump to Mexico and gave him red-carpet treatment, to the rev-
enation that Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray co-wrote for the Jan. 25 executive order on the wall and border security, Mexicans are infuriated at the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government.

A Feb. 12 march for “national unity” organized by pro-government business sectors and media conglomerates fizzled when only a few thousand people turned out. In contrast, nationwide marches on Jan. 31 that combined the protest against Trump with calls for Peña’s resignation and an end to gas-price increases brought some 60,000 into the streets of Mexico City alone.

Mexico is being forced to rethink its dependent economy, and grassroots organizations see that as an opportunity. With renegotiating NAFTA possibly on the table, small farmers’ organizations are demanding that Mexican food production be withdrawn from the agreement. Trump’s threat to pull the United States out would cause much suffering, but many organizations are looking at how to move out of a bad deal and into greater sovereignty and equality.

A new “Mexico Moment” could be in the making. Far from the one that put Peña Nieto on the cover of Time, this one won’t be registered in the U.S. mainstream media and it won’t be led by Mexico’s political elite. It’s building from below, and it includes strengthening cross-border ties.

Laura Carlsen is the director of the Americas Program of the Center for International Policy based in Mexico City.
Havana who has been conducting research about the economy, said Dr. Daybel Panellas, a professor of social psychology at the University of Havana. “The challenge we face is how to build a prosperous and sustainable socialism at a moment of increasing income heterogeneity,” said Dr. Panellas. “We’ve already suffered through, resisted and survived the worst that could be thrown at us,” said the owner of the casa particular where I stayed during my visit. “Nothing that can happen in the coming months or years can be more difficult than what we have already lived through. After all, we are Cuban.”

Ruben is another Havana taxi driver. “I came home one day and I decided that I wanted to be part of the history. I dropped out of medical school and joined one of the literacy campaigns. “After all the fees and taxes are paid for, I come home every night between $8 and $10.” That’s a small fortune in Cuba.

In 2015, Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro resumed normal diplomatic relations between the two countries, after 54 years. Many Cuba-watcher are speculating how a possible reversal of that policy by President Donald Trump might affect the island nation.

Yet, the biggest challenges Cuba faces at this moment may be of its own making. A growing private-sector economy centered around the tourism industry is creating pockets of individual prosperity, while driving inequalities not seen in the country since the 1959 Revolution. The changes underway in Cuba are being widely discussed by everyone, from young punk-rockers hanging out in the streets to high-ranking members of the Communist Party. The artistic community is embracing the new possibilities that these changes are bringing in. In the heart of Old Havana, for example, a number of galleries are popping up, run by established artists who are promoting the new spaces as venues for tourists and Cubans alike, to celebrate the vibrancy of Cuban culture and artistic expression.

But for the most part, the changes underway in Cuba are much more below the surface. Today, as many as 29 percent of Cuban workers are active outside of the state sector, abandoning jobs that pay as little as one-tenth of what they can earn in the private sector. It’s a brain drain that sees well-educated professionals like Luis and Ruben abandoning their careers to drive taxis.

By Mario A. Murillo

CUBA’S DELICATE DANCE WITH A NEW ECONOMY

NEW OPPORTUNITIES:
A carriage driver navigates his way through tourist-friendly Old Havana.

40 YEARS LATER

I last visited Cuba in 1993, when its economy was enduring an unprecedented collapse caused by the sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union, the nation’s primary benefactor. Known as the “special period,” it was a time of energy rationing, extreme food shortages and scarcity of basic goods, as the real wages of the typical Cuban plummeted. Overall, the Cuban economy contracted by one-third between 1990 and 1993.

“The special period made the Great Depression in the United States, look like an economic boom,” said Dr. Ricardo Torres, an economist at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. “Cuba was left all alone to fend for itself, with no support from the international community, and more importantly, with a tightening noose from Washington as it tried to finally put an end to the Cuban Revolution by making the economic blockade even more restrictive.”

Yet with some pragmatic changes such as loosening restrictions on foreign investment, propping up the long-dormant tourism sector and legalizing the use of U.S. dollars on the island for the quest for hard currency, somehow, Cuba survived.

The changes to the physical environment have been modest, but are eye-catching when seen after a long absence. There are much larger swarms of foreign tourists, including an unprecedented number of norteamericanos, who for decades had been practically non-existent because of the stringent travel restrictions placed on U.S. citizens, many of whom were lifted by the Obama administration. The Malecon, the esplanade that buttresses a good part of the city from the Caribbean Sea, still has its dramatic structures with decaying facades, but its five miles are now peppered with dozens of new restaurants, cafes and swanky bars that could not have been imagined in the early 1990s.

The challenge we face is how to build a prosperous and sustainable socialism at a moment of increasing income heterogeneity,” said Dr. Daybel Panellas, a professor of social psychology at the University of Havana who has been conducting research about the Cuban worker’s psychosocial outlook.

The phrase quoted by economists and sociologists on the island is Raul Castro’s own slogan, “sin prisa, pero sin parar,” or “without a rush, but without stopping.” Yet, is it sustainable in the long run?

“During the special period, there was a feeling of collective sacrifice and struggle, that everyone was in this hole together,” said Dr. Panellas. “Today, that sense of social solidarity is threatened by the growing inequality. But there’s also a recognition that there’s no turning back the clock. The economic reforms that were pushed by the government will not be turned around any time soon.”

Indeed, the debate about how to move forward is being widely discussed by everyone, from young punk-rockers hanging out in the streets to high-ranking members of the Communist Party. The artistic community is embracing the new possibilities that these changes are bringing in. In the heart of Old Havana, for example, a number of galleries are popping up, run by established artists who are promoting the new spaces as venues for tourists and Cubans alike, to celebrate the vibrancy of Cuban culture and artistic expression.

One of them is Daniel Atiéns Ans, a painter and sculptor whose work has been exhibited from Havana to Berlin, New York City to Santiago de Cuba. His new gallery space is conveniently situated right in front of the birth home of the revered Cuban patriot Jose Martí, the 19th-century revolutionary who is the national symbol of Cuban independence and resistance. Atíens is renovating a formerly abandoned building to “make it a space for the community and the world to celebrate our art and culture.” It was only possible, he told me, because of the reforms approved by the government to allow for more independent endeavors to take hold without the direct oversight of the state.

“Many tourists who come in here from Canada and Europe tell me they’re visiting the island before Cuba changes totally and becomes something else,” he said. “I tell these people not to worry, that they must know that the Cuban people will always be Cuban, and the rich culture of national pride and resistance will always be with us regardless of what happens.”

While Cubans are concerned that U.S. policy toward their country could once again take a bellicose turn under Trump, their experience over the past quarter-century has left them confident in their ability to face adversity.

“We’ve already suffered through, resisted and survived the worst that could be thrown at us,” said the owner of the casa particular where I stayed during my visit. “Nothing that can happen in the coming months or years can be more difficult than what we have already lived through. After all, we are Cuban.”
The Indypendent
March 2017
By Nicholas Powers

The end of White Respectability

Race, class & privilege

The future is elsewhere.

For most America, history, ethnic minorities practiced respectability politics. We policed ourselves to embody white middle-class beauty aesthetics, mannerisms, styles and culture. Professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her 1993 book, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, wrote how Black women, “felt certain that respectable behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem and respectability. We policed ourselves to arrive on time, talk proper and be twice as good. In short, we had to be respectable.

For most of American history, ethnic minorities practiced respectability politics. We policed ourselves to embody white middle-class beauty aesthetics, mannerisms, styles and culture. Professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her 1993 book, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, wrote how Black women, “felt certain that respectable behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the aura of white respectability snapped. The elites of both parties had been coasting on a social contract that had dissolved their cultures in the blandness of the postwar GI Bill subsidized suburbs. The ’50s were a white golden age. Wives with pearls vacuuming. Men with gleaming new cars. The American president was the final authority on the matter and national politics were the embodiment of the ideal.

American whiteness worked as long as the escalator kept moving people across the class divide. But the inner dynamics of capitalism act like a suction tube drawing wealth from the many to the few at the top. Politics strained to bridge the gap. Presidents overcompensated with populist gestures; Bill Clinton brandished his sax and flaunted a baby-boomer sexuality, George W. Bush had a folksy twang and baseball mitt. But neither their theatrics nor their policies could stop the class divide from getting wider until the aura of white respectability snapped. The elites of both parties had been coating on a social contract that had been defaulted on. Then along came a man called Trump.

The president doesn’t read. The president hangs up the phone on other world leaders. The president speaks like a middle-school kid bully. The president sends angry 3 a.m. tweets at his TV critics. He held the hand of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for a long time, petting it like the head of dog.

Every day, we get more evidence that President Trump is embarrassing himself and the country. And yet it is exactly his vulgar, crude and ignorant ways that endeared him to some white voters who found themselves living at the end of whiteness. Their racial privilege is more visible at the same time that their class privileges have stalled or been revoked. And their psychological allegiance to the white ruling class has broken enough for them not to care about respectability. They are no longer looking down at themselves from the position of the elites, but are looking at the elites as frauds. In a fury, they have thrown off white respectability politics.

But in a telling gesture, they, in voting for Trump, threw away their dignity. Respectability politics, whatever race, is implicitly a transactional act. I pay for entry into the club with good taste and good behavior. It is performative, meant for the appraisal of others, one that Jean-Paul Sartre would call “bad faith” or psychologist D. W. Winnicott would call life as a “false self.” It is a mask.

In voting for Trump, a man who laughed at the disabled, gleefully dumped slurs on whole peoples and is too entitled to bother to think, white voters did not free themselves from their elites. Respectability politics can only be a long trap if it was first seen as a source of freedom, but it never was.

Dignity is. Dignity comes from a deeper place. Dignity is the source of true revolutions. It’s the realization that you, no matter how poor or tattered, are the embodiment of an immeasurable worth that cannot be defined by status or property.

When you feel that power within, you feel it with everyone, because it is our universal truth. When Trump tried to enact his Muslim ban, tens of thousands of immigrants and native-born allies showed up at airports to protest. It was a deeply loving act of dignity, to reach out in the name of shared humanity to those being scapegoated. It was the birth pang of a New America, where everyone is welcome, including Flava Flav. Yeah Boyeeeereee!

Nicholas Powers is a Professor of African-American Literature at SUNY Old Westbury and author of The Ground Below Zero (UpSet Press, 2015).
SEE MORE OF MNN THAN EVER BEFORE.

No one tells the story of New York better than New Yorkers, and now the story just got bigger. Presenting MNN’s HD Community Channel: We built this channel specifically for MNN Community Producers to tell their stories. Love stories, documentary stories, action stories, BIG stories. Join us at MNN HD on Time Warner Cable channel 1993 for the biggest New York stories there are - the story of your life.

AMPLIFIED LOCAL VOICES

TIME WARNER CABLE
CHANNEL 1993

HD

MNN

STREAMING WORLDWIDE ON MNN.ORG
MAKE PIZZA GREAT AGAIN!
RIGHT-WINGERS ARE ATTACKING A CULINARY DELIGHT THAT REPRESENTS WHAT IS BEST ABOUT AMERICA

By Peter Rugh

When a far-right conspiracy theory involving the Clintons, pizza, and a supposed child sex-trafficking ring led to a shooting incident in December, I knew it was time to talk to The Independent’s readers about pizza.

When Edgar M. Welch, a 28-year-old father of two and certifiable moron, decided to investigate “the Pizzagate” conspiracy, he showed up at Comet Ping Pong in Washington. A trendy pizzeria and ping-pong parlor on the city’s leafy northwestern edge, it was the alleged hub of the Clintons’ child-trafficking operations. Like all great detectives seeking to expose criminal activity, he fired his AR-15 the minute he walked in the joint. Luckily, no one was injured.

“I just wanted to do some good and went about it the wrong way,” Welch apologized after he was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon. “The intel wasn’t a hundred percent.”

That is perhaps the understatement of the century. Comet Ping Pong is not alone. The conspiracy theorists claim that the words “cheese pizza” in leaked emails from John Podesta, Hillary Clinton’s former campaign chairman, were code for “child pornography.” Roberta’s, an upscale pizzeria in Bushwick, has been the target of related threats.

“More than I dig those emails and new findings,” one online commentator remarked about Roberta’s, “the clearer it gets…. Most of those so-called elites made a cult out of pizza. Disturbing indeed.”

Anyone who has seen the photos of Donald Trump and Sarah Palin eating Famiglia’s pizza with knives and forks knows the elites wouldn’t even know where to begin making a salt out of pizza. They don’t even know how to eat it.

But it seems the forces of ignorance and bigotry that Trump has brought to the fore are not content with just going after Muslims and immigrants, women and gays. Like ISIS lopping off the heads of the idols of ancient dynasties, they have launched an attack on pizza, a divine delight that represents what is truly great about our sad and confused nation.

First brought to New York at the turn of the 20th century by Italian immigrants who were considered dirty and politically suspicious by the American jingoists of the day, pizza is now a quintessential part of the American diet.

“A very simple dish, invented as a filling fast meal for the poor of the teeming city,” Elizabeth Luard remarked in pizza’s Neapolitan roots in her classic, The Rich Tradition of European Peasant Cooking. Quick to prepare and easy to eat on the fly, pizza thrived in our own teeming city of immigrants. It spread like marinara across the country.

Like the American dream itself, the surface of a pizza is a wide-open canvas. Let’s make pizza again. Make it yourself, share it with friends, and give New York’s great pizza houses your patronage, before Famiglia becomes our only option.

For help, I’ve reached out to Scott Wiener, who runs tours of New York’s oldest and finest pizza establishments, and is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as having its largest pizza-box collection. [Visit scottspizzatours.com to book one, or check out his book Viva La Pizza! The Art of the Pizza Box to delve into the nerdier subculture surrounding pizza.]

He’s provided a list of some of New York’s best pizza-by-the-slice establishments, along with a simple dough recipe you can whip up at home. I’ve also included a basic marinara recipe and a few additional tips that will help put you on the road to becoming a master pizza chef.

WHERE TO FIND THE PERFECT SLICE

JOE’S — 7 Carmine St. (West Village)
LUIGI’S — 86th 5th Ave. (Park Slope, Brooklyn)
NY PIZZA SUPREMA — 413 Eighth Ave. (Midtown)
PATSY’S — 2287 First Ave. (East Harlem)
SCARR’S — 22 Orchard St. (Little Italy)

SCOTT’S PIZZA RECIPES

Meticulous bakers measure the weight of their ingredients. If you’re going to go all out, you might want to invest around $20 in a kitchen scale. It’s perhaps more important to be mindful of the dough’s consistency. With some breads, such as focaccia (a precursor to pizza) or no-knead bread, you’ll want a wet, sticky batter. Pizza calls for a smooth ball of dough that expands back into form when you poke it with your pointer finger. If your dough is too wet, add more flour; too dry, add water a spoonful at a time.

455g or just shy of 2 cups of water (room temperature is fine)
700g/1 1/3 cups of flour (all-purpose is fine, bread flour is even better)
3-3.5g/1 tsp active dry yeast
14g/2% tsp salt (kosher or sea salt)
10g/1/4 tbsp olive oil

Mix flour, yeast, salt and water. Let rest 30 minutes. Add olive oil. Knead until springy, then split into four pieces, each weighing 290 grams (or as close as you can get). Store in lightly oiled containers overnight in the fridge. DONE!

MARINARA SAUCE

6 cloves of garlic, minced
2 tsp red chili flakes
1/8 cup of olive oil
28oz can of whole peeled tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)
2 tbsp of oregano, or more to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Add oil to a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and red chili flakes. When the garlic becomes fragrant, in about one minute, add tomatoes and all the juice with them from the can. The tomatoes will cool the skillet, so turn the heat up. Allow the mixture to come to a boil. As it does, stir in oregano, a couple dashes of salt and a sprinkling of pepper. Reduce heat and allow to simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring and tanging occasionally. Season with more chili flakes, oregano, and salt and pepper to your liking, as you go. The tomatoes will gradually break down and dissolve. This makes a thick marinara. For a thinner sauce, add a 1/2 to 1 cup of water in with the tomatoes.

A WORD ABOUT TOPPINGS

Choosing quality ingredients goes a long way with pizza. For cheese, I recommend sticking to the classic: fresh mozzarella, the kind that comes in a ball you can effortlessly peel apart. (There are vegan substitutes that I’m told, come close.) Celly and cheddar will yield a similarly gooey-cheesy consistency.

It is tempting to load your pie with marinarra, cheese and other toppings, but it’s better to err on the side of restraint, or else you might have a soggy, undercooked pie on your hands.

BAKING

The key to the solid, crisp crust and sizzling cheesy top that makes a perfect pizza is heat, a hard thing to duplicate in domestic ovens. You can get around this by using a cast-iron or otherwise oven-safe skillet. The blister on my left hand as I type this reminds me to warn: Be careful not to burn yourself.

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Lightly brush skillet with olive oil. Roll pizza dough into a disk 12 to 15 inches wide, depending on the size of your skillet. Once your dough is snugly on the pan, add toppings and turn up the burner to high heat. You might have to shift your pan here and there over the burner to ensure even cooking. After about 2 to 4 minutes, the dough will begin to bubble ever so slightly, and the cheese may begin to gently melt. Faint plumes of smoke will begin to rise from the pan. Don’t be alarmed. Give the pizza another 30 seconds on the burner, and transfer to the oven on the skillet. When the dough has risen and turned golden brown, and the cheese has melted — about 10 minutes — remove the pie from the oven. (This is the perfect moment to toss arugula or fresh basil on top.) Let rest about 5 minutes. Slice. Dig in.

Mix flour, yeast, salt and water. Let rest 30 minutes. Add olive oil. Knead until springy, then split into four pieces, each weighing 290 grams (or as close as you can get). Store in lightly oiled containers overnight in the fridge. DONE!

MARINARA SAUCE

6 cloves of garlic, minced
2 tsp red chili flakes
1/8 cup of olive oil
28oz can of whole peeled tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)
2 tbsp of oregano, or more to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Add oil to a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and red chili flakes. When the garlic becomes fragrant, in about one minute, add tomatoes and all the juice with them from the can. The tomatoes will cool the skillet, so turn the heat up. Allow the mixture to come to a boil. As it does, stir in oregano, a couple dashes of salt and a sprinkling of pepper. Reduce heat and allow to simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring and tanging occasionally. Season with more chili flakes, oregano, and salt and pepper to your liking, as you go. The tomatoes will gradually break down and dissolve. This makes a thick marinara. For a thinner sauce, add a 1/2 to 1 cup of water in with the tomatoes.

A WORD ABOUT TOPPINGS

Choosing quality ingredients goes a long way with pizza. For cheese, I recommend sticking to the classic: fresh mozzarella, the kind that comes in a ball you can effortlessly peel apart. (There are vegan substitutes that I’m told, come close.) Colby and cheddar will yield a similarly gooey-cheesy consistency.

It is tempting to load your pie with marinara, cheese and other toppings, but it’s better to err on the side of restraint, or else you might have a soggy, undercooked pie on your hands.

BAKING

The key to the solid, crisp crust and sizzling cheesy top that makes a perfect pizza is heat, a hard thing to duplicate in domestic ovens. You can get around this by using a cast-iron or otherwise oven-safe skillet. The blister on my left hand as I type this reminds me to warn: Be careful not to burn yourself.

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Lightly brush skillet with olive oil. Roll pizza dough into a disk 12 to 15 inches wide, depending on the size of your skillet. Once your dough is snugly on the pan, add toppings and turn up the burner to high heat. You might have to shift your pan here and there over the burner to ensure even cooking. After about 2 to 4 minutes, the dough will begin to bubble ever so slightly, and the cheese may begin to gently melt. Faint plumes of smoke will begin to rise from the pan. Don’t be alarmed. Give the pizza another 30 seconds on the burner, and transfer to the oven on the skillet. When the dough has risen and turned golden brown, and the cheese has melted — about 10 minutes — remove the pie from the oven. (This is the perfect moment to toss arugula or fresh basil on top.) Let rest about 5 minutes. Slice. Dig in.
Dear Rev,
Back when Trump was just a candidate I used to laugh at his antics. Now I'm horrified. I feel bad for not taking him as seriously as I should have but I can't help but feel these days that laughing at him would take the edge off all the terror he represents. Is it safe to laugh again? How do I regain my sense of humor when it comes to our mad hatter-in-chief?

— Cody, East Williamsburg

Dear Cody,
Give yourself a break. You can't constantly be arranging your emotional response to the outside world like you're driving a car, steering between the lines. I agree with you that we were laughing when we should have been volunteering against Trump's fascism. We should have flown to Toledo, gone door-to-door — a modern version of going off to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

When George Orwell was fighting in Catalonia, he was quipping wittily about proceedings as the bullets flew by. One bullet struck him and he even kept laughing as he fell. That's why he survived to tell the story.

You don't have to find a safe place to laugh. A sense of humor is not earned. We're in a dangerous place right now, Cody. We can blame ourselves for all those years of laughing with Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and letting the monster sneak up on us. But the problem was never that we were laughing, it was that we became depoliticized. Have your big laugh at Trump. He is funny. But by all means necessary send him to the hell where he belongs. Send him to some beauty contest in a phosphorescent subterranean world, where everything is orange. That's good for a laugh.

Laugh-a-lujah!

— Reverend Billy Talen

Reverend Billy is an activist and political shouter, a post-religious preacher of the streets and bank lobbies. He's been in New York forever with the activist performance group the Church of Stop Shopping.

GOT A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REV:BILLY@INDYDEPT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.
“OUR LIBERATION IS BOUND BY EACH OTHER’S”

WHAT WE WANT

- Accountability and justice for police brutality and ending racial profiling.
- Dismantling of the gender and racial inequities within the criminal justice system.
- Reproductive freedom.
- LGBTQIA rights.
- An equitable economy with paid parental leave, affordable childcare, healthcare for all and a livable minimum wage.
- An end to discrimination against women and mothers in the workplace.
- Dignity and fair treatment for all unpaid and paid caregivers.
- Restoring and protecting voting rights.
- Ending mass deportation, family detention, violations of due process, and violence against queer and trans migrants.
- Clean water, clean air, and access to enjoy public lands.

— FROM THE PLATFORM FOR THE WOMEN’S MARCH ON WASHINGTON, JANUARY 21, 2017

To see the full platform, visit www.womensmarch.com/principles.

Celebrate the power of women to change the world.

The centerfold from our Women's March special edition was a huge hit. Now we’ve made it into a beautiful 18” x 24” poster. Printed on high quality paper stock, it will look great on any wall.

Place your order online today at indypendent.org. Or, send a check or money order to The Indypendent/388 Atlantic Ave., 2nd Fl./Brooklyn, NY 11217. All proceeds will go to help continue publishing The Indypendent.

1 poster.......................... $12
2 posters.......................... $18
5 posters........................... $40
10 posters.......................... $60
20 or more........................ $5/each

*All prices include cost of shipping and handling. Allow 3-5 weeks for delivery. Any questions, email contact@indypendent.org.

THE INDYPENDENT