JERK CHICKEN VS. GENTRIFICATION, P6
SOCIALISTS GET ORGANIZED, P8
40 YEARS OF DIRECT ACTION, P18

MEDICINE FOR THE PEOPLE
TRUMPCARE HAS BOMBED. OBAMACARE ISN’T ENOUGH. CAN WE FINALLY HAVE THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WE NEED?, P12
BY NICHOLAS POWERS
A Good Man is Hard to Find

Ravi Ragbir is a fine person of good character who has spent many years reaching out to others in immigration jeopardy like himself (“Walk With Me,” March Indypendent). As the article shows, he thinks of others even when he is defending his own status here in the United States. I am crying inside for him and his wife at the thought that he might be removed from us. That would be a terrible mistake and a miscarriage of justice. Leave this good man to do his work!

— Anne E. Wright

Quit While You’re Behind

The Democrats have not been an effective opposition party for at least 40 years (“Which Way Forward,” March Indypendent). Their strategy of pretending to be for workers and women and minorities while serving the 1% has been a miserable failure. They now control only a handful of states and nothing at all in Washington. It’s ridiculous to believe that the people that presided over this catastrophic defeat are now going to resurrect the party. They should just declare the party dead and disband now.

— Charles Dunaway

No Excuse

If you want a day off (“Dreaming of a General Strike,” March Indypendent), just take it! Don’t use Trump as an excuse!

— Jose Matias

Covering All Our Home Bases

Excellent journalism — clear, concise and sparklingly readable (“Home Sweet Home,” March Indypendent). Lauren Kaori Gurley adroitly covers all the relevant points of view and personalizes the issue of legal representation in housing court — a topic that is of much social interest. Thank you!

— Brian Wallace

Not What It Seems

What was achieved here (“A Victory 50 Years in the Making,” March Indypendent) is a sham PR “victory” that in reality changed nothing. The owners of the Indian Point nuclear power plant did what they wanted to, for as long as they wanted to do it and are now expecting gratitude for finally stopping when it suits their purposes to stop and when they’d always intended to stop.

— Jim Barron

Equal Opportunity Exploitation

Nothing like stereotyping and scapegoating whites for the crimes of the super wealthy (“The End of White Respectability,” March Indypendent)! If the author had bothered to do a little research, he would have discovered that a minority of whites elected Trump into office. A minority of white, plutocratic oligarchs steal democracy from the people and enact legislation that only benefits their oligarchy. That same minority oppresses whites, along with everyone else. This is not a racial war of whites versus people of color. This is a war on people of all races conducted by an equal opportunity exploiter.

— Kevin Schmidt

Man of the Pizza

Great article (“Make Pizza Great Again!” March Indypendent). Remember, however, Donald Trump and Sarah Palin do not consider themselves elites.

— David Blanchard

Busy Work

The United States is dependent on its global dominance and low wages to sustain its currently unsustainable employment rate (“Trump Through Mexican Eyes,” March Indypendent). Any disturbance in the economy is likely to send employment tumbling again. The only reason our unemployment rate is as low as it is because A) Americans are able to go basically anywhere in the world to work, since we essentially control most of the world and B) because low wage service jobs like fast food and retail work are keeping most Americans barely afloat, many with government assistance.

— Michael

THE REBELS ON THE BUS GO “DOWN WITH TRUMP!”

THE INDY IS HEADIN TO WASHINGTON FOR THE HISTORIC PEOPLE’S CLIMATE MARCH ON APRIL 29 AND WE WANT YOU TO JOIN US. SICK AND TIRED OF OUR FOOL-MOUTHED PRESIDENT STICKING UP FOR POLLUTERS? HOP ON THE INDY CLIMATE BUS. WE’RE FOLLOWING A ROUTE THAT BENDS TOWARDS JUSTICE.

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT WWW.BIT.LY/2MKOM22 OR CALL (212) 904-1282.
THIRD MAY 16
Thurs 1PM—9PM, Fri—Sun 12PM—5PM • Donations suggested
EXHIBIT: FINALLY GOT THE NEWS
Uncovers the hidden legacy of the radical left of the 1970s, a decade when vibrant social movements challenged racism, imperialism, patriarchy and capitalism itself. It uses original printed materials — from pamphlets to posters, flyers to record albums — to tell this politically rich and little-known story.
Interference Archive
131 8th St, #4

TUE APRIL 4
6PM–8PM • Free
FILM: OUR VOICES: TRANS STORIES, TRANS JUSTICE, TRANS RESILIENCE
In a time when transgender and gender nonconforming communities remain under attack, this film screening and panel will highlight ways trans communities fight back, build community and center the intersectional work essential to survival. Featuring Giveille Bleuz, Devin Love and Luce Lincoln of Global Action Project, Marin Watts of Trans Justice Funding Project and Olympia Perez and Sasha Alexander of Black Trans Media.
Union Pool
404 Union Ave

THUR APRIL 13 thru SUN APRIL 30
8PM Thu–Sat, 3PM Sun Matinees • $15, $12 seniors/students, $10 groups
THEATER: THE FACULTY ROOM
Faculty members at James Baldwin High School find themselves under mandatory lockdown when two star players on the girls’ basketball team have a gun battle over a common boyfriend. Tickets at thebstsetheatrenyc.net.
Theater for the New City
155 1st Ave

SAT APRIL 15
9PM–3AM • $10–$20 suggested donation
BENEFIT PARTY: DANCE WITH THE INDY
Feeling inundated by fake news and orange-haired madness? The Indy has been KEEPING IT REAL since the year 2000. Come celebrate independent media in the age of Trump. Beats by DJ Stylus.
Starr Bar
214 Starr St

SAT APRIL 29
6AM—9PM • $50
HOP ON THE INDY BUS
ROADTRIP: Join The Indybus contingent — staff, reporters and editors — as we trek to our nation’s capital for the historic People’s Climate March on Washington. Seats are limited, reserve them now at bit.ly/2wk8m22 or call (212) 904-1292. Departing from the Commons Brooklyn
388 Atlantic Ave

PARTY WITH US: Every month we tell you all about events other outfits are hosting. This time we’re throwing the party! Join us at Starr Bar on April 15 to celebrate independent media in the age of Trump.

TOTALITARIAN STATE OF ATTRACTION: On April 4, arthouse movie theaters across the country are screening George Orwell’s dystopian thriller 1984. The film stars the late, great John Hurt (left) and Suzanna Hamilton (right). Turn off your phone, remove your sim card and watch Big Brother for once.

THUR APRIL 27
7:30PM–9:30PM • $5 - $15 suggested donation
AUTHOR DISCUSSION: THE EXPLOSION OF DEFERRED DREAMS
The Explosion of Deferred Dreams offers a critical re-examination of the interwoven political and musical happenings in San Francisco in the Sixties. Native San Franciscan Mat Callahan explores the dynamic links between the Black Panthers and Sly and the Family Stone, the United Farm Workers and Santana, the Indian Occupation of Alcatraz and the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the New Left and the counterculture.
Commons Brooklyn
388 Atlantic Ave

Fri APRIL 28 to SUN APRIL 30
$20–$35
MUSIC: 9TH ANNUAL BROOKLYN FOLK FESTIVAL
Ready. Set. Hurl your banjoes. Presented by the Jalopy Theatre & School of Music, the Brooklyn Folk Fest is a celebration of downhome music, cultural diversity and memory. Don’t miss the world famous banjo tossing contest.
Visit brooklynfolkfest.com for tickets and more information.
St. Ann’s Church
157 Montague St

SAT MAY 4
6AM—9PM • $50
HOP ON THE INDY BUS
ROADTRIP: Join The Indybus contingent — staff, reporters and editors — as we trek to our nation’s capital for the historic People’s Climate March on Washington. Seats are limited, reserve them now at bit.ly/2wk8m22 or call (212) 904-1292. Departing from the Commons Brooklyn
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Set an alarm to wake up to The Nightly News every night.

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FREE, FOR NOW
NYC IMMIGRANT ADVOCATE RAVI RAGBIR FACES A NEW DEPORTATION CHECK-IN ON APRIL 11

By Renée Feltz

"This is a sea of love," proclaimed Ravi Ragbir as the Trinidadian immigrant arrived at Foley Square, across from his deportation check-in at 26 Federal Plaza, and found the hundreds of people who had gathered to support him. "This is like the Katrina that is going to overtake any wall that is going to be built, because this sea, that is love, is going to make that change."

As The Independent reported in its last issue, Ragbir is a leading New York City immigrant rights advocate and executive director of the New Sanctuary Coalition. He has helped pioneer an "Accompaniment Program" for such check-ins that has taken on new significance under Trump because more people are being detained at what used to be routine appearances.

Three City Council members who rallied for Ragbir on March 9 actually joined him for his check-in, along with his wife and lawyer. Outside people circled the federal building in a Jericho Walk, largely silent until those who had signed up for text alerts received a message: "Ravi checked in, and everything is ok with him for now. Thanks for all the support."

Everyone exhaled sighs of relief and Reverend Billy and his choir — which Ragbir has sung with for the past two years — made a joyful noise. Soon Ragbir emerged, his arms linked on either side with Councilmembers Jumaane Williams and Ydanis Rodriguez. They expressed relief when he was allowed to leave about an hour later, but could not forget what they witnessed at the local office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"It was the most un-American thing I have seen in a very long time," Williams said. "I see a room full of terrified people facing deportation with no legal representation at all — grandmothers in [electronic monitoring] bracelets, single parents with children waiting to hear if they were deported or not."

Ragbir himself still faces what he calls a "guilt-lotine over my neck." Even though he has a stay of deportation in place until 2018, his deportation officer asked him to return on April 11 and to make efforts to get a travel document, one of the first steps in the removal process.

"I’m not going to just sit back quietly and just let then take me away," Ragbir said afterward, fighting back tears. "I’m going to stand up. I’m going to fight. I’m going to speak about this. And I’m going to invite you all to join me."

Like millions of New Yorkers over the years, Ragbir came to the United States with a visitor’s visa and later acquired a green card. But ten years after his arrival he was convicted of conspiracy to commit wire fraud for a mortgage lender and served two years in prison before he was transferred to immigrant detention and released two additional years later.

If he was labeled by his rap sheet, President Obama might have called Ragbir a "criminal alien" and Trump may use the term, "bad hombre." But in New York City, his dedication to advocating for immigrants facing deportation has made him a respected authority on the topic. So just two weeks after his check-in, Ragbir was able to keep his commitment to appear on a panel about New York as a sanctuary city alongside the speaker of the City Council, Melissa Mark-Viverito.

"This is the reality we are living," Mark-Viverito said as she described one of her undocumented constituents who had recently faced harassment from her landlord but was afraid to report it despite efforts to reduce NYPD collaboration with ICE. The speaker used the event to outline policy changes the city has made "in order to limit people being run through the mill," such as forging an agreement with local district attorneys to dismiss decades-old warrants, and making some minor offenses punishable by a summons, which is less likely to trigger deportation.

"So even though we came out it was bittersweet," Ragbir recalled, noting that "we are looking into ways to get him released soon."

In the meantime he says people are also strategizing in preparation for his own fast-approaching meeting with a deportation officer. A recent email update from his defense committee urged supporters to "save the date of Ravi’s check-in: Tuesday, April 11th, at 8:15 AM in Foley Square." Further plans will be posted on the New Sanctuary Coalition’s social media pages. "People have gotten the understanding they can do a lot more than sign a letter or a petition," Ragbir says. "They want to have a direct impact and help someone directly. The accompaniment does have that impact. A lot of people have been requesting to learn how to do it."

"I’M NOT GOING TO JUST SIT BACK QUIETLY AND LET THEM TAKE ME AWAY."

ACCOMPANY ME! Ravi Ragbir at Foley Square on March 9 before reporting to ICE for his annual check-in. Hundreds of people came out on a cold weekday morning to support Ragbir whose story was featured on the cover of the March Indypendent.
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JERK CHICKEN VS GENTRIFICATION

ERROL’S, A BELIEVED FLATBUSH EATERY, WAS ALMOST EVICTED. BUT, IN WHAT COULD BE A CITYWIDE MODEL FOR FUTURE FIGHTS, RESIDENTS RALLIED ON ITS BEHALF

By Colin Kinniburgh

On Jan. 7, as the first big storm of the winter was busy dumping nearly a foot of snow on the New York area, more than 25 neighbors and activists rallied on the corner of Flatbush Avenue and Hawthorne Street in Brooklyn with signs reading: “Give Errol’s a New Lease!” The beloved Errol’s Bakery, a Flatbush staple renowned citywide for its Jamaican patties and jerk chicken, was facing eviction after 15 years on the block, and the community was having none of it. “Greedy landlords go away, we want Errol’s Bakery to stay!” the group chanted as the snow piled down.

The rally was the second of three community actions organized in support of Errol’s by Equality for Flatbush after the group’s lead organizer, Imani Henry, learned in late November that the bakery’s owners, Dorothy and Errol Miller, had been denied a new lease and were facing eviction.

“We had no problem the first 15 years,” explained Errol Miller. The Millers say they had never missed a rent payment since opening the bakery in 2001, and the building’s owner, Rothstein Management, had so far offered them successive five-year leases without any issue. But last year, when the lease was up, the landlord stopped answering the Millers’ calls without explanation, only to take them to court when Errol’s stay put after the lease expired.

Unlike roughly half of New York’s residential tenants, whose right to renew their lease is protected by rent-stabilization laws, commercial tenants like the Millers are at the mercy of the market. As a result, one small business after another has been pushed out by skyrocketing rents. On a five-block stretch of Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg, now the most expensive commercial strip in the borough, commercial tenants have climbed a staggering 477 percent over the past decade.

With rents finally leveling off in the most condo-filled areas, landlords and developers are shifting their sights to less-gentrified neighborhoods like Flatbush, the heart of Brooklyn’s Afro-Caribbean community. A new report by the real-estate services company CPEX lists the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Church Street, just a few blocks down from Errol’s Bakery, as one of six Brooklyn retail areas “poised for growth” in the Williamsburg mold over the coming years.

Area landlords are counting on it. Rather than gradually raising the rents on businesses, advocates say, landlords are actively kicking tenants out and keeping stores vacant while they wait for the gentrification wave to hit. According to Shelley Kramer, vice president of Parkside Empire Flatbush Avenue Merchants Association, at least 22 stores along the 10-block stretch of Flatbush Avenue between Empire Boulevard and Parkside Avenue are currently vacant. Errol’s almost became one of them.

“All of a sudden the landlord doesn’t want me to be here,” Errol Miller said of Rothstein Management. “He doesn’t want to talk to me about no lease, he just takes me to court. I worked in this community 30 years, and he just want to take it away from me.” He connects the plight of black- and immigrant-owned businesses in the neighborhood to luxury developments like 626 Flatbush Avenue, a 23-story tower completed last summer, where rents start at $2,044 a month for a studio — and exceed $4,500 for a three-bedroom apartment. “[With] the high-rise building there … no small businesses can stay around here,” he says. “Once the lease is up, you have to go.”

Last May, a court ordered the Millers to vacate the space by the end of November. As word began to spread about the bakery’s impending eviction, the court extended the deadline to Feb. 28, and community members rallied around this neighborhood institution. Equality for Flatbush began circulating a petition online to save Errol’s, and held its first rally outside the shop last Dec. 17. Passers-by joined the dozen-odd picketers in support.

“This is traditionally an immigrant neighborhood,” said Al Saint Jean, a Flatbush resident and organizer with the Black Alliance for Immigrant Justice. “Errol’s is a testament to that, along with many of the other establishments here. They’re part of the economic foundation of this neighborhood and invested in this neighborhood long before it got gentrified, long before folks with money started moving in here.”

Two months later, protests and more than 1,500 petition signatures later, the Millers finally secured a new five-year lease from Rothstein Management.

While the Millers and the community around them are celebrating this victory, the struggle of small businesses like Errol’s is far from over. Supporting families like the Millers is one reason Equality for Flatbush has launched a new “rapid response legal fund,” to connect small-business owners as well as other low-income tenants and homeowners to trusted lawyers.

Meanwhile, as one beloved neighborhood institution after another has been forced to shutter by escalating rents, a coalition of small businesses, residents and advocacy groups under the banner Take Back NYC is making a renewed push to pass the Small Business Jobs Survival Act. The bill would allow commercial tenants to bring rent increases to arbitration and give them the right to get 10-year leases.

New York City had commercial rent control for 18 years after World War II, until the regulations expired in 1963. A bill to revive it was introduced in the City Council in the 1980s, but was strongly opposed by real-estate interests and Mayor Ed Koch, and died in committee. An earlier version of the Small Business Jobs Survival Act was introduced in 2009, but then-Speaker Christine Quinn blocked a vote on it, claiming it had vague “legal problems.” Councilmember Annabel Palma (D-Bronx) introduced the revived version in 2014, and by late 2015, 27 of the 51 councilmembers had signed on as cosponsors. But Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito has blocked a vote on it. Early last year, she instead announced an alternate planning study “to develop recommendations for strengthening our small-business community through land use policy and other tools, such as tax incentives.”

Members of Take Back NYC insist that there is no need for another study, and that the speaker’s plan is little more than a stalling tactic to placate real-estate interests.

“How can the Speaker acknowledge ‘unaffordable rent increases’ as the core problem and then not address it in her solution?” the coalition demanded in March 2016. It called the proposed study “another Trojan horse from City Hall … to keep the status quo,” and charged that Mark-Viverito was selling out to the Real Estate Board of New York, the powerful developers’ lobbying group that has long opposed restrictions on commercial rents.

As of press time, the bill remains stalled.

Still, the Errol’s victory marks what activists hope will be a turning point in the fight against gentrification, in Flatbush and beyond. The campaign’s success “not only demonstrates how much people appreciate small businesses in our neighborhoods, but it also shows what is possible when a community comes together,” says Soraya Palmer, lead organizer with Equality for Flatbush and a lifelong neighborhood resident. “What this victory shows is that we can stop the displacement of residents and businesses in our neighborhoods.”

On a cold Saturday in early March, Errol’s is bustling, and the taste of victory is still in the air. A sign out front reads, “To everyone who prayed with us and for us, who stood in the frigid cold, mounting snow and the rain to let your voices be heard… to those who stopped by daily to give an encouraging word, words are not enough to express how grateful we are to have the support of you all.” Now, when the bakery’s loyal customers stop by Errol’s for their patties, space bread and oatmeal, they can enjoy the fruit of their collective action, too.
A four-year battle to prevent a controversial Business Improvement District from being established along the main commercial corridor in the immigrant communities of Jackson Heights and Corona ended recently in victory for neighborhood activists who had warned the project would accelerate gentrification in western Queens.

“It’s a very significant win,” said Tania Mattos, an organizer at Queens Neighborhoods United (QNU) and a native of Jackson Heights, a majority immigrant neighborhood. “We always kind of new we would win this because the community never supported this.”

There are presently 73 BIDs in New York City. They are private-public partnerships formed by a majority of property owners in a given neighborhood, which essentially privatize public services while hitting while levying additional fees on local residents. A larger police presence also come with BIDs. The ill-fated Jackson Heights-Corona Business Improvement District would have run along Roosevelt Avenue — a noisy artery known for its authentic Latin culture and vibrant nightlife — from 81st to 114th Streets. It would have incorporated several important retail shopping areas and impacting hundreds of small businesses as well as street vendors who are an essential part of the neighborhood’s fabric. Its defeat marks only the second time since the 1980s that a proposed BID has been stopped.

“Business Improvement Districts work in the interests of property owners,” explained Mattos. “Property owners demand that BIDs work with local law enforcement in ‘cleaning up’ an area to look and feel aesthetically pleasing. This means, getting rid of anything or anyone who is deemed unpleasant.”

Local City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras welcomed the proposal in 2013 as a “New Deal for Roosevelt Avenue” but the plan soon met vociferous opposition from QNU and other neighborhood groups.

Sergio Ruiz, an immigrant who came to Jackson Heights 16 years ago expressed his opposition, a sentiment echoed by many of his neighbors. “They want to kick out all the neighbors, all the businesses so they can put in other people,” Ruiz said from the back of his bakery and grocery store La Estrella. “They want to improve the neighborhood, and improving it means kicking us out to put in another type of people and another type of business.”

Even with the defeat of the BID, major real estate development projects are in the works across Queens. Hector Marquez, owner of the Manhattan Cocktail Lounge, remains uncertain like many other small business owners about his future in the neighborhood. His rent will likely increase after his current two-year lease runs out, as Jackson Heights continues attracting new upper-middle class residents who the BID sought to attract in the first place.

“If I have to move, where?” Marquez asked.
BUILDING POWER FROM THE GRASSROOTS
DSA, A ONCE OBSCURE SOCIALIST GROUP, HAS BALLOONED IN NUMBER SINCE NOVEMBER. THEY'RE ATTEMPTING TO USE THEIR NEWFOUND POPULARITY TO SHAKE UP POLITICS AS USUAL

By Peter Rugh

I’m calling on Crown Heights,” shouts New York State Assemblywoman Diana Richardson. “I’m calling on East Flatbush, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill. Rise up and pay attention.”

Richardson is testifying in the Baptist sense of the word and her remarks are greeted with various interjections of “yes” and “that’s right” from the 30 or so people assembled on the steps of City Hall.

“The fight we are fighting here today is everybody’s fight,” she continues.

This is supposed to be a press conference but it is a Sunday and colder than a traffic cop’s smile out here. Aside from a half-frozen fellow from the local NBC affiliate who isn’t bothering to film Richardson’s speech, I’m the only reporter in the vicinity. You can tell by the banners the people on the steps are holding which con- 

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Although Richardson lives two blocks from the Bedford Armory, the development isn’t technically in her district and, in any case, it is out of the state assembly’s hands. It’s future is up to the Department of City Planning which will first have to certify BFC’s land use application. Next the Crown Heights community board will make recommendations to the Borough President and Borough Board. Finally, the City Planning Commission will weigh in. After passing through this dizzying array of checkpoints that few but city bureaucrats and savvy real estate insiders know how to navigate, the development will go before the City Council.

There its fate will ultimately be decided by Councilwoman Laurie Cumbo given City Council’s unwritten rule of approving developments provided they are backed by the councilmember representing the district in which they are undertaken. The District 35 representative, a Democrat, has hosted a series of town halls on the Bedford Armory development that have been packed by its opponents. Cumbo says she’s against the project as it currently stands but whereas DSA and the Crown Heights Tenants Union are calling for the Armory to become part of a community land trust, Cumbo wants to negotiate.

“The mayor is discussing with me how we can create more low-income housing with this project,” Cumbo told me over the phone, noting that the Gov. Andrew Cuomo has also pledged to put $1.4 billion towards housing in Brooklyn. BFC will receive $25.1 million worth of tax write-offs for the project and Cumbo wants the city and the state to put up subsidies to help house more low-income Brooklynites at the Armory. “What we’re seeing here is the opportunity for the [mayoral] administration, the developer and the governor to come forward to see how we can create the best project possible — vastly different than what’s been proposed currently.”

Opponents of the project are distrustful of Cumbo’s let’s-hear-em-out approach. They do not want to negotiate for scraps. She in turn feels her views have been mischaracterized by her opponents. “I don’t see the benefit in not hearing what the deal is before we kill the deal,” Cumbo said.

The conflict between pragmatic politics embodied by the Democratic politician and her critics to the left is also one that has played out within socialist movements in the past. There were the “sewer socialists” who won hundreds of municipal offices in early 20th Century in America, for instance, who urged their more radical brethren to put aside their revolutionary ideals and concentrate instead on immediate, practical concerns like building public works projects. The German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg attempted a synthesis of the two poles, which were also present among European socialist groupings. Fighting for reform is a way of building mass power capable of revolution, she contended.

DSA for its part emerged in the early 1980s on the right wing of American socialism, rejecting revolution in favor of a reformist approach. “I share an immediate program with liberals in this

Continued on page 16
Feminists Need to Focus on Child Care

BY ELIZABETH PALLEY

Reproductive rights were a centerpiece of the mass women’s marches throughout the United States and the world, both on Jan. 21, the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as President, and on International Women’s Day, March 8. Trump’s threat to reproductive rights is real and profound. It is already clear that his choices for federal judges will be heavily influenced by the religious extreme right. However, to move forward, this movement must embrace a broader feminist agenda beyond reproductive rights. It must be intersectional and inclusive and avoid the alienation of women of color that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

Child care must be part of this agenda. It should be understood as both a necessary social investment and an issue of labor rights for child-care providers. It has only been through the availability of child care that many women have been able to stay in the paid labor force. However, this has often been accomplished on the backs of poorly paid providers, most of whom are women, and disproportionately women of color. In order to be more inclusive, the new women’s movement needs to put concrete universal child-care proposals on its agenda, and fight for better pay and working conditions for providers.

Child care should not be considered “a woman’s issue.” However, any feminist movement must understand the historical and current role that women play in child rearing, and include child-care support and policies on its agenda. Women with children earn 71% of what fathers earn. Having children affects their treatment in the workforce and without proper support, it is difficult for many women, other than the very rich, to keep jobs. Many families have remained in the middle class solely as a result of a second household additional income, that of a woman. Child care must be available to enable women to work, or many more families will fall into poverty.

Any new movement must also put the needs of child-care workers in the forefront. They are among the lowest-paid people in the U.S.: According to a 2016 report by the University of California at Berkeley’s Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, their median wage is less than $10 an hour, and 46 percent receive public assistance such as Medicaid or food stamps. Pre-kindergarten teachers fare somewhat better, and 46 percent receive public assistance such as Medicaid or food stamps. Pre-kindergarten teachers fare somewhat better, and 46 percent receive public assistance such as Medicaid or food stamps. Pre-kindergarten teachers fare somewhat better, and 46 percent receive public assistance such as Medicaid or food stamps.

The cost of child care is a huge financial strain for many families. Though proposed tax benefits may help some, they fall far short of addressing the core problem: If we want qualified well-educated people to care for our children, we need to be able to pay them a living wage. We have not been able to find a way to use technology to make child care more productive or cheaper. In order to ensure that parents can afford care and that providers receive a living wage, we as a country need to subsidize child care. This will be expensive, but if we want to be competitive in the future, we need a well-educated public and this education needs to begin early.

Subsidizing child care is not a new idea. In fact, much of the industrialized world provides both child care and health care as a basic right. We could learn from Sweden, France, England, and many other nations. The last time this was considered on a national scale in the United States was in 1971, when President Richard Nixon vetoed a bill that would have created a network of federally funded child-care centers, with low-income parents’ payments subsidized. It is time for the feminist movement to add child care to its priorities, and to work toward putting universal child care back on the national agenda.

Elizabeth Palley, JD, PhD, MSW is a Professor of Social Work at Adelphi University and the co-author of In Our Hands: The Struggle for U.S. Child Care Policy (NYU, 2014).
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April 2017 THE INDIEPENDENT
Tori was at a dance studio, and the instructor was going on and on about how it was all about form and technique. Tori was just trying to keep up, but she knew her heart wasn't in it. She was thinking about her brother, who was still recovering from surgery at the hospital. She couldn't help but feelレスon for him. He was always so strong and independent, but now he was frail and vulnerable.

Her brother's illness had been a wake-up call for Tori. She had always taken her health for granted, but now she realized how precious it was. She wanted to do something to make a difference, to help others who were going through similar struggles. That's when she decided to open a Dance Studio, offering classes to people of all ages and abilities.

Tori's studio quickly became a hub of activity. She taught classes for children with special needs, for adults recovering from surgery, and even for professional dancers looking to improve their technique. Tori's dedication to her students was evident in the way she tailored her classes to fit each individual's needs.

As the word spread, more and more people started coming to Tori's studio. Some came to improve their technique, while others came for the community and the sense of belonging it provided. Tori's studio became a place where people could come together and support each other.

Tori's story is just one of many. There are countless people out there who are doing amazing things to make their communities better. Whether it's through dance studios like Tori's, or through other forms of support and advocacy, we all have the power to make a difference. It's all about finding your passion and using it to help others.
LIFE IN THE BALANCE
Continued from previous page

The Independent
April 2017
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highlighting unique ways people are resisting.
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health insurance reform, not much different than the 1993 Republican Bob Dole-led plan, into the morbid image of “death panels” as a symbol of white genocide. Here we are in the 21st Century, carrying the weight of the past. Capitalism from the Middle Passage to Mid-
dle America has created a mountain range of disposable bodies. It is now catching up to whiteness and throwing that away to. It was inevitable. Class was never separate from race but just a lesser degree of darkness.

We’re stuck together. All of us. Millions of Americans who want a fairer more humane society cheek and jowl with millions of Americans, drunk on race, who clutch the Dream. They walk in a daze. Faces bloated from lack of a future. They are lost like Cornelius. They need a new family. And history may push the Black Freedom Movement be-
yond saving Black Lives Matter, to seeing all these abandoned souls; knowing, however reluctantly, it may have to take America back in, touch scars by be re-born work and say, “This is how you heal.”

THE GREAT DIE IN

“We should have a great die-in,” I told my friend, “Let’s bring our sick and injured to the White House gate. Maybe I’ll get dressed as a Statue of Liberty, limping on a crutch with a bandage around my eye.”

We laughed as subway tunnel lights, flashed in the window. We made a bitter sound. The Republicans were saying Black Lives Matter, to seeing all these abandoned souls; knowing, however reluctantly, it may have to take America back in, touch scars by re-born work and say, “This is how you heal.”

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“Yeah, let’s have a die-in,” he stroked his chin, smiled, “Roll people in wheelchairs up. Get folks to waddle as if tearing at spider webs. We were never meant to survive here. They tried to kill us so many times. They never cared about our bodies from cuts. There will cuts to our health, our edu-
cation, our culture, our future.

Unlike conservatives, the left is trying to recreate from a “savage” nation, a “civilized” one. When we march with signs or rally or block traffic or organize, we are showing the millions of other Americans that our bodies are not disposable.

It is catching on. Recently, Bernie Sanders held a nationally televised town hall in West Virginia where people told stories of addiction and loss, fear and sick-
ness. He asked a coal miner who voted for Trump if he

She took out her oils, smudged some on her forehead. We’re MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER!
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hall thinks that citizen also means the Mexican and Muslim, the Black and the openly gay. When they think me and my family and my friends are also part of Amer-
ica. Then our movement will be strong enough to win.

One night, I brought my girlfriend medicine for her hives. In her bedroom, I saw the heavy backpack with student papers from teaching, stacks of books from her graduate classes. Most days, she wakes before sunrise, to travel to New Jersey to teach. She sends me photos from the train. In the background, I see so many tired, beleaguered faces snoozing in the seats.

Every day, she works. Most people, work. We make the world’s wealth but are cut off from it. The division of labor goes into the laborer, dividing us from our bod-
es, until we have to buy back our lives. It leaves us tired. Whatever this is, it is not the Dream.

“What are you thinking,” she asked. I chewed my lip (before answering), “I want to burn the system down.”
CRONY CAPITALISM

‘THE GREATEST JOBS PRODUCER GOD EVER CREATED’
TRUMP’S TRILLION DOLLAR INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN COULD BE HIS BIGGEST CON YET

By Peter Ruch

Last March, as news of the lead-poisoned water supply in Flint, Michigan made national headlines, Christopher Cerf, the newly appointed superintendent of the Newark, New Jersey school district, ordered faucets in his school district tested for the presence of lead, a neurotoxin that can cause learning disabilities and behavioral problems in children. When the results came in, Cerf ordered water shut off in 30 of his district’s 67 schools. Statewide testing found that the water in 88 school buildings in 30 districts contained levels of lead that surpassed the 15-parts-per-billion limit set by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The American Society of Pediatrics considers no amount of lead safe for children.

Fixing the contamination in Newark alone will require “billions of dollars of infrastructure repair and that’s going to take decades,” David Pringle, a public health expert with the New Jersey chapter of Clean Water Action, told The Independent. “No meaningful source of funding has been identified for that and I have zero expectation that [Gov. Chris Christie] is going to do anything.”

Lead-tainted water is not limited to New Jersey or Flint. A 2016 USA Today investigation found that since 2012, water systems serving 6 million Americans had contained lead levels above the EPA safety standard. “Many of the highest reported lead levels were found at schools and day cares,” the paper reported. “A water sample at a Maine elementary school was 42 times higher than the EPA limit of 15 ppb, while a Pennsylvania preschool was 14 times higher, records show. At an elementary school in Ithaca, New York, one sample tested this year at a stunning 5,000 ppb of lead, the EPA’s threshold for ‘hazardous waste.’”

Small wonder then that this March, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave the country’s drinking water a grade of D in its 2017 infrastructure report card. In fact, nearly every grade on ASCE’s report card would guarantee an ass-whooping from Mama Dams: D. Levees; D. Aviation, roads, inland waterways; D, D and D. Wastewater; D. Clearly there is a lot of room for improvement, but some infrastructures are sexier than others. A huge, beautiful bridge, for instance, will make an enticing photo opportunity for a certain overgrown Richie Rich president prone to tacking his name on skyscrapers. A glass of clean tap water, on the other hand, perhaps small enough to make said president’s hands look bigly, isn’t quite as awe-inspiring. Besides, over at Mar-a-Lago, they can afford 24-karat bottles of Acqua di Cristallo. Following up on a campaign pledge, Donald Trump told Congress on Feb. 28 that he plans to send lawmakers a $1 trillion infrastructure bill — half of what ASCE expects it would cost to fix and modernize everything from our big, sexy bridges to our water systems. But, hey, it’s a start. Other recent events have also highlighted the need for some national home improvements, notably the near-hemorrhage at the Oroville Dam in Northern California in February. Trump pressed secretary and shell Sean Spicer called the threat at Oroville a “textbook example” of the need for infrastructure improvements.

A $1 trillion investment would help make good on Trump’s repeated assertions that he will be “the greatest jobs producer that God ever created.” But here’s where Trump’s populist pose (not to mention the habit of raiding public coffers he developed as a real-estate mogul) meets the constant Republican desire to shaft the poor.

First, there’s the matter of coming up with the trillion dollars. The White House wants to boost the Pentagon’s budget by $54 billion, at the expense of just about every other government department. The proposal, drafted by White House budget director Mick Mulvaney, who sifted through footage of Trump’s campaign speeches for guidance rather than consulting with the president directly — has even proven too harsh for members of Trump’s own party.

Economic development commissions that steer millions of dollars to Appalachia, the Midwest and the South are on the chopping block, as are grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and a $3.4 billion job training program managed by the Department of Labor — all of which, it turns out, are dear to the hearts of fiscally conservative red-state governors who rely on the federal assistance. Some of them are complaining loudly. According to The New York Times, the message they’ve received back from the White House so far is: “We’ll get back to you on that.”

“They’re cutting all sorts of infrastructure projects and economic-development projects at the same time that the President is still talking about how much of an investment he’s going to put into infrastructure,” the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center’s Kim Rueben observed.

So where’s the infrastructure money going to come from? The answer is: Nowhere. Trump’s plan, as it exists, relies entirely on tax incentives to private companies. “The scheme offers a tax credit to private investors covering 82 percent of their equity investment costs,” the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) noted in an analysis of the infrastructure plan Trump’s campaign released in October, the most recent date to date. “Investors would cover the remaining 18 percent but would receive all the profits, effectively privately owning and operating the projects and charging the public to use them.”

Furthermore, as the CBPP report highlights, there is no mandate in the Trump plan to ensure that the tax breaks wouldn’t actually go toward new infrastructure, instead of subsidizing projects that were already in the works or that would have been undertaken anyway. Nor are there stipulations directing improvements to communities who need them most, or toward sorely needed projects like lead abatement in New Jersey that would not yield high returns on investments.

“The plan,” it said, “has no mechanism to ensure that infrastructure projects flow to communities already underserved by infrastructure investment — to towns that have lost a major employer, rural communities lacking easy access to amenities, and low-income communities that lack basic necessities such as clean water. Instead, the investments likely would flow more heavily to higher-income, more developed communities where investors are more assured of ongoing income streams.”

In short, the plan is a massive giveaway to the rich disguised as a jobs program. It “more closely resembles a licensing scheme, in which the government will try to incentivize companies to build privatized infrastructure, with a shiny Trump seal of approval slapped on the side,” as Pat Garofalo put it in U.S. News and World Report.

The deeper problem with Trump’s infrastructure plans, according to Gerald Epstein, a liberal economist at the University of Massachusetts, is that it is a method of building upon the proto-fascist social formation that Trump represents. Epstein calls it “Schacht therapy,” after Hjalmar Schacht, Adolf Hitler’s minister of economics from 1934 to 1937. Schacht therapy “is a set of economic policies that might result in short-term economic expansion and job creation,” Epstein wrote recently, “but are designed to strengthen the power of repressive, authoritarian, rac-

TRUMP’S POPULIST POSE MEETS THE CONSTANT REPUBLICAN DESIRE TO SHAFT THE POOR.

April 2017 THE INDYPENDENT

Continued on the next page
to his cronies.”

In New Jersey, Gov. Chris Christie, a staunch Trump ally, initially downplayed the state’s drinking-water crisis, but caved to public pressure and offered $20 million toward a fix. The money will revitalize an abatement fund originally established to address lead contamination, one that the governor has raised over the years.

There are a number of solutions that could address the contamination, according to Clean Water Action’s David Pringle: installing filters on pipes (and, as Newark failed to do, maintaining them) or adding chemical solvents to the water to dilute the lead. Yet there is only one long-term solution: Removing the source of the contamination by replacing old pipes.

“There’s no reason to think Newark is going to come up with the money on their own to fund this,” said Pringle.

Some Republicans are attempting to paper over the lack of actual funding for infrastructure in Trump’s budget by turning their psychic drive to eliminate government regulations up a notch.

“It’s not going to be $1 trillion coming out of Washington, D.C.,” Rep. Bill Shuster (R-Pa.), who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, told the Associated Press on Mar. 1. “There are billions and billions of dollars out there today, private-sector dollars, that are going to be spent.”

Rep. Shuster cited the Constitution and Atlantic Sunrise pipelines, which, respectively, will carry natural gas fracked in Pennsylvania’s Marcellus Shale region to New York State and to a new export terminal at Cove Point in Maryland. Both have been delayed due to hurdles obtaining water permits from environmental regulators and the Army Corps of Engineers.

“If the Corps signs off, and we get a couple of other people in agreement, we’re talking about $4 billion just in Pennsylvania and a couple of other states that can be done,” he claimed.

Robert Bea, professor emeritus of civil engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, a former Shell Oil executive and one of the world’s leading experts on catastrophic-risk management, worries that Trump’s proposed federal budget is dangerously shortsighted when it comes to guarding U.S. infrastructure against future environmental risks. It’s not just the EPA that’s on the chopping block. The budget would also eliminate the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, impose steep cuts to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and block funding for the National Science Foundation.

“He’s effectively erasing the advanced ways we have to determine what needs to be changed for public safety,” Bea told The Indy. Climate change “should factor in directly” with all infrastructure investments.

“If you build infrastructure systems that eventually or quickly degrade the natural environment, you’ve got a big problem.”

He compares Trump to Lord John Brown, who ran BP prior to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster. Blinded by his drive to increase profits, Brown failed to heed concerns raised by Bea and his colleagues about the safety of the company’s offshore oil-drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico in the years leading up to the Deepwater Horizon blowout that killed 11 workers and released hundreds of millions of gallons of crude oil into the ocean. “I looked at him and said, ‘You’re screwed,’” said Bea, recalling a meeting in 2009 with the BP executive.

The full scope of Trump’s infrastructure hoax might not be fully felt until long after Trump retires, loses continence and is being spoon-fed his meals by a big-chested nurse. The effect of human-induced global warming is already upon us, but flooding, droughts and superstorms will only intensify in the decades ahead. The tragic irony is that addressing the problem now with direct government investment would be far more effective than throwing tax incentives at private companies in the hopes of spurring a building orgy.

“There have been lots of studies that show there is no tradeoff between generating jobs and fighting climate change,” said UMass’s Gerald Epstein. “The best way to generate jobs is by investing in renewable energy. It could generate millions of jobs. If we don’t do that, we’re threatening livelihoods. We saw that in New York City with Hurricane Sandy, to say nothing of what will happen in other major cities and communities all over the world. The real way to make the U.S. economy get going again is to have a massive investment plan for renewable energy.”

In the meantime, parents and their kids in Newark and across New Jersey would settle for a clean glass of water.
The opening scene of *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele, flips the script on the Hollywood trope that has echoed and reinforced white fears of black men for generations, from D.W. Griffith through Lena Dunham. How many films have shown that scared (or oblivious) white woman (or sometimes a man) walking through a “bad” neighborhood, past a gauntlet of hostile black gazes? Or maybe it’s a desolate, empty maze of streets, with the implied lurking presence of dangerous and criminal black or brown men. The specter of black-on-white violence, set within the disintegrating urban core, is stock Hollywood fodder. As a white audience member, I have been coached since childhood to empathize with that fearful and clueless potential victim. The opening scene of *Get Out* turns all this on its head, convincingly and chillingly. A black man wanders lost at night in suburban America. He is on the phone with a friend or lover, agitated and panicky, creeped out. His fear is palpable, and surprisingly (for this white man at least) relatable. Relating to him caught me off guard. That’s the crux of the important work of the Black Lives Matter movement’s activists and the cultural conversation that they have sparked. (As well as the work of generations of black activists, such as journalist Ida B. Wells’ 1890s crusade against lynching.) As a storyteller, Peele is able to take us places that news stories and memoirs can’t reach, deeper into the psychological and emotional truth of a situation. However, the hard work of activists has produced a wider understanding of the underlying reality, setting the scene for a film like *Get Out* to be as well received as it has been.

That first scene sets the stage and does the important work of generating overall empathy, but the tone quickly shifts, and then shifts again and again. This film is a shape-shifting, genre-bending tour-de-force. The first act feels like just another intelligent, well-written romantic comedy, with the political subtext of race relations to give it some depth. An interracial couple, Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) and Rose (Allison Williams of “Girls” fame), goes to meet her white parents. Awkwardness and hilarity ensue, as one would expect. It’s painful, but retains a sense of humor.

It then veers into more stock horror-movie territory. Something wicked lies below the surface, something menacing and deeply creepy. And it’s coming to get you. Peele intends to frighten us the way that any good horror movie does, and he fully succeeds, just as he had been succeeding with a politically edgy rom-com a little earlier.

The film’s horror comes with a smirk and a nod, however. It pivots back toward comedy through the tropes of the buddy film. Chris’ best friend, Rod, played by scene-stealing comedian Lil Rel Howery, desperately attempts to convince the police of the dangerous situation that Chris is in, delivering big laughs just as the story is hurtling toward its grisly conclusion. The surreal adventure rides all these genre tracks simultaneously due to some truly adept writing and directing, but ultimately comedy trumps horror. Peele is a comedian, after all.

Humor, of course, is a primary strategy for revealing and commenting upon difficult truths in a way that’s approachable to a wide (and/or white) audience. If done well, it enables people to be open to ideas that, if shared in a different way, might feel like an attack. It enables us to maintain emotional distance from something that might be too painful to look at directly. Jordan Peele is an adept enough comedic writer to expose the painful realities of black people living under white supremacy without pulling any punches, but in a way that whites can take it in.

This year, we have heard much from Hollywood-celebrity award winners about the importance of empathy and the role that films play in generating it. While it’s pretty easy to be cynical about the self-congratulatory Hollywood liberal elite, they do have a point, and this film is an example. It’s meaningful to me that I was in some small way able to experience, by way of imagination and empathy, what it might be like to be that guy, walking around in an unfamiliar white suburb, knowing that if a cop comes by they will probably assume something about me that isn’t true, and how those assumptions could put my life in jeopardy. Or maybe it’ll just be some paranoid suburban dude with a gun, or some teenage guy with something to prove. Who knows what’s coming, right?

This shouldn’t be trivialized. The basic building blocks for solidarity are empathy and mutual interest. If we can’t feel the former, we probably won’t see the latter. Empathy, or the lack of it, has real political consequences that we shouldn’t sneer at. Jordan Peele has given us a terrifically funny and popular film that does some really interesting and important political-cultural work. Bravo!
L.A. KAUFFMAN GETS THE GOODS

Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism
By L.A. KAUFFMAN
Verso Books, 2017

By Steven Sherman

Whole bookshelves groan under the weight of histories of the sixties, and both the old left and the new left have been extensively studied,” organizer and journalist L.A. Kauffman states at the beginning of her new book, Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism, “yet, while significant waves of activism have punctuated the history of the last forty years, the story of American radicalism in recent decades remains almost untold.”

Direct Action seeks to remedy this situation partially by focusing on one major strand of radicalism in this period — the disruptive but basically non-violent style of protest epitomized by the blockading of the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle in 1999. On these terms, the book is clearly a success, and activists attempting to understand their own history and the strengths and weaknesses of this tradition will return to it time and again.

Kauffman begins her story in 1971, describing the largely forgotten May Day protests against the Vietnam War, which converged on Washington, D.C., to shut down the federal government. A sort of response to the Weather Underground — an effort to be as disruptive as their bombing campaign, but in a nonviolent manner that could better include widespread participation — it failed to “stop the government,” as 14,000 protesters were pre-emptively arrested, but did intensify pressure on the Nixon administration to end the war. The action’s approach owed more to anarchist thought and practice — from which it drew the idea of affinity groups — than to socialist practice.

Civil-rights movement veterans mobilized to support detained activists, representing something of a passing of the disruptive-protest baton from a generation exhausted by government repression to a new tendency.

She continues by describing a series of high points over the next 40 years, including the Clamshell Alliance’s sit-ins at the Seabrook nuclear-power plant in New Hampshire, the protests at the 1984 Republican convention in Dallas, ACT UP, the South Africa divestment movement, Earth First!, the “Battle of Seattle,” Occupied Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. Care is given to outlining the precursors, mood, tactics and dilemmas each faced. This sort of describes an arc, as the revolutionary dreams of the early 1970s give way to a more internally focused, defensive posture in the later ‘70s and the ‘80s, and then growing confidence leading up to Seattle.

The aftermath of 9/11 drove disruptive dissent off the streets, but it returned with Occupy Wall Street and then Black Lives Matter, in some ways stronger than ever. Several threads run through this narrative. The book notes the central role of queer, in particular lesbian, activists, throughout this period. A more nonpolitical or antipolitical focus early on — such as the tendency to zoom in on the immediate needs of people living with HIV or defense of the environment outside of a larger political framework — eventually gives way to a tendency to see commonalities in struggles and the potential for larger-scale radical change. Above all, the challenge of the racial segregation of this part of the left looms large. Kauffman sees the earlier movements as more inept at posing this question and responding to it, but depicts some progress by the time of Occupy and in particular Black Lives Matter, an African American-led movement supported and informed by direct-action stalwarts.

There are some unfortunate omissions. The mobilization of thousands of activists to New Orleans to support Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts under the aegis of the Common Ground Collective is not mentioned at all, although it probably represented the most prominent direct-action mobilization between the start of the Iraq War and Occupy Wall Street, and as it was largely white activists taking leadership from an African American group, would have fit well with the narrative.

Similarly, the U.S. Social Forum of 2007 and 2010, spearheaded by mostly non-white groups but attracting participation from considerable numbers of the sort of activists Kauffman is describing, is not mentioned. And Occupy Oakland, the one Occupy encampment where Black Bloc tactics were not marginalized, is also absent. Occupy Oakland was one of the largest and most militant of the movement’s occupations, and its proponents typically said its roots were in the response to the 2009 police shooting of Oscar Grant, again linking it to non-white struggles.

Although she handles the question of race well throughout, she doesn’t comment on this movement’s other demographic limitations. One is the question of class. How many of the blockaders of the WTO were not college-educated (to take one way of identifying class), aside from the union members who broke from the union-sanctioned march to join the blockade? I suspect not many.

A second question centers on geography. Like the Democratic Party vote, the direct-action tendency is highly concentrated: Almost all the actions cited here took place in a handful of metropolitan areas and around prestigious universities. On the other hand, Occupy Wall Street showed some signs of breaching these limitations during its brief heyday.

These questions are not addressed, I suspect, because they have never had much prominence in debates within the movement. But they are relevant nevertheless for building effective mass movements. These are, however, quibbles, as Kauffman has drawn a vivid narrative in its own right.

After the election of Donald Trump, it is difficult to not feel that the terrain of protests has changed dramatically. For a time, it made sense to debate intensively about how to have an effective spokesperson that would incorporate ideas from all the affinity groups, or how to lock down an intersection near an International Monetary Fund meeting. Direct action also often seemed the best strategy, in a time of political...
PHOTOGRAPHY

W

hen photographer Cor-
nell Capa founded the
International Center of
Photography in 1974,
there was no way he
could have anticipated the world we live in today — one in which every person has the chance to be a photojournalist and/or documentary filmmaker; video, text and images are shared at the touch of a button; and the audience is (potentially) always watching. This is a monumental shift. It changes who gets to tell the story, who gets to access it, how factual the story is, how quickly news travels and even how we think and express ourselves. (Hello, memes and hashtags!)

Yet even with all this change, so many of us still want the same things people wanted in 1974, like peace and justice. Capa’s aim was to make ICP a place that would, as its website tells us, “preserve the legacy of ‘concerned photography’” — in other words, photography that has the chance to teach and inspire change on both a social and political level. Images, of course, still have the potential to do that. That’s one thing that has not changed.

“Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change” meets Capa’s original goal while appealing to modern audiences. It holds up a mirror to our current world and the new ways we make and consume media. “Perpetual Revolution” can be interpreted to mean that revolution never sleeps in the age of the Internet, but I believe revolution is perpetual as long as people are dissatisfied. And while people can be dissatisfied no matter what, technology can make people more dissatisfied, or spark new dissatisfaction, because of how it opens a window to possibility.

As you might expect, much of what this exhibit shows is not very pretty, but if you want to change the world, you first must learn what the problems are. You must get deeply uncomfortable, and then you must get angry. So, unlike much art, this exhibit is not a tonic for stress and depression. If anything, it will probably make you feel worse, but, on the positive side, it will also remind you of the unbreakable strength of human beings.

One of the first things you will notice is a NASA video called Climate Time Machine: Global Temperature. It illustrates, via color animation, how global surface temperature has evolved from 1880 through 2016 — global warming’s fury clearly emerging in a violent blood-red. It is a real-life horror film, and the scariest part is we still don’t know the ending. What is clear is that we have been sleeping on the job.

The exhibit also includes a powerful Democracy Now! clip from when company security guards attacked the water protectors trying to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota (Dakota Access Pipeline Company Attacks Native American Protesters with Dogs & Pepper Spray, September 3, 2016). Despite the chaotic and dangerous atmosphere, reporter Amy Goodman stays calm and gets her story, while the protectors bravely fight for the land. This is five-star reporting that is impossible to look away from.

The section titled The Flood: Refugees and Representation shows images of refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, a journey in which more than 5,000 drowned last year. New York Times photographer Daniel Etter captured a stunning Pulitzer Prize-winning moment from 2015: Iraqi refugee Laith Majid crying and holding his kids after they have finally gotten to Kos, a Greek island. Who knows how many times he worried his boat would go down? It is enough to make you weep too.

From there we go downstairs — the exhibit covers two floors — to The Fluidity of Gender. Queer progress is proudly, loudly, fiercely on display in videos, on magazine covers and online. The collection shows how crucial the last few years have been for the trans and gender non-conforming communities, and the importance of controlling the way you are portrayed instead of having someone else do it for you.

And while it got better, there’s still a lot of crap the trans community has to deal with. Kristen P. Lovell’s Trans in Media video focuses on the routine murder and exploitation of trans folks. One generally thinks of “Saturday Night Live” as being pro-queer, but there is a stunning piece of anti-trans garbage in this piece. Lovell’s other video, The Tipping Points, features famous trans people — Laverne Cox, Jazz Jennings and Caitlyn Jenner. (The title likely comes from that famous Cox cover Magazine cover.) Taken together, these videos show a lot about privilege in a marginalized community. Cox, Jennings and Jenner have faced struggles, for sure, but are less likely, I believe, to wind up in the dangerous situations the average trans woman might find herself in. Eight trans women of color were murdered in just the first three months of 2017.

Men of color are, of course, also at risk of being killed. Black Lives (Have Always) Mattered is housed in a too-small room that does not allow for the broad exploration the subject warrants. Sheila Pree Bright’s video, #1960Now: Art x Intersection, tackles the response to the killing of Philando Castile in Minnesota last year, but the lack of audio weakens the effect.

Terror of a different sort can be found in Propaganda and the Islamic State. It is overwhelming to process all the videos in this section, and you may not have much motivation to understand such viciousness, at least if you are anything like me. For the sake of journalism, I viewed Eid al-Fitr in the City of Ar-Raqqah, a video which looks like a Norman Rockwell illustration come to life, or a fun night at Coney Island. The jihadi sees himself much differently than we do.

The Right Wing Fringe and the 2016 Election is, like the Black Lives Matter section, a lost opportunity. You’ll see status updates from Trump and the alt-right projected on a wall. If you don’t get enough of that on Twitter or Facebook, then, by all means, knock yourself out.

Visiting this exhibition is akin to going to an antique store run by a hoarder. You have to do a lot of searching to get to the treasures. It would take a week, maybe more, to consume everything here. That doesn’t mean you should skip it. In fact, I would go so far as to say you can’t afford NOT to see it: If you have been sleeping, this will wake you up. And if you already consider yourself awake, it might still give you a Red Bull jolt you didn’t even know you needed.

Through May 7

Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change
International Center for Photography
250 Bowery

By Gena Hymowech
GROWTH SPUTTERS TO A CRAWL

The Rise and Fall of American Growth
BY ROBERT J. GORDON
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS 2016

By Bennett Baumner

Darkness defined the American home prior to the electric light bulb. It was pork and corn for breakfast, lunch and supper (at least in Southern homes) before the rise of industrial processed-food manufacturers that delivered goods in refrigerated trucks. Before tranches and washing machines, people worked until they dropped farming with horses and scrubbing clothes by hand. In winter, running to the outhouse and setting around a hot stove trying to keep warm were the norm before indoor plumbing and central heating.

Before the U.S. industrialized after the Civil War, economist Robert Gordon writes in The Rise and Fall of American Growth, its economic growth measured about “6 percent per century.” In contrast, when the economy geared up for World War II in 1943 and 1944, the gross domestic product more than doubled each year. Gordon’s main thesis in this expansive book is that innovations drove growth, most innovations have already occurred and the United States is now in a slow-growth period.

The Rise and Fall of American Growth chronicles the rise in quality of life in great detail, although not all improvements are captured in GDP statistics. Though the Sears catalog included only sinks in 1897, Gordon notes, by 1908 it offered several full sets of bathroom equipment, including “a clawfoot bathtub, a porcelain-enameled sink, and a toilet. . . with its ‘golden oak’ tank and set. The entire three-part outfit cost only $43.80, equal to about three weeks’ working-class income at the time.”

Gordon posits that the Industrial Revolution (steam engines, railroads, the first factories) was in fact only the first of three revolutions. By the mid-20th century, rural and urban Americans were networked into telephone lines, sewers, water pipes and electrical poles. This networking allowed for a great leap in quality of life and constituted a second industrial revolution that broadly shared prosperity and fueled growth, generally known as the “American Dream.” The postwar boom created consumer culture, as Americans bought suburban bungalows and filled them with kitchen appliances, Detroit-made cars and mass-produced clothing from department stores.

Since 1960, the invention of the computer, Internet and smartphones has powered the third industrial revolution — but it has not delivered the overall economic growth of the second industrial revolution. It may have changed communications, news delivery and computations so fast that Intel cofounder Gordon Moore predicted exponential growth — a doubling of microchip density every 18 months for the foreseeable future. The Rise and Fall of American Growth notes that Moore’s Law did not hold. Despite rapid technological advances, the third industrial revolution’s productivity growth stalled around 2004. Capitalism is predicated on perpetual future growth, yet Gordon determines that the U.S. economy’s growth slowed to a crawl around 1970, and “steadily rising inequality” began to mark the era. Average real income — which considers the effects of inflation on purchasing power — for the bottom 90 percent of the population was higher in 1972 than it was in 2013. Occupy Wall Street drew attention to the spectacular wealth accumulation by the “1 percent” — yet, Gordon writes, “even within the top 1 percent, income gains are much faster the higher one rises into the stratosphere of the top 0.1 percent and the top .01 percent,” the people French economist Thomas Piketty calls “super managers.” Moreover a working paper released in December by Piketty and fellow economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman showed that even the top 10 percent income earners had only seen wage growth because of public spending on benefits such as health care.

Like Piketty’s seminal economic tome, Capital, Gordon theorizes that inequality will be a permanent fixture for the near future, and possibly long-term. He identifies four headwinds blowing against greater equality: deepening overall income inequality; crumbling public education and the declining fortunes of people with only a high-school education; declining labor-force participation, amplified as baby-boomers retire; and perhaps more controversially, government debt and unfunded pension-fund liabilities, coupled with tax cuts reducing government wealth redistribution.

Those four headwinds helped blow the country into the arms of the Trump administration, which is likely to exacerbate the already deep inequality. Trump won the electoral vote with narrow victories in Rust Belt states, where he’d promised to bring back the manufacturing jobs that provided the second industrial revolution’s living standards — but then staffed his cabinet with billionaires and multimillionaires. The Republican-controlled federal government is poised to dismantle the meager remnants of the social safety net, particularly Medicaid, and may go after Medicare and Social Security. 

Gordon believes that economic growth is driven by population growth and productivity — which are likely to decrease due to lower labor-market participation and an increasingly elderly population. Trump campaigned by stirring up white fears of immigration, but a mass deportation campaign could further depress both population growth and labor-market participation rates. If we don’t change the course we are on, the only growth industry might be books about inequality.
Interview by Peter Rugh

At a bumble commercial kitchen in Queens, women from Syria, Iraq, Guinea-Conakry, Nepal and Eritrea are working together to cook up delicacies from their homelands and send them out, hot and steaming, across the hungry city. Under the tutelage of Juan Suarez de Lezo, a veteran of numerous Michelin-starred restaurants, they are utilizing home cooking knowledge passed down from generations to feed hundreds of people a day. They’re serving up culinary delights you’d be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in America, even in New York. And another thing they each have in common: They’re refugees.

The catering service, Eat Offbeat, is the brainchild of Manal Kahi, herself a transplant from Beirut. Kahi says that when she first arrived stateside in 2013 she noticed the hummus just wasn’t as tasty as in Lebanon. That sent her on a mission to master her grandmother’s recipe and left her wondering what other flavors New Yorkers were missing out on. Four years later, Eat Offbeat headquarters is a bustling reboots to the publics of xenophobia, jingoism and divisiveness that have gripped the nation — even if Kahi prefers to avoid politics and let the food do the talking. Kahi was kind enough, however, to speak with The Independent this month about offering New Yorkers a culinary escape. Iraqi momos and the international language of food. Eat Offbeat is raising funds for a cookbook on Kickstarter. Learn more about it at eatoffbeat.com/cookbook.

Peter Rugh: What was it like coming from Beirut and encountering the food here in New York? I take it you weren’t very impressed by the quality of the hummus?

Manal Kahi: I love the food here. I mean, the hummus per se was not great in the grocery stores. Clearly there are some restaurants that make great hummus, but the one you buy in grocery stores wasn’t the same as the one I would get back home. The one I made back home was so much better.

As for food you can get in the city, it’s so diverse, but in terms of ethnic restaurants you sometimes have to go really deep into Queens or somewhere like that to find places that are really authentic. And even in a city as cosmopolitan as New York, you still don’t find cuisines from places like Eritrea, Nepal, Syria or Iraq. You might find one restaurant somewhere, but it’s not that common.

That’s why we thought this idea was good. We serve cuisines that are hard to find and we thought it would be good to highlight them, while at the same time creating jobs and opportunities for talented refugees.

Is there a philosophy behind Offbeat?

We have a few goals. The first is to provide quality jobs to talented home cooks who happen to be refugees by status, but are by nature great chefs. The second goal is to build bridges between those who are cooking in the kitchen and New Yorkers who are eating our food, making an easier way for them to connect through something as great as food. And the ultimate goal is to change the narrative and show a different story about refugees. They are the chefs. They are the heroes. So it’s switching perspectives a bit. It’s really about highlighting the fact that, in this case, refugees are helping us. They don’t need our help. They are the ones helping New Yorkers try new flavors.

Have there been any discussions in the kitchen about Trump’s Muslim travel ban? Are folks worried about the political climate here?

What we’re doing is focusing on the food. That’s what we do. By the number of orders we’ve received people are very clearly showing their support for us. And we feel that it is more urgent than ever, we’re more determined than ever, to keep doing what we’re doing.

It seems like this effort is, by example, counteracting the idea that because people are different they can’t live side-by-side. At Offbeat there are people from different parts of the world all working together.

Oh, for sure, and everyone loves it. We all love it. Everyone learns everyone else’s recipes. It’s an exchange of richness and words. People are speaking different languages and somehow they understand each other. What often happens is that when someone feels comfortable, they switch from English to their native tongue. And sometimes I can see it happening that people are just understanding each other, although they’re speaking different languages! I don’t know how that happens, but they kind of get used to each other.

Can you think of an example of cross cultural pollination you’ve witnessed?

Our Nepali chef makes a lot of momos (dumplings) but she makes a vegetarian version, since she’s a vegetarian. Our Iraqi chef loves beef. What she does is make her own beef filling and fills the momos with that. So now we have something with an Iraqi filling on the inside but it’s momos on the outside.

Does food generate sensory cultural memories for you? And do you feel that your chefs have the same relationship with food?

Personally, the easiest way to remember is to call home, but there’s a seven-hour time difference in Lebanon. The second easiest way is to make something, try some food. The spices and things will sometimes bring back certain memories. I always have those ingredients I would need to make something Lebanese very quickly at home. And I think that’s also true with our chefs. At home they cook food from their own countries. If they already cook it so well for their families, we want them to cook it for New Yorkers and help New Yorkers discover the kind of cooking they do at home.

I’m wondering about the challenge of going from cooking at home to a professional kitchen. I cook a lot at home but I can’t imagine cooking on a line. That seems very intense.

All of our chefs are very passionate about home cooking. They already have that talent of knowing what to put next or when to add the oil or at what point you put next or when to add the oil or at what point you put next or when to add the oil or at what point you put next or when to add the oil or at what point you put next or when to add the oil or at what point you put next or when to add the oil or at what point...
Dear Reverend Billy,

I’m dating an undocumented person who is at risk of being deported. One way she’d be safe is if we got married. I want to help her but I’m not sure if we’re ready for that kind of commitment. What should I do?

— G., Newark

Dear G.,

Lots of people get married not feeling ready and they spend a century together. Trump is a tragic jolt to our soul. That’s what 9/11 was. You know what we do with tragedies on that scale? We get married. We get pregnant. We take our lives in new directions. This white nationalism is a tsunami. A drastic response is wise. Go ahead, change yourself radically. I myself am involved in a flourishing romance that became a marriage in the spring after 9/11. Don’t be afraid to let events speed you up.

Marriage is the action of caring; of laughter, quiet moments and working together for years toward having a family. The everyday action of a marriage puts the preliminary fears in the family. The everyday action of a marriage removes the preliminary fears in the family. The everyday action of a marriage removes the preliminary fears in the family.

Please consult an immigration lawyer either but you should probably also consult an immigration attorney. If you decide to tie the knot. (I’m no lawyer either but you should probably also consult an immigration attorney.)

You say you want to help her like it’s a one-way street. Did you propose yet? If she says “Yes!” then I’m sure that she has plans to help you, too. If you two do decide to tie the knot, I recommend you see an immigration lawyer to help you through this process.

... ... ...

The other day on the subway, a young woman got on and began singing the most beautiful aria. It seemed nearly everyone on the train gave her something from their pockets, including myself. Literally, at the next stop, she got off and a woman with a baby in her arms got on. I felt like I was in a sociology experiment! The woman with the baby started asking for money and hardly anyone gave her a thing. I guess since they’d just shared with someone else. I could hardly look the mother in the eye because I gave my last dollar to the singer. My question is this: When should I give? I’m on a fixed income. Normally I give when the impulse strikes me but maybe I should be more systematic...

— Martha on the Upper West Side

Dear Martha,

It is not possible to place a systematic moral policy on your personal giving down in the subway in New York City. I knew a lady once who had a policy of not giving money to white males. Well, okay, but — always?

Lurching along to the bums with 47 people in a train car under the East River, I don’t find myself wanting to make generalizations about the people around me. Everyone is more than the snarky labels we give them. That person across from me isn’t just a yuppy, and that guy with the Mets cap isn’t just a Mets fan. This is where racism and all the killer isms begin.

What happens when strangers break through this, and start looking at each other, really inquisitively looking, wondering about each other? Two human beings coming closer to each other — that experience is always unique. We get married. We get pregnant. We get married. We get pregnant. We get married. We get pregnant. We get married. We get pregnant.

Reverend Billy’s Revelations

DID YOU PROPOSE YET? IF SHE SAYS “YES!” THEN I’M SURE THAT SHE HAS PLANS TO HELP YOU, TOO.

Reverend Billy is an activist and political shouter, a post-religious preacher of the streets and bank lobbies. Got a question for Reverend Billy? Just email reverend@indy.com and UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.
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