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KEEP THE INDY STRONG
FOR MORE ON OUR 2018 WINTER FUND DRIVE, SEE PAGE 2 & 23
EDITOR’S NOTE

WE ARE BEING TESTED

When we publish a new issue of The Indy, I like to slip away from our office in downtown Brooklyn and hand the paper out to rush-hour commuters at one of several nearby subway stations. It’s a chance to absorb the energy of the city and witness people’s reactions to the new cover. “I just found this paper last month,” one middle-aged commuter told me recently at the Jay Street-MetroTech station. “It tells the truth.” Yes, it does. And a lot more people are seeing it than ever before. We have more than doubled our circulation in the past year to 40,000 copies per month, making us the fastest growing print newspaper in New York City, if not the country.

The Indy’s rapid growth comes as much of the established legacy media is collapsing. Over on the Internet, the FCC is dismantling net neutrality which allows smaller websites to compete on an equal playing field with corporate giants. Closer to home the Village Voice ended its print edition and Gothamist and DNAinfo were closed down by their anti-union owners.

We can’t know when or how the Trump regime will end or what will follow it. Whole groups of people in this country have been subjected to far worse over much longer periods of time and persevered. When we look back on this moment, I think we will understand that we were all being tested — our values, our willingness to take risks, our ability to think clearly and work with other people of goodwill and most of all our readiness to remain hopeful and engaged when despair and resignation may have seemed easier and more logical.

What we’ve accomplished here at The Indy this past year has been our response. We’re poised to do more great work in 2018 with your help. For more about how to pitch in, please see our fund appeal on Page 23 or visit us at indypendent.org/donate.

— John Tarleton

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

FRI DEC 29
11PM • $10–$20
PARTY: THE FREEDOM PARTY
A legendary annual old-school dance party that has brought people together to dance to hip-hop, R&B, pop, rock, reggae and house since 2003. Enter promo code “freedom” for $10 tickets. Receive two free passes if you are born in December by emailing info@freedomparty-worldwide.com. Both offers good while supplies last.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl.

SUN DEC 31
9PM • $30 in advance, $40 at the door
PARTY: NEW YEAR’S EVE
Starr Bar rounds the corner on its second year and welcomes DJ Geko Jones and friends to host our new year’s party. We’re excited to put the lid on 2017 and pop the cork on a fresh new year with free champagne for all. Sets by DJs Ushka, Selecta 7 and Geko Jones. Performance by Banji Twerk Team. Hosted by Jay Boogie.

STARR BAR
214 Starr St., Bklyn

MIC CHECK!
LISTEN TO OUR INDY AUDIO AND INDYSTRUCTIBLE PODCASTS ON ITUNES AND SOUNDCL...
January 2018
THE INDEPENDENT

3

constitute the “gun lobby,” Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s Loaded presents a people’s history of the 2nd Amendment, as seen through the lens of those who have been most targeted by guns. Meticulously researched and thought-provoking, this is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the historical connections between racism and gun violence in the United States. BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE 172 Allen St.

JAN 8–15 Various • $30–$35 + fees TYPHOON THEATRE: OCTAVIA BUTLER’S PARABLE OF THE SOWER Based on the post-apocalyptic novel by the late Afro-futurist and science fiction author Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower is a genre-defying opera that harnesses two centuries of black music. Conceived by the genre-bending musician Toshi Reagon, in collaboration with Bernice Johnson Reagon, Parable of the Sower brings to life Octavia Butler’s Afro-futurist sci-fi classic of a young woman’s spiritual awakening in an America wracked by unrelenting greed and systemic injustice. 425 Lafayette St.

TUE JAN 9 7PM • FREE PERFORMANCE: THE BROOKLYN POETRY SLAM This event brings together the borough’s best slam poets for a monthly gathering of words and wisdom; hosted by poet, activist, and educator Mahogany L Browne with music by DJ Jive Poetic. The Slam is followed by an open mic, so come early to sign up and make your voice heard. BRIC 647 Fulton St., Bklyn

WED JAN 10 1PM–3PM • FREE DRINKS: SOCIALIST SERVICE INDUSTRY HAPPY HOUR Join members of the Demo-cratic Socialists of America to discuss ways to organize and work toward making the service industry more equitable and just over a snifter of brandy. FRANKLIN PARK 618 Saint Johns Pl., Bklyn

JAN 10–FEB 11 Various • $25–$50 THEATER: THE HOMECOMING QUEEN In Ngozi Anyanwu’s new play, a bestselling novelist returns to Nigeria to care for her ailing father, but before she can bury him, she must relearn the traditions she’s long forgotten. Tickets on sale starting Dec. 27 at atlantictheater.org. Enter promo code BTN25 for a $25 discount. ATLANTIC STAGE 2 330 W 16th St.

FRI JAN 12 6PM–9PM • FREE FOOD: XM FOOD: A CONVERSATION ON THE BENGALI–NEW YORK COMMUNITY WITH JHAL NY In homage to the late Gordon Matta-Clark’s community project FOOD, XM Café is featuring local chefs and artists who incorporate food as part of their social justice practice. This month, new-immigrant chefs with Jhal NYC will share Bangladeshi street food and take part in conversations on immigration and community building. The musicians, poets and activists of Ifti & The Royal Bengal Tea House perform. BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS 1040 Grand Concourse, Bronx 7:30PM (Fri), 6PM (Sat) • FRI JAN 12–SAT JAN 13 Various • $30–$65 FEST: ZLATNE USTE GOLDEN FESTIVAL 2018 Golden Festival showcases more than 50 Balkan and Roma bands and acts on multiple stages over two nights. Plus, refreshments, arts vendors and intricate textiles. GRAND PROSPECT HALL 283 Prospect Ave., Bklyn

FRI JAN 12–SAT JAN 13 12PM • FREE, $10–$20 suggest-ed donation EDUCATION: FREE UNIVERSITY On the one-year anniversary of Trump’s inauguration, in the face of horrific futures imposed from above, the Free University of NYC and Mayday Space invite people to come together and share skills, models, experiences and visions for building our own futures from below. Childcare, Spanish interpretation and a community meal will be provided. After-party at Starr Bar! MAYDAY SPACE 176 St Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

SUN JAN 14 7PM–8:30PM • FREE, donations welcome TEACH-IN: ANTI-CAPITALIST SELF CARE Specifically geared toward black, brown and indigenous leftists, the goal of this monthly teach-in is to begin to create a culture of self-healing. AUDRE LORDE PROJECT 147 W 24th St. 3rd Fl

JAN 19–FEB 6 Various • $9–$15 CINEMA: “60S VERITE” This film series features more than 50 modern classics that not only changed the recording of social history, but revolution-ized filmmaking itself, including nine films by Jean Rouch, one of the inventors of cinema verité. Visit filmforum.org for listings, showtimes and tickets. FILM FORUM 209 W Houston St.

DIG IN: Join Jhal NYC at the Bronx Museum’s XM café for a night of culinary activism focused on New York’s Bangladeshi community.

JANUARY
HOMELESSNESS

THE PROSPECT PARK HOTEL

A GROWING NUMBER OF NEW YORKERS HAVE OPTED TO FORGO THE CITIES STRAINED SHELTER SYSTEM AND SLEEP OUTDOORS THIS WINTER

By Rico Cleffi

Early mornings, the scene at the LeFrak Center ice rink in Prospect Park is a model of comfort and tranquility. Skaters pirouette in time with Bach cantatas as ubiquitous landscapers tend to the surrounding greenery. On an unseasonably warm December morning, you could even mistake the men nearby, doing waking stretches and cooking over an open fire, for residents of the camp.

In recent weeks, structures resembling large lean-tos mysteriously appeared within the park’s southeast entrance, only to vanish, torn down by the Parks Department, witnesses said. The structures haven’t gone unnoticed by many residents of the neighborhood abutting the park, the Prospect-Lefferts Gardens section of Flatbush. A neighborhood Facebook page was recently astir with calls for a crackdown amid quality of life complaints, including concerns about “soil erosion.”

How many people are living in and around Prospect Park is anybody’s guess. What everyone agrees on is that the number is up. When asked what was causing the increase in homelessness, one outreach worker who asked to have her name withheld told The Independent: “Evictions. The area is gentrifying so rapidly you’ve got people being pushed out, and going directly into the park. We’re seeing people through the entire park. We’re seeing fences to reach people, in the woods, everywhere.”

The changes in the neighborhood are not lost on Thomas Harris, aka Yeshua Ben Judah, popularly referred to as “Drum Man,” after the large battery of drums that surround him where he resides on the sidewalk beside the park. He blames the machinations of the Airbnb economy. “They’re rent-controlled shelters, and a variety of other causes, but the primary cause is the lack of affordable housing.”

Even though New York State has the right to shelter enshrined in its constitution, the dozen or so people staying in or around the park I spoke to for this article concurred on one point: none feel comfortable in a shelter. “They’re like jail,” said Nicky Dario. For Casey “Now What?” Larson, the shelter was a place where “I felt like I was in high school all the time.” She describes cliques that formed among other residents, condescending shelter workers, a general lack of dignity.

A white woman originally from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Larson has a familiar story: She became homeless after a relationship turned abusive. “First I went and slept in Central Park,” she says. “Then I was in the shelter.” Larson, who has an associate’s degree and a history of retail work, signed up for the city’s housing waitlist through the shelter she was staying in but the process went nowhere. She has been sleeping in and outside of Prospect Park off and on since September.

“I was here when it was below freezing,” she says. “I wore my sleeping bag in the middle of the park. I was freezing to death.” Larson has also endured harassment from some of the men in the park, including pressure to do sex work for money. “That’s something I am not going to do. Sometimes at night, I’m scared to go to the bathroom. I like to have somebody walk with me. It’s especially hard as a woman out here.”

Meanwhile, the Breaking Ground outreach team logs endless miles circling the park, attempting to respond to complaints and concerns about this growing population. “If someone in Brooklyn sees someone on the street that needs assistance, they call 311,” Bonck says. “We’re obligated to respond within an hour.”

Thomas “Drum Man” Harris points to the view held by many that the street population is a nuisance, something to call the city to have removed. He relates comments he hears about his dwelling, an intricate tangle of djembes that would fit well in any number of art galleries. “A little kid says, ‘Mommy, that’s a bunch of garbage, right?’” People have been staying in the park since

The Independent

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Continued on page 16

The Coalition for the Homeless report announced in August that the number of people homeless in New York City is up from 70,685 last year. The number is estimated at just under 4,000, 39 percent above last year’s number. To get an idea of how much the homeless population has grown in recent years, consider a 2011 Coalition for the Homeless report announcing

THE DOZEN OR SO PEOPLE STAYING IN OR AROUND THE PARK I SPOKE TO FOR THIS ARTICLE CONCURRED ON ONE POINT: NONE FEEL COMFORTABLE IN A SHELTER.

Nobody knows for certain how many people are living in and around Prospect Park. What everyone agrees on is that the number is up.

THE PROSPECT PARK HOTEL

As this story was being written, the city’s Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released its annual “Hope Count,” an estimate of the number of homeless. The count is considered to be low, since its methodology involves visual estimates of homeless people spotted on the streets on a given day. According to the Hope Count, the shelter population is up from 70,683 last year to 72,365. Two thirds of those in shelters are families. The street homeless population is estimated at just under 4,000, 39 percent above last year’s number. To get an idea of how much the homeless population has grown in recent years, consider a 2011 Coalition for the Homeless report announcing
NEIGHBORHOOD GRANTS

Have a great idea to improve your neighborhood?

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awards grants of up to $3,000 to grassroots groups working on community-building projects in NYC, from community gardening to tenant organizing to arts programs to your idea.

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APPLICATIONS DUE JANUARY 22, 2018
By John Tarleton

When Juan González retired last year from a long and distinguished career as a reporter, including 29 years at the New York Daily News, he didn’t miss it. “Forty years was enough,” he said recently as we walked over to a Chelsea coffee shop following his morning stint co-hosting Democracy Now!

That may be. But González still has an unerring instinct for where the big story may lie. This fall he came out with his fifth book, *Reclaiming Gotham: Bill de Blasio and the Movement to End America’s Tale of Two Cities* (New Press, 2017) that looks at the impact of New York City’s 109th mayor and other progressive urban leaders like him who have taken power in recent years.

Where many on the left have been critical of de Blasio for his close ties to the real estate industry and his tepid attempts to reform the NYPD, González argues that de Blasio has accomplished more for the working people of the city than any mayor since Fiorello LaGuardia in the 1930s. Nonetheless, he adds, de Blasio will need a “hard push” from activists to fulfill the most important items on his second-term agenda.

JOHN TARLETON: After 20 years of rule by Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, there was tremendous anticipation following Bill de Blasio’s 2013 election on the promise to address the “Tale of Two Cities.” How do you assess de Blasio’s performance so far as he prepares to begin a second term?

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: I place de Blasio in the context of a much broader movement that has erupted across the United States in recent years that has brought progressive mayors to power in a number of cities. De Blasio is not the most progressive of these elected officials. The difference is that de Blasio administers the largest city in America, a city that is the center of world capitalism, that directly employs more than 300,000 people and whose $82 billion annual budget exceeds that of many nations. So we’re talking about a huge administrative apparatus that is now being led by someone who espouses progressive views.

I supported John Liu in the 2013 Democratic primary, not de Blasio. So I have actually been surprised by how much of a progressive agenda he has enacted — universal pre-K, paid sick leave, increased minimum wage and much more. You would have to go back to Fiorello La Guardia in the 1930s to come up with a mayor who has directly and concretely affected the lives of ordinary New Yorkers at the level that de Blasio has. Has he fallen short in several areas? Yes. I think the biggest has been the construction of new affordable housing. But in the sum total of all the reforms that he has managed to effect in a condition of a deep right-wing drift in this country, I think it’s remarkable.

**Why is it important for the left to win control of municipal governments?**

Cities today are the only hope for progressive politics, not just in the United States, but in the industrial world. Federal and regional governments are going increasingly to the right. They’re becoming increasingly xenophobic, pro-capitalism, pro-imperialism.

The cities are the only place where there’s racial diversity, where there’s tolerance, where there’s the desire for sustainable development. You have to build a base area somewhere. And for me, the only place to build mass base areas right now is not in the labor movement, because the labor movement has been decimated. It’s in the cities. And just to do it in the cities, you have to build cross-class alliances and negotiate. You have to risk the possibility that your leader turns out to be a total fuck-up (laughs) and gets caught up in the trappings of power and celebrity. That’s a risk you take, because there are no radical political parties to hold them accountable.

In Reclaiming Gotham, you assert that de Blasio has caved to the urban growth machine model in which the government assists the real estate developers in maximizing profits from the land they control. Yet, when I look around New York, I see ever more luxury condo towers being built for people who live in a whole other stratosphere.

In certain areas de Blasio has definitely sought to suppress the old urban growth machine model. He’s refused to subsidize any more mega-project deals like Hudson Yards or Atlantic Yards where housing is an adjunct to a much bigger commercial development project. On the existing rent-stabilized housing, he’s produced historic lows in rent increases, which has directly benefited tenants and hurt landlords. And he’s investing heavily in fixing public housing.

Where he has failed, and where I think almost all of the progressive mayors have failed, is in coming up with a model to build new low-cost housing in urban America. In the absence of any federal or state attempt to build low-income housing, he has adopted the erroneous viewpoint that you can trade height or density for affordability. The difference is that you’re now requiring a certain percentage of affordability, whereas previous administrations have pretty much left it up to the whims of the developers.

I think he’s too beholden to the developer community on the issue of how to build affordable housing. He’s giving up too much height, he’s not requiring enough affordability and the affordability that he’s requiring is not at the lowest levels of income that are necessary to meet the crisis. The key thing that he would need to do is get the for-profit developers out of affordable housing and just do it as nonprofits — whether cooperatives or nonprofit housing developments.

Another problem that often plagues progressive mayors is how to manage their police department. In de Blasio’s case, it often seems as if he is more a captive of the NYPD than the man who is ultimately in charge of it.

I don’t think he became a captive of the police force. But he did make compromises with it. As I mention in my book, de Blasio was a young aide to Mayor David Dinkins in 1992 when there was a famous police riot at City Hall against legislation to create the Civilian Complaint Review Board. It was total bedlam. The police, I believe, stopped working under Dinkins and the annual number of murders peaked at 2,000 compared to the 300 or so we have now.

Because of what he saw under Dinkins, I think when de Blasio got into office he realized, “I have a very ambitious social agenda. If I have to battle the police from the beginning, I’m not going to be able to accomplish much of my social agenda.”

So, he decided to bring in Bill Bratton as police commissioner because he felt that Bratton had the respect of the city’s elites and of the rank-and-file — and that Bratton could take care of the police department while he implemented his social agenda.

I wouldn’t have chosen Bratton, but I understand why de Blasio did it. Bratton was still into...
IMMIGRATION ACTIVIST RAVI RAGBIR FACES DEPORTATION ONCE MORE

“According to the policy, I could be deported,” said Ravi Ragbir, head of the New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, when The Independent called him for an update on his scheduled check-in with immigration authorities. Ragbir’s current stay of removal expires Jan. 18. But he has a groundswell of support from the community. For himself and innumerable others facing similar check-ins, Ragbir helped pioneer an accompaniment program in which supporters join them in the waiting area and courtroom. Ragbir’s check-in on March 9 drew hundreds of supporters who accompanied him, and they turned out again in April. Both times he was allowed to stay. His support committee urges people to join in solidarity with Ragbir and families facing deportation when he appears for his check-in on Thursday, Jan. 11 at 9 a.m. in the northwest corner of Foley Square.

RIGHT TO ‘NO’
The City Council passed a package of police reforms on Dec. 19, but not before one of the bills lost the support of its original champions, civil rights organizations, public defenders and families of those killed by police. Part of the Right to Know Act, the bill requires the NYPD to identify themselves and provide a reason for stops during non-emergency interactions with the public, but was amended to exempt low-level vehicular encounters. The bill “fails to require officer identification in the majority of police-community interactions and allows for unchecked officer discretion in determining whether to provide an explanation for any law enforcement activity,” a coalition of legal aid groups representing Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx said in a statement.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL
The New York City Council approved sweeping development plans in November that will change the face of two of the metropolis’ most prominent neighborhoods. After winning the support of Crown Heights City Councilmember Laurie Cumbo, lawmakers voted unanimously to sell off the 138,000-square-foot Bedford-Union Armory to BFC Partners. Activists who mounted a campaign against the proposal were successful in nixing proposed condos at the site and winning more affordable housing, though their push for the city-owned property to be converted into a community land trust rather than privatized was unsuccessful. The council also greenlit a rezoning proposal that will allow higher density buildings in East Harlem. Proponents of the measure argued that larger buildings will generate more affordable housing, but as its detractors point out, a greater percentage of the new apartments will go for market rate, which will drive up housing costs in the neighborhood overall.

DISSENT ON TRIAL
As The Independent went to press, a verdict was expected in the trial of six defendants charged with conspiracy to riot for attending Inauguration Day protests in Washington, D.C. In total, 194 people are expected to go on trial in a series of federal prosecutions related to the demonstration, which resulted in minor property damage near the National Mall. They face decades in prison. Though the government concedes that none of the defendants were involved in the destruction, it claims the dark clothing they wore to the protest is evidence they participated in a wider conspiracy. The trial will likely set a template for the prosecutions of the remaining defendants in the case, as well for as how the government treats dissenters in the Trump era. Visit independent.org for the latest updates.

TOUGH TIMES FOR UBER
Uber is a transportation company, not simply a software platform, the European Union’s highest court ruled this month despite objections from the firm. Based on the European Court of Justice’s ruling, E.U. states can regulate Uber as they would any other taxi company. Uber will be subject to taxes and worker protections with which E.U. members govern their transportation sectors. The company has flaunted such laws to monopolize the taxi market and drive down wages, not only in Europe but everywhere it has established itself. There are 46,000 Uber-connected cars on the road in New York City today.

— INDPEPENDENT STAFF
I'm an honest person."

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people who are very conservative. We agree on noth-

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began to reach its apex and Gov. Cuomo wondered out

wind down in a tent behind the brisket joint, he ex-

lected for President — and later for the

Albany over the head with his pen, fi  rst for the

Democratic National Committee, has called the New York state Sen-

's governing system "a danger to the nation.""

But look out, Albany. An emerging cadre of Demo-

cratic candidates plan on busting up the delicate balance of power in Albany in 2018 and blue-ting New York —

real.

Among them is Ross Barkan, a journalist by trade, who in October announced his candidacy in the 22nd Senate district in southern Brooklyn. Tired of beating

Albany over the head with his pen, fi rst for the

Observer — until the Jared Kushner-owned rag endorsed Donald Trump for President — and later for the

Voice and Gothamist, the 28-year-old opted to step into the political arena himself.

"I understand how the system works, why it succeeds and why it fails," Barkan says. "I know what motivates politicians, for better and worse, and I have a strong un-

derstanding of the issues. I've held the system to account from the outside. Now I will do it from the inside."

On a rainy December night in Long Island City at John Brown's Smokehouse, as a fundraiser for Barkan wound down in a tent behind the brisket joint, he ex-

plained what first motivated him to run for offi ce. It was over the summer, when New York City's subway crisis began to reach its apex and Gov. Cuomo wondered out loud "who's in charge." (He is.) As is the case in much of the city, the trains in Barkan's native Bay Ridge neigh-

borhood run infrequently, and none of the stations in District 22 are compliant with the Americans with Dis-

abilities Act. He wants the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA)'s budget boosted, and for the agency to spend money on computerizing its Depression-vintage

signaling system rather than on flashy beautifi cation projects backed by the governor.

"It's a system-wide failure," Barkan says. "And there has been a lack of impetus on the part of a lot of elected officials to hold the MTA to account, to hold the gover-

nor to account, to really say, 'Here is the problem. Here

is how we can actually try to fix it.'"

His get-down-to-business approach to the troubles afflicting America's largest subway system is indicative of Barkan's political style. He plans to tell it like it is, unlike the backpussing politicians he has covered over the years. "You're going to know where I stand on an issue," he says. "I have great relationships with people who are very conservative. We agree on noth-

thing, but they know where I'm coming from. They know I'm an honest person."

Those relationships with conservatives might come in handy if Barkan's reform politics are to at least receive an airing in District 22, an artfully gerrymandered bas-

of mostly ethnic-white and Republican voters that

wants to connect with the changing face of southern

Brooklyn — home to a growing Arab population that

have given to his campaign. Like El-Yateem, he

of the state's capital.

For a muckraker aiming to take on the muck, Bar-

could not have done a better job of choosing a tormentor.

Golden has tunneled hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign funds from landlord and law en-

forcement lobbies into his family catering business since he was fi rst elected in 2002. His offi ce did not respond to requests for comment on this article.

A staunch defender of Trump, Golden has been stok-

the fi gures of controversy long before Ross Tweed's

assent to power. In 2012, his offi ce cancelled a work-

shop it planned to host that promised to teach women

how to "sit, stand, and walk like a model" and "walk up

and down a stair elegantly," after women's groups raised

an outcry. In a 2015 Facebook post that Barkan him-

self reported on at the time, Golden jokingly confl ated

the Supreme Court's decision legalizing same-sex mar-

riage with the lifting of marijuana prohibitions in several states, writ-

"It all makes sense now. Gay

marriage and marijuana being le-

galized on the same day. Leviticus

20:13 — "if a man lays with anoth-

er man he should be stoned.' We've

just been interpreting it wrong all

these years."

On Dec. 11, confronted by a

Brooklyn bicyclist when a Cadillac he was traveling in drove through multiple red lights and nearly ran

the man off the road, Golden im-

personated a police offi cer and threatened to bring him to "the precinct," the cyclist said. When the cyclist, who did not initially realize he was in the presence of a state senator, asked who he was, Golden responded, "Wouldn't you

like to know?"

Barkan said he hopes to raise "several hundred thousand dol-

ars" through small contributions. Last summer's City Council bid

by Palestinian-American pastor

Khader El-Yateem in Bay Ridge serves as an inspira-

tion for Barkan. El-Yateem raised over $100,000 before

he narrowly lost the September Democratic primary. Though he resists being pigeonholed with the Bernier

label, Barkan is seeking endorsements from the Working Families Party and the Democratic Socialists of Amer-

ica, which sent many of its 2,000-plus New York City

members out knocking on doors for El-Yateem.

Barkan says he is already excited by the "number of people, the wide array of people, from all walks of life"

en who care, when I talk about over de-

velopment and the real-estate industry running the state,

[voters] are very receptive," Barkan says. "And I tell

them, 'You know what? Marty Golden is in the pocket of

big real-estate developers.' And they say, 'Wow.' And

something suddenly clicks in their head."

Barkan sees his campaign as paralleling the pri-

mary challenges to the members of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) — the breakaway

Democrats who share power with the Republicans.

Technically speaking, Democrats hold 32 seats in the

Senate to die.

— PETER RUGH
The Muckraker Vs. The Muck

ing how the governor, possibly positioning himself for
campaign advisor Hank Sheinkopf told
before their well-heeled donors.

blame the Senate. In neither scenario do they lose face be-
universal health care bill, Cuomo and company can also
limited down, as happened with 2016’s $15-an-hour min-
legislation, but blame the Senate when the bills are wa-
allowing the Assembly and Gov. Cuomo to support liberal

time, as happened with 2016’s $15-an-hour min-

one slice of the pie when we should be getting the entire pie,
nor Myrie. “Once people start realizing we are only getting
‘Well look, I’m doing what’s best for you,’” explained Zell-

some of these perks and to be able to tell the community,
upgrades in his district, according to records from the state
has used the dough to put millions of dollars toward park
bonds home to his northeast-Bronx/Westchester district,

Treachery has its perks, however.

Senate Republicans have had generous to the IDC turn-
coats. IDC members receive additional staff, computers
and larger offices, and committee chairmanships that at-
tract donors hoping to influence legislation and come with
luhs ranging from $9,000 to $34,000 a year. As lawmakers
often chair multiple committees but can legally receive
only one stipend, Republicans opt to receive luhs from the
committee with the largest payout, and then pass the
cash remaining on the table to GOP and IDC vice chairs,
maladroitly listing them as committee leaders on payroll
documents submitted to the state comptroller. Jesse Hamil-
ton, for instance, chairs the Banks Committee, receiving
a $13,000 stipend.

The IDC’s political chicanery has also meant that Sen-
ate Democrats have secured just $3 million for their dis-
tricts out of the $1.6 billion State and Municipal Facilities
(SMF) bond issuance program established in 2013, while
the Republicans have received $210 million and IDC mem-
ers $35 million. The largest IDC share has gone to the
faction’s leader, Jeff Klein, who took $17 million in SMF
bonds home to his northeast-Bronx/Westchester district,
where a 2018 primary challenger has yet to emerge. Klein
has used the dough to put millions of dollars toward park
upgrades in his district, according to records from the state
Dormitory Authority, which reviews most SMF requests.

“What the IDC has relied on is their ability to bring back
some of these perks and to be able to tell the community,
‘Well look, I’m doing what’s best for you,’” explained Zelli-
or Myrie. “Once people start realizing we are only getting
one slice of the pie when we should be getting the entire pie,
people are going to be upset about that.”

With each party ruling a legislative house, the spoils are
nearly divided: Assembly Democrats have steered $150
million in SMF earmarks their way, with Republicans get-
ting just $4 million. But beyond the pork, the power split
allows the Assembly and Gov. Cuomo to support liberal
legislation, but blame the Senate when the bills are wa-
tered down, as happened with 2016’s $15-an-hour min-
imum-wage law. If a measure goes nowhere, like 2017’s
universal health care bill, Cuomo and company can also
blame the Senate. In neither scenario do they lose face be-
fore their well-heeled donors.

“Reaching across the aisle as a principle is a great
thing, but blaming the opposition party for not work-
ing with you is also a great thing,” former Cuomo cam-
paign advisor Hank Sheinkopf told Politico, describ-
ing how the governor, possibly positioning himself for

a 2020 presidential run, “can have it both ways.”

It remains to be seen where the state’s powerful labor
unions will fall in 2018. In the past they have campaigned
for and donated heavily to Cuomo and the IDC senators.

With the Trump administration powerfully anti-labor and
and a pending Supreme Court decision that could force public-
employee unions to represent nonmembers for free by ban-
ning “fair-share fees,” unions could be more likely to back
less progressive candidates they are confident will win, in
order to have a seat at the table when legislation is drafted
or when their contracts are up.

New York unions are “going to do what is best for their
members,” said Myrie. “I would hope that what they feel is
best is real progressives in Albany, people who won’t just be
satisfied with compromises, but will go on the offensive.”

Myrie, Robert Jackson and their comrades have appar-
ently lit a fire under Albany. Cuomo brokered an agreement
that is supposed to bring the IDC members back into the
mainline Democratic caucus, which has 23 members and
is headed by Andrea Stewart-Cousins of Yonkers, who is
posed to become the first woman of color to lead either
house of the legislature.

The IDC says it’s on board, with Jeff Klein praising
the offer as an “assurance that our progressive legislative
agenda will be advanced.” But Cuomo will likely blunt
the deal’s effect by not calling a special election to fill two
vacant seats in Democratic districts until April, after the
March 31 budget deadline — the most important day on
the legislative calendar.

The deal was crafted to “delay special elections and al-
low a Republican budget,” Zephyr Teachout tweeted. “We
have to double and triple the heart.”

Even if the IDC steps on board, Simcha Felder will likely
be a holdout. Secure in his Borough Park seat — home to a
conservative, predominantly Orthodox Jewish commu-
nity — he promptly went over to the Republicans after be-
ing elected as a Democrat in 2012. Felder has urged IDC
senators to rejoin the Democratic fold, but has made excuse
after excuse for not doing so himself, telling one reporter he
won’t join up with his party again until there is an armed
guard stationed at every New York City school. One Re-
publican will have to fall if Democrats hope to win control
of the Senate again. Barkan hopes it will be Marty Golden.

“In order to build a strong Democratic majority in the
Senate, you have to defeat Republicans,” he says. “I see
this as a joint effort. We want the same thing. We want a
majority of real Democrats who are going to fight for
New York City.”

In Washington State, an IDC-style agreement in which
two Democratic state senators made a power-sharing deal
with Republicans ended after last November’s elections,
when voters gave Democrats full control of both houses of
the legislature and the governorship. The odds of knocking
off all nine of the New York Senate’s renegade Democrats
in one election are much steeper. But the days when IDC
members could brazenly live a double life in Albany with-
out being noticed by their constituents are over.
Living through this era of rotten feelings is like being trapped in an endless dystopian movie. We now live under an alliance of the old-guard conservatives and the far right (evangelicals, Tea Party and overt white supremacists), fund-ed up by the yin-yang by billionaire lunatics. This alliance in-cludes theocrats like Vice President Mike Pence and open fascists, and their beliefs are surging into the mainstream. The goal of this real-life hydra, which now dominates all three branches of government, has gone beyond the old conservative dream of dismantling the social benefits brought about by the New Deal. Now they are set on de-stroying what’s left of bourgeois democracy. A Hunger Games story is emerging in its place: a tightly controlled state, militarized police, unregulated monopolies, priva-tized services, a powerless and destrue working class and a culture pulsing with the venom of war and racial hatred.

The role of the electoral opposition largely falls to the corporate-friendly Democratic Party centrists, now deci-dedly in the minority in Congress despite the GOP’s low polling numbers. The centrists did not plan it that way. They play that role because no one else is in any position to put up a fight at that level of politics. But they’re lousy at it. They blew the election and they know it, but they don’t want to confront their mistakes.

Instead, they are praying for the cavalry, a fairy god-mother, any superhero from the power centers of society to come to their rescue. Their appeal has always been to the moderate wing of capitalists: You need us, keep us funded and we’ll keep them dogies rollin’. To the public, their appeal is: We’ll protect you if you come through with the votes. Between the money guys’ indifference and being out-organized in key sectors of key states, those appeals fell flat. Yet they seem to know no other way to play politics.

The Democratic centrists’ main hope right now is that the Mueller investigation will bring Trump down with a crash, à la Watergate. They envision a scenario in which Trump’s Russian ties get him legally branded a traitor to America. This would get them off the hook for their bungling the election and tarnish the Republicans’ image enough to give them a path back to power. It would also enable them to win without offering a strong alternative to the center-clingers have cultivated for decades. Follow the shift to the right halfway, keep the left at bay and eventu-ally the public will get sick of the Republicans and return to Old Faithful. So in the face of an active attack on every principle they purport to be about, the centrists still insist on a half-assed response. They are afraid of their party’s base. They are afraid of losing favor and financial support from big business and Wall Street.

That’s their problem. Our problem is that the stakes are much more than just win or lose for the Democratic Party. The country and the world are at a critical tip- ping point. Government is being transformed amid wide-spread voter disenfranchisement, rampant privatization and monopolization, shrinking wages and the destruc-tion of basic democratic and human rights. And, of course, all the money in the world can’t deal with the ravages of a wrecked environment.

We can’t afford the Democrats trying to fight the rightist siege with their usual tactics of “bipartisan” halfway trad- eoffs. Their working assumption is that the more balls-out crazy Trump performs, the more power he’ll lose, as Re-publicans and more moderate supporters defect. Some see Roy Moore’s defeat in that light. But generally, without a strong progressive alternative, the crazy becomes normal.

When the media talk about “the resistance,” they are usually referring to Democrats in office. Secondly, they mean the crowds of angry civilians confronting elected of-ficials in town halls, on the heels of the massive women’s marches in January. Below the radar, there is widespread opposition, anger and revulsion. This is where the left should come in. Situations like this call for a solid, politi-cally coherent left, but that’s what seems to be missing.

The left’s role is to move this unrest and opposition in the direction of politics — enabling working-class people to apply pressure where and when it can change the situation in their favor, building their (small-d) demo-cratic strength. This is our mission inside and outside the Democratic Party, in social movements, in unions and in intellectual settings.

The next move should be away from fragmentation and isolation. Each fragment tends to confuse building the left with keeping its own particular project afloat. This is a problem even in the suddenly expanded Democratic So-cialists of America and more spontaneous self-conscious resistance groups like Indivisible. There’s so much going on in every state and territory, but most of those involved are unaware of it. All of us need to find and connect the pieces into a coordinated mutual project, one with a uni-fied focus on democratic action and potential power.

The focus we need comes down to an immediate, defen-sive political operation: Unseating and defeating every Re-publican and “blue dog” (conservative-friendly) Demo-crats to the left. “Centrists will be centrists, dependent on support from corporate donors even when they use leftish-sounding rhetoric for votes or back some leftist goals. But if they actively push back against the GOP, it will create more political space for the left.

Nor does it mean dropping other issues. Single-payer health care? Hurts the rightist regime. Ending police mur-der and violence? Also. Every social movement that con-fronts the attack on democratic rights speaks a pillar of the right’s right alliance’s influence on voters.

Third-party efforts and campaigning for socialists as Democrats can sometimes be feasible tactics. But in order to cut Trump & Co. off at the knees, we’ll also have to work for some lesser evils to break the GOP stranglehold on Congress and state legislatures. A center-left alliance will be necessary over the next three years, even if the cen-trists have to be dragged into it to avoid collapse.

Politically-minded leftists need to practice solidarity as something more than just mutual sympathy and support. We’ll have to make connections across old, entrenched and increasingly obsolete barriers. No single group will achieve this. Competing sects hooking up momentarily won’t cut it. It’s up to individual group leaders and move-ment organizers to make up their minds that this approach should be the priority over tending their own gardens. This is happening to a limited extent, and people are finding each other and beginning to talk seriously.

One potential national rallying point is the Poor Peo-ple’s Campaign being organized by Rev. William Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis of Kairos Center. They are reviv-ing Martin Luther King’s unfinished Poor People’s Cam-paign of 1968. They plan to draw organized poor people into direct action targeting state and federal authorities to demand that poverty and inequality be addressed. It grows out of the Moral Mondays movement, which helped slow North Carolina’s race to the far right after the state gov-ernment fell under total Republican control in 2012. This should not be confused with “pushing the Demo-crats to the left.” Centrists will be centrists, dependent on support from corporate donors even when they use leftish-sounding rhetoric for votes or back some leftist goals. But if they actively push back against the GOP, it will create more political space for the left.

One reason to play on this field is to isolate the right inside and outside the party. The left is in no position to drive out the Trumpoids without allying with the center, as much as we (and they) might like to avoid it. This worked in Virginia this year, when a centrist Democrat was elected governor over a Trump imitator spewing anti-immigrant urban legends, and progressives won a number of legisla-tive seats, including socialist Lee Carter and Danica Roem, Virginia’s first transgender state legislator.

This should not be confused with “pushing the Demo-crats to the left.” Centrists will be centrists, dependent on support from corporate donors even when they use leftish-sounding rhetoric for votes or back some leftist goals. But if they actively push back against the GOP, it will create more political space for the left.

One potential national rallying point is the Poor Peo-ple’s Campaign being organized by Rev. William Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis of Kairos Center. They are reviv-
Peter Hogness saw a spot of hope in Nevada in last year’s otherwise disastrous election. Donald Trump lost the state, and Democrats held on to a Senate seat and won control of the state legislature — for which he credits the work of the Culinary Union, UNITE HERE Local 226, which represents more than 55,000 hotel, casino and restaurant workers in the state, mostly women and immigrants.

“What struck me was that the union played the role it did in expanding the electorate and the pool of activists,” he says.

But Hogness, a longtime union staffer and labor journalist, was also well aware of the pitfalls of electoral politics, that the intensity and passion put behind a progressive candidate like Bernie Sanders or Jesse Jackson in the 1980s can “start sucking up all the oxygen” and dissipate after the election.

The result was Water for the Grassroots, an organization founded in February to aid other groups doing “long-term organizing, but active at election time” — particularly those in states that are more likely than New York to elect right-wing politicians who can impose their agenda on the entire nation. This year, it assisted voter-registration, canvassing and get-out-the-vote efforts by grassroots groups in Philadelphia; drummed up support for a Florida ballot initiative that would restore the right to vote to 1.6 million people convicted of felonies other than murder or sexual assault; and raised money for Woke Felonies, which would provide lawyers free of charge to those that cannot afford one “of seeking victory for prosecutors” to one of achieving “real justice for victims and others caught up in the criminal justice system.”

Water for the Grassroots volunteers were part of their backing of Larry Krasner, who was elected district attorney in November on a platform of changing the office’s culture from one “of seeking victory for prosecutors” to one of achieving “real justice for victims and others caught up in the criminal justice system.”

The groups’ electoral efforts were part of their backing of Larry Krasner, who was elected district attorney in November on a platform of changing the office’s culture from one “of seeking victory for prosecutors” to one of achieving “real justice for victims and others caught up in the criminal justice system.”

It was really inspiring to know that people from New York City wanted to come down and help,” says Rich Krajewski of Reclaim Philadelphia.

The political problem for activists there, he adds, is to persuade people that voting can actually change things.

“The new prosecutor can fulfill some of his promises, ‘it’s going to be a lot easier for us to mobilize.’

Orange, New Jersey City Council president Donna K. Williams, who joined Water for the Grassroots for one weekend of door-to-door canvassing in Philadelphia, had similar experiences. People who initially ob-

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...
When Nilda Sánchez and her children ventured outside after Hurricane Maria waged a direct hit on Puerto Rico, aluminum road signs near their house and trees crisscrossed each other like slain animals in the street. The power and water were off, and remained so for six weeks. It was nearly three months before Sánchez learned whether another of the mainstays in her family’s life would be restored: her son’s education.

Sébastián, Sánchez’s 9-year-old son, had been receiving therapy for his learning disabilities at Instituto Loaiza Cordero, a public school in their San Juan neighborhood. Already the school had been shut down following Hurricane Irma’s sweeping of the island Sept. 6. For the next three months, Sánchez had no word on how much damage the school had sustained in the storms, and no inkling of whether or when it would reopen.

Their hardships multiplied. Sánchez began to worry that Sébastián, who suffers from developmental delays in hand-eye coordination and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, was regressing without therapy and the routine of the school. Child support payments from Sánchez’s ex-husband — whom she left, she said, after he became abusive toward her — stopped coming, slipping through the cracks of administrative upheaval. Without anywhere else to be, Sébastián had to accompany Sánchez to the few job interviews she could find in the hurricane’s wake.

Sánchez says Hurricane Maria opened her eyes to the “cruelty” of living in bureaucratic limbs. On Dec. 4, three months after Irma shut down Instituto Loaiza Cordero, and after its reopening was twice scheduled then postponed, a handful of students trickled through the front door at the morning bell. Sébastián, who Sánchez says had taken to sleeping in his school uniform, excitedly wheeled his backpack through the schoolyard.

Public schools in Puerto Rico began reopening roughly three weeks after Hurricane Maria, according to the island’s Department of Education (DOE), and 97 percent of island’s approximate 1,100 schools were open by the first week of December. The reopenings came after a protracted battle that pitted union leaders, parents and teachers against the DOE, led by Secretary of Education Julia Keleher, whom activists accuse of trying to render the temporary school closures necessitated by Maria permanent. Officials stalled in order to drive down enrollment and continue a trend of public school downsizing, many students are absent. Nilda Sánchez fears her son’s classmates will never return. “Some are out of Puerto Rico,” she explains. “Some of them cannot go to the school or do not know that the school is open.”

An important factor in Puerto Rico’s education battle is the island’s massive debt crisis. The territory is saddled with $74 billion in public debt and the island’s Fiscal Control Board — instituted by Congress in 2016 to supervise a debt restructuring — imposed budget cuts across several departments, including the DOE, which represents nearly one-third of Puerto Rico’s $9 billion annual budget. Even before the debt crisis, public education shouldered cutbacks. The DOE closed 150 schools between 2010 and 2015. Then, in May, the DOE announced it would close 179 more, estimating it would save about $7 million per year on water and electric costs at the schools. The DOE is using the fiscal crisis “to justify budget cuts and make right-sizing measures” that especially impact poor children, said Morales.

In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that over 40 percent of Puerto Rico residents were living below the poverty level. Closing and consolidating schools leaves poor Puerto Ricans with limited educational options. Kelvin Coffie, whose 11-year-old son has autism, says Puerto Rico’s 120,000 plus disabled students suffer disproportionately from school closings since they require special services and have a more difficult time adapting to new school settings. His son’s school is still closed despite having sustained no major structural damage in the hurricane. Coffie said none of the other schools in his district are equipped to serve students with disabilities. “If they don’t open the school, I don’t know where I’m going to put my son,” he said.

Additionally, advocates continue to worry a mass exodus of students to the United States will lead to future school closings and disenfranchise the families who remain.

When asked how many schools will eventually close in the aftermath of Maria, Keleher said she would have to wait until January to tabulate what “our population looks like, because the dust hasn’t settled yet.” She said her October tweet was “referring strictly to the physical conditions” of schools in New Orleans post Katrina. “I have not opined on the issue [of privatization]. I have done nothing and I have said nothing,” she said, adding that she is “going to look and fight for every resource and every dollar that I can bring to the island.”

At Instituto Loaiza Cordero, two weeks after reopening, many students are absent. Nilda Sánchez fears her son’s classmates will never return. “Some are out of Puerto Rico,” she explains. “Some of them cannot go to the school or do not know that the school is open.”

Monica Espitia contributed to this article.
TRUMP’S TAX HEIST FOR THE RICH

By Dean Patterson

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill approved massive tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and corporations on Dec. 20. Rallies against the Republican legislation were held across the country, including a protest in front of the New York Stock Exchange in which hundreds of demonstrators participated.

According to an analysis by the Tax Policy Center, the final version of the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” gives the highest-earning 1 percent of households, those with incomes of at least $733,000, an average tax cut of $50,000. Those in the top 1 percent, earning $3.4 million or more, will receive a $190,000 cut on average.

There are a number of other goodies embedded in the legislation that further favor the rich, including a provision that allows for a new deduction on income earned from real estate “pass-through” entities, such as limited liability corporations (LLCs). Fourteen Republican senators with investments in holding companies whose assets amount to a combined total of $105 million stand to personally benefit from the law, as does President Trump. His financial portfolio contains 369 such businesses.

Middle- and low-income households will see a modest break from the tax bill, but the benefits they receive will taper off over the next 10 years, with only cuts for high earners remaining.

By eliminating the Affordable Care Act’s health coverage mandate, the tax bill is expected to drive up premiums, forcing millions of poor- and middle-income Americans, unable to keep up with rising health-care costs, off of insurance rolls. They will thereby no longer receive tax breaks and subsidies provided to those with coverage. Four million Americans will no longer have health insurance by 2019, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Thirteen million will be without coverage within the next decade.

Over that timeframe, the CBO estimates that the tax cuts will add $1.4 trillion to the deficit, which advocates fear will be used to justify reductions to health, education, welfare and other forms of social spending. Additionally, the bill eliminates nearly all deductions for state and local taxes, shifting more of a burden on to taxpayers in states with robust public pensions and social programs. Republicans are betting that taxpayers will be less willing to support such spending if they are forced to front a larger portion of the costs.

Already, the unpaid-for tax cuts automatically trigger yearly reductions to Medicare, agriculture subsidies, student loans, affordable housing and other programs that began at $114 billion and will mount to $150 billion by 2027. A total of $400 billion will be gutted from Medicare.

“The tax bill is part of a class war we are caught in with Wall Street corporations,” said Jim Perlestein, a retired professor and an organizer with the Professional Staff Congress, a union representing 27,000 current and former CUNY faculty and professional staff that helped organize the Dec. 19 rally in front of the Stock Exchange on Wall Street. “This bill is an assault on every part of life the union represents. It will devastate the public service sector we represent.”

Sherry Wolf, an organizer with the 8,000-member American Association of University Professors at Rutgers, commented on the irony of the bill’s passage during the Christmas season: “The rich have launched this attack on the public as a gift to themselves. They are relying on people paying the least amount of attention at this time of year.” The public, especially public-sector unions, must amp up their resistance, she said. “We are under siege and we ought not to stand in paralysis. They want to dismantle public institutions for their private benefit.”

Activists from the faculty unions staged a civil disobedience during the protest, blocking a gated passageway leading to the Stock Exchange building. After 20 minutes of warnings by the police to “willingly open the pedestrian walkway,” 15 protesters were arrested. The sit-in was largely symbolic, however, given that little stands in the way of the legislation.

The tax act will likely arrive on President Trump’s desk before Dec. 25 and defeating it could take a Christmas miracle, although he may delay signing the measure until January to suspend cuts to social spending until 2019, after next year’s Congressional elections. Nevertheless, in 2018, protesters plan to continue to lay the groundwork for unraveling the legislation in the streets and at the ballot box — a new year’s resolution they aim to keep.
PROSPECT PARK HOTEL
Continued from page 4

The de Blasio administration recently announced a plan to convert 8,000 apartments located at cluster sites into long term affordable units, using eminent domain if necessary. “That’s a big step and a big change in strategy from what we’ve heard from this administration,” said Coalition for the Homeless Policy Director Giselle Routhier. “That’s one way you can get out of these poor models of shelter on one hand and increase the number of permanent affordable housing as well.” Over the next decade, says Routhier, the city “should be creating 10,000 new units of housing specifically for homeless households.”

Picture the Homeless has mapped much of the city’s vast stock of abandoned and vacant buildings. The group advocates tapping into this resource as a means of ending homelessness altogether. “There’s enough apartments out there,” says Lucas, pointing to the almost 2,000 abandoned buildings containing close to 12,000 apartments and 505 vacant lots Picture the Homeless has documented in Manhattan alone.

As proponents of the de Blasio plan tread with cautious optimism, the real estate industry has a different view of what it takes to survive in the city. A recent analysis by the rental listing site “RentHop” found that the median rent for a two bedroom apartment in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens was $2,450 a month. Tenants earning the neighborhood’s median household income of $42,462 would have to sacrifice nearly 70 percent of their pay to make rent each month. Citywide, the median household income is just over $50,000 a year, with 1.8 million households earning half that figure. Median rental prices, however, hover either at or above $3,000 a month in Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. Given those numbers, we can probably expect a steady increase in the number of homeless.

The situation a few blocks south of Prospect Park is indicative of the housing challenges facing much of the population.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ
Continued from page 6

broken-windows policing which was effect-
ively ended when City Council voted to
decriminalize all the minor offenses like holding a can of beer or urinating in public that people got locked up for. Bratton’s gone, and broken-windows policing is effectively gone. And now the city is doing things like a bail program for people who can’t afford bail that they didn’t have before. So there’s been sub-
stantive changes in criminal justice that overall ranks New York City as among the more progressive cities when it comes to criminal justice systems today.

What do you expect de Blasio will focus on in his second term?

He’s outlined universal 3-K as a next big step. It’s two reforms in one. You are pro-
viding an extra year in school for every child, and you are saving the parents of those children huge child care costs. On building affordable housing, he’s made deeper affordability requirements for lower incomes, but it’s not enough yet. Activists have to keep pushing him on this issue. It’s nowhere near what needs to be done.

What do you think the impact will be from the Republican tax bill that just passed Congress? It takes direct aim at blue states such as New York and Cali-
fornia that have high taxes and higher levels of social services.

The dirty secret of New York government over the last five years is that the city and the state are swimming in surpluses. All you have to do is read State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli’s reports, because he charts quarterly how big the state surplus is growing. And now the city has a budget surplus of about $4 billion. The city’s population has grown by 375,000 people since 2010. There are more jobs. Tourism is also at an all-time high, a million people a week visit the city. And of course Wall Street continues to have record years that the city benefits from. So I think that it’s possible to weather the federal storm.

It’s not going to be easy, but it’s possible to do it.

De Blasio is often portrayed in the media as restless to move on to higher office. What do you see in his political future?

It would be nonsense for him to run for president. I think he would have a better chance running for governor after he completes his second term as mayor. His problem is he is unpopular with whites. In New York City, 40 to 45 percent of whites supported him for mayor while he registers 63 percent with Latinos and 80 percent among African Americans. Why is that? I believe that his reforms have more directly affected African Americans and Latinos. I’m certain 300,000 of the 500,000 workers who received paid sick leave work in bodegas or in the backs of kitchens are Latino, and the tenants whose rents were frozen are largely Afri-

can American and Latino.

The immediate suburbs of New York City are becoming more Democratic, and more Black and Latino. Whether the combina-
tion of the suburbs and New York City would be enough to offset the rest of the state, I don’t know. But he certainly has a better chance to run for governor than he has to run for president.
Lancaster Stands Up is now taking questionnaires from the three candidates running in the April Democratic primary. Unseating Smucker will be an uphill battle. The rural areas outside Lancaster are heavily Republican, and Pennsylvania’s congressional districts vie with Texas for the most GOP-gerrymandered in the nation. Still, Smucker won his first term in 2016 with only 52 percent of the vote.

To win, she says, they’ll need to register more than 15,000 new voters. “The potential to have 12 volunteers come down will be really helpful,” she says.

One project Water for the Grassroots originally envisioned is on the back burner for now: being a “matchmaking service” to connect low-budget community organizing groups that can’t afford to pay for professional-quality video and graphic design with media workers who have those skills and want to volunteer.

“We’re still finding our footing,” Hoggness says. But in Florida, where the group contacted progressive churches and union retirees to get them to support the voting-restoration initiative, “we really found a niche we could fill without having to go down in person.”

To get involved or learn more about Water for the Grassroots, email water4grassroots@gmail.com.
**THE BEST ALBUMS OF 2017**

By Charina Nadura & Brady O'Callahan

As the old Confucian adage has it, it is a curse to be born into interesting times. But it is also a blessing, a blessing in the sense that some of the world’s finest art is born out of personal and political struggle. Frughten blessings indeed, but as this year in music proves, the world is full of them; struggles, hope, dreams, resistance and joy. If, as the poet Diane di Prima once put it, “The only war that matters is the war against the imagination,” then we can count many victories this year in its defense.

VINCE STAPLES // Big Fish Theory

Vince Staples has spent the past couple of years carving out a special place in the rap universe all for himself. Perhaps the most charming and unreserved musician to offer cultural commentary for the likes of Gucci Mane and Post Malone, he’s never seemed to be one to hold back. With Big Fish Theory, Staples digs his heels deeper into his predilection for powerfully illustrating the black experience and the state of hip-hop, all while pushing his sound further into club and dance music. Of any album this year, Big Fish Theory is the one to truly push your system to its limits. The album title evokes the phrase “big fish in a small pond” and Staples is quickly establishing himself as a rapper with fewer and fewer peers.

FOUR TET // New Energy

Kieran Hebden started off the first half of 2017 on social media channels dropping cryptic, puzzling hints at new music. He likes to keep his audience guessing. With New Energy, he does it again. The album is a hybrid of his early ambient work with his more recent forays into club-style beat mastery. The result is a lush, exquisite work of a sound collage artist with complete control over his elements. New Energy is an exciting chapter in the story of Four Tet that hints at even more exciting work yet to unfold.

BENJAMIN BOOKER // Witness

Booker’s raspy voice is remarkably soothing. The lead single on Witness (which shares its title with that of the album) is a collaboration with R&B legend Marvin Staples. The song’s lyrics could have been pulled right from the headlines: “See we thought that today your heart would take flight / But I know you're feeling so cold.” Lead vocalist Jacob Bannon made it a personal priority to be heard and understood this time around, while still pushing his vocals into cord shredding territory. Every instrument is mathematically precise and the band syncs together almost mechanically. When Bannon screams, “You don’t know what my pain feels like,” you want to scream along with him. The Dusk In Us is a masterful metal album that plays with the ideas of fatherhood, pacifism and empathy. The result is a beautiful, emotionally fulfilling and absolutely cathartic record.

CONVERGE // The Dusk In Us

Storied metalcore band Converge released their first album in five years in 2017, and it found them at possibly their most accessible. The Dusk In Us is loud, fast and full of wild time signatures, but moments of clarity bubble up through the noise. Lead vocalist Jacob Bannon made it a personal priority to be heard and understood this time around, while still pushing his vocals into cord shredding territory. Every instrument is mathematically precise and the band syncs together almost mechanically. When Bannon screams, “You don’t know what my pain feels like,” you want to scream along with him. The Dusk In Us is a masterful metal album that plays with the ideas of fatherhood, pacifism and empathy. The result is a beautiful, emotionally fulfilling and absolutely cathartic record.

MUSIC

This year in its defense.

BAMBU // Party Worker

BAMBU, who spent the past couple of years carving out a special place in the rap universe all for himself. Perhaps the most charming and unreserved musician to offer cultural commentary for the likes of Gucci Mane and Post Malone, he’s never seemed to be one to hold back. With Big Fish Theory, Staples digs his heels deeper into his predilection for powerfully illustrating the black experience and the state of hip-hop, all while pushing his sound further into club and dance music. Of any album this year, Big Fish Theory is the one to truly push your system to its limits. The album title evokes the phrase “big fish in a small pond” and Staples is quickly establishing himself as a rapper with fewer and fewer peers.

FOUR TET // New Energy

Kieran Hebden started off the first half of 2017 on social media channels dropping cryptic, puzzling hints at new music. He likes to keep his audience guessing. With New Energy, he does it again. The album is a hybrid of his early ambient work with his more recent forays into club-style beat mastery. The result is a lush, exquisite work of a sound collage artist with complete control over his elements. New Energy is an exciting chapter in the story of Four Tet that hints at even more exciting work yet to unfold.

BENJAMIN BOOKER // Witness

Booker’s raspy voice is remarkably soothing. The lead single on Witness (which shares its title with that of the album) is a collaboration with R&B legend Marvin Staples. The song’s lyrics could have been pulled right from the headlines: “See we thought that today your heart would take flight / But I know you're feeling so cold.” Lead vocalist Jacob Bannon made it a personal priority to be heard and understood this time around, while still pushing his vocals into cord shredding territory. Every instrument is mathematically precise and the band syncs together almost mechanically. When Bannon screams, “You don’t know what my pain feels like,” you want to scream along with him. The Dusk In Us is a masterful metal album that plays with the ideas of fatherhood, pacifism and empathy. The result is a beautiful, emotionally fulfilling and absolutely cathartic record.

CONVERGE // The Dusk In Us

Storied metalcore band Converge released their first album in five years in 2017, and it found them at possibly their most accessible. The Dusk In Us is loud, fast and full of wild time signatures, but moments of clarity bubble up through the noise. Lead vocalist Jacob Bannon made it a personal priority to be heard and understood this time around, while still pushing his vocals into cord shredding territory. Every instrument is mathematically precise and the band syncs together almost mechanically. When Bannon screams, “You don’t know what my pain feels like,” you want to scream along with him. The Dusk In Us is a masterful metal album that plays with the ideas of fatherhood, pacifism and empathy. The result is a beautiful, emotionally fulfilling and absolutely cathartic record.

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RED BARAAT // Bhangra Pirates
Brooklyn-based Red Baraat lets it rip — wild Bhangra music with a pounding beat and ska and punk influences. It’s music like nothing you have ever heard.

CHICANO BATMAN // Freedom is Free
Freedom is Free conjures the smooth rhythms of ’70s soul and the loungy vibe of tropicalia, while its wild-toothed guitar riffs are reminiscent of psychedelic rock. Bardo Martinez, the band’s lead singer (who also helps out on guitar and tickles the organ) sings about romantic relationships, as well as wider social issues, as on “La Jura” (The Police) — a story of a neighbor shot by police. The record possesses what the poet Garcia Lorca might have called duende, “a mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains.”

LA SANTA CECILIA // Someday New
La Santa Cecilia is one of those bands that infuse their music with the spirit of political struggle. Their jazzy, cumbia rock rhythms make it sound exciting too.

KENDRICK LAMAR // DAMN.
Kendrick Lamar is, at this point, potentially the most important voice in all of music. He defies the expectations set in hip-hop while still paying respects to the traditions that paved the way. He speaks to the struggle and experience of real people in a way that reaches millions upon millions. Technically, he’s a master. Lyrically, he’s unmatched. Creatively, he’s miles ahead. DAMN. is Lamar’s finest work to date, which seems impossible and yet par for the course with him, as both To Pimp a Butterfly and good kid m.A.A.d. city stand among some of the best rap records ever made. DAMN. will be heralded as a time capsule of the fortitude of people in the nightmare that was 2017.

SZA // Ctrl
SZA’s debut record Ctrl feels deeply personal and refreshing in its honesty and candor. It documents a young woman navigating the world of relationships, love, sex and every insecurity that surfaces in between. Peppered with nuggets of wisdom from her mother, the entire album feels like a meeting of the minds of strong, independent women. Even when men show up for support, SZA never loses her place in the spotlight. This is probably the first instance that I’ve encountered where Kendrick Lamar is present on a track and comes even close to second. SZA’s talent is too big to be held back. Ctrl should instantly insert her into the conversation with Frank Ocean as the best and most inventive in the genre, whatever genre that may be. (R&B doesn’t really seem to fully encapsulate the lengths to which they’re taking their sounds.) SZA is the future.

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**Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon**

New Museum  
235 Bowery  
Through Jan. 21  

By Gena Hymowech  

Those who deviate from gender norms threaten, though gender itself isn’t an actual weapon. It may be seen as an affront to religion, politics or biology, but regardless of how you feel about it, stopping change is a useless hobby. Queer and women’s liberation were huge movements, and those begot others. In 1993, gender’s patron saint David Bowie released a song called “Hallo Spaceboy.” “Do you like boys or girls? It’s confusing these days,” he sang. Even David Bowie could not imagine how much more confusing gender and sexuality would get. Or maybe gender and sexuality have become less confusing because now at least we have an expansive vocabulary to describe who we are.

That’s the result of one specific gender war. There have, of course, been others. Many have been fought via art — whether it was the Guerrilla Girls (active for over 30 years now) protesting the lack of women artists in museums; Judy Chicago inviting us to remember crucial feminist figures while we get comfortable with women’s genitalia in *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979); or Yoko Ono allowing random people to treat her body like an object in the 1964 performance work *Cut Piece*. None of these artists are in “Trigger,” though the exhibition shows the next generation is carrying the torch.

“Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon” explores how gender is used against us, and celebrates gender wins. It shows how flouting gender rules can be a tool to build greater understanding. The exhibition consumes almost the whole building of the New Museum, from the cellar through the fourth floor. Art is placed pretty much anywhere there is room for it, stuffed into the museum like so many toys in a stocking on Christmas Eve.

Mickalene Thomas is an exhibit highlight, but that shouldn’t surprise anyone who has followed her. Known for her pop art style and celebration of black women’s beauty, the lesbian artist traveled back to various time periods for her 2016 multimedia piece *Me as Mase*. “A man has always wanted to lay me down, but he never wanted to pick me up,” Eartha Kitt confesses in an audio interview that is the piece’s heart. She speaks of discrimination from mothers who “would rather [their boys] marry trash than marry someone of color.” As Kitt is talking we see Thomas, Grace Jones and Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman (a Khoisan woman who performed for white audiences in various 19th century European “freak shows”) displayed on 12 screens. Visually, the piece reminds one of looking into a kaleidoscope. The contrast of Kitt’s story against images of Thomas and Jones — women who were able to come after her because of her — is moving. Thomas is speaking to us, but it also feels like she’s speaking directly to her late idol, showing her how beautiful and worthwhile she is.

Gender-fluid performer Justin Vivian Bond found an icon in Karen Graham, a former model for Estee Lauder, and created two pastel and pencil artworks of her in 1979 and 1980, when Bond was just a teen. The artist also went on to reference her in *My Mother | My Self* (2014-present). The museum shows watercolors, wallpaper, a recreation of a living room, and a performance space decorated like the outside of a movie premiere, all from that same project. Bond is next to Graham in portraits that have a creepy *Single White Female* edge to them. These practically dare the viewer to look for the difference between cis and trans beauty, and the conclusion you reach is that there is no difference. Beauty is beauty. Close your eyes as you sit in the living room and you can see Bond there too, sketching those pieces of Graham, yearning for a more authentic life. There is a record player and the album on tap is by Bond, showing the dream came true for this gender warrior.

Despite these and other excellent pieces, “Trigger” as a whole does not deliver — not with a thorough investigation of feminist and lesbian movements, not with a long, hard look at current events and gender. There are two sculptures from 2011, *Table for One* (at the sad cafe) and *I’m Every Woman I Ever Met* by Anicka Yi. In *Every Woman* pearls have been vacuum-packed, a commentary on Chelsea Manning. I would have never in a million years guessed Yi’s was the subject.

The exhibit is crying out to be separated by theme. Editing would have been welcome, too. When there are so many artistic voices, it starts to feel like a talk show in which everyone is speaking on top of each other.

When you come right down to it, “Trigger” is a pat on the back, a way to show how cutting edge the New Museum is. If that’s all you want from your art, fine. I’m going to need a lot more.
T

hink of this book as a basket of deplorables. It’s thick on illuminating descriptions of renascent white nationalists, gun-enamored militia posesseurs, conspiracy-theory mongers, Ku Klux Klansmen and women, Christian Identityarians and proto-Nazis benefitting from and legitimized by the sor
did presidency of Donald Trump. It’s thin on explaining why such phenomena persist or have arisen as political thuggery in 21st-century America.

Journalist David Neiwert’s Alt-Right: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump is certainly required reading. He’s a widely respected expert on the American far right, author of five previous books on the right and repression of immigrants, as well as a frequent guest on CNN and MSNBC and a con
tributor to the Washington Post. The book’s breadth of detail is exhaustive and almost singular in focusing on the racist far-right movement that has often been presumed dead, but got a jolt of growth hormones from the Trump campaign, who main
streamed what Neiwert calls their “eliminativist rhetoric” as applied to immigrants, people of color and Jews. Some even refer to Trump as “Glorious Leader,” language the author doesn’t harp on but that harksens back to the fuhrerprinzip, or notion of the leader as above all law. Neiwert also notes the manifold funding of far-right causes from wealthy grandees like the Co
ors family and the Koch brothers.

Where Neiwert is at his best is in charting and quantifying the mainstreaming of white-nationalist ideas, where even Nazis were free to join and lead Tea Party efforts. Teabagger ideology was broadcast not just by lunatics like Alex Jones, obvious rac
ists like David Duke and pervasive social-media trolls, but by seemingly respectable Fox News. The Oathkeepers, in effect a revived ’90s-style militia, could masquerade and be accepted as “just another community-watch organization.”

Trump’s condemnation of “dangerous Mexicans” and his fancied immigrant crime wave won him unwavering support from white nationalists, including Nazi wannabe Andrew Ang
lin, who wrote on his website “The Daily Stormer” (named af
fer a fanatical 1930s Nazi newspaper!), “I urge all readers of this site to do whatever they can to make Donald Trump president.” (Luke O’Brien also ably profiles Anglin in the December 2017 Atlantic.) Peter Brimelow’s white-nationalist website, vodore.com followed suit, headlining “We Are All Donald Trump Now,” while Richard Spencer’s Radix Journal, in acknowledg
ing it considered Trump “a troll,” claimed he was their troll. “We need someone who can break open public debate,” Spen
cer wrote. “The fact that Trump himself is part of this same farce is utterly irrelevant.”

“White people are realizing they are becoming strangers in their own nation and they do not have a major political voice speaking for them,” Rachell Pendergraf, a national organizer of the Knights Party of the Ku Klux Klan, told Neiwert. “Trump is one example of the alternative-right candidate [whom] Knights Party members and supporters have been looking for. And we feel that through continued grassroots mo
bilization, more candidates will arise who will speak out for white Christian America.”

As Neiwert commented, “All the long-sup
pressed hatreds and resentments, all the deep anger and black fears about the nation and the changing shape of American society, came bubbling up and bursting into pub
lic view in predictably ugly ways. Trump’s rhetoric seem
ingly gave permission for the unleashing of an eliminationist
set.” Meanwhile, the right-wing media set the scene by “creating a self-affirming community.”

Alt-Right: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump is a thorough review. It’s not the first work to posit the connec
tion between Trump and the mainstreaming of white nation
alist movements; Neiwert and Sarah Pouner anticipated some of the book’s revelations in an October 2016 article in Mother Jones, as did Andrew Marantz’s October 2017 New Yorker profile of fascist shock-jock and virulent Jew-hater Mike Enoch. But Neiwert’s book masterfully exposes so many of the inter
stices between Trump, the far-right nationalists and the toxic manipulators of social media, each feeding off the others.

The book, however, never tries to give a theoretical explana
tion of why such hateful ideas festers. Why, for example, does a movement so tied to Christian Identityans ignore Jesus’s key injunction that “what you do unto the least of you, you do unto me?” Why the fetishistic clinging to a “white” identity and a “white European heritage”? Neiwert does digests briefly to explore a useful distinction by the psychologist Robert Alt
meyer between authoritarian “followers” and “dominators,” the former looking only for order and peace, while the lat
ter last for power. That might be the beginning of a useful discussion, but it would be aided by referring to some stan
dard works on authoritarianism, such as Theodor Adorno’s The Authoritarian Personality and Wilhelm Reich’s The Mass Psychology of Fascism.

For all its keen attention to right-wing movements—much of Neiwert’s sourcing is augmented by the excellent work of the Southern Poverty Law Center — the book is decidedly apoliti
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REVEREND BILLY'S
TRUMP HELP HOTLINE

Dear Reverend Billy,

I’m stunned by the greed and the destructiveness of the Republican and their big money backers as they pursue their tax cut scam. What is wrong with these people?

— Harold, Dyker Heights

They want us to be afraid all time, because they are afraid all the time. Barely able to breathe, they drive through suburbs of traumatic stress, worship today’s stock price on Bloomberg screens, and keep their children in a state of utter confusion as they prepare for the mass death of Christ’s Eternal Life.

But love is poppin’ out all over. When Colin Kaepernick’s knee hit the grass, concussions of hate began to heal. Let’s dream with extraordinary folks). They speak of terrible wounds, but they are giving us a new, honest world.

... ...

Dear Reverend Billy,

In December, I see Christmas tree stands all over New York. The smell of fresh trees in the city air is quite pleasant. Is the city dweller’s fondness for placing a Christmas trees in their home one more example of consumerism run amok? Or does it reflect a healthy impulse to connect with the natural world?

— Marci, Jersey City

The fading smell of factory pine trees is what’s left of the ancient ritual of the Winter Solstice. The birth of love on the darkest, longest night of the year is the spark that makes the time of Spring.

Bringing the forest into the center of your home is also an act of honoring last year’s Spring, when the trees were full of sap and sexed-up buds. Our lovers gather in our memory and we thank them and then we look out into the Fabulous Unknown and we accept gratefully the responsibility of life!

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