Redefining Justice

Tiffany Cabán has transformed the Queens DA race. Now she wants to win it.

By Libby Rainey, P12
COMMUNITY CALENDAR

JUNE

THU JUNE 15
TUE–FRI, 1PM–8PM • $5 EXHIBITION: RACE, MYTH, ART, AND JUSTICE
Twelve photographers engage with the premise of “race” as a social construct rooted in myth, while simultaneously interrogating its profound implications and indignities on our 21st-century lives.
CARIBBEAN CULTURAL CENTER
120 E. 125th St., Mhnthn

THU JUNE 16
THU–SAT 7PM–9PM, SAT 3PM–5PM • $25–$30 THEATER: THE HAUNTING OF LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA
Ishmael Reed’s new play brings to the forefront those characters who are absent from Hamilton, The Revolution: slaves, Native Americans, indentured servants and Harriet Tubman.
UYORICAN POETS CAFE
236 E. 3rd St., Mhnthn

THU JUNE 19
TUE & THU, 6:30PM–7:30PM • FREE EXERCISE: YOGA IN THE PARK Stretch, breathe, and find your inner peace. Bring a mat.
RANDALL’S ISLAND PARK
20 Randall’s Island Park, Mhnthn

JUNE 3–JUNE 9
MON, THU–SUN, times vary • $40 & up PERFORMANCE: EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED AND WOULD HAPPEN Part-performance, part-construction site, this groundbreaking work from German composer Henrik Goebbels is a poetic re-enactment of a Europe always on the verge of collapse, only to be rebuilt as if nothing had happened.
PARK AVENUE ARMY
643 Park Ave., Mhnthn

THU JUNE 6
6:30PM–9PM • FREE MEETING: THE FIGHT FOR LATER CARE ABORTION
Come learn about this commonly misunderstood type of abortion care and why it’s critical in the fight for abortion rights and bodily autonomy.
MAYDAY SPACE
176 St Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

THU JUNE 6
7PM–10PM • $15 SCREENING: CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON
All hell breaks loose when a group of scientists led by ichthyologist Dr. David Reed decides to capture a prehistoric gill-man for study, only to find it taking a King Kong-like fancy to the doctor’s girlfriend, Kay.
THE METROGRAPH
2537 Broadway, Mnh

THU JUNE 6
8PM–12AM • $15–$35 PARTY: PAPI JUICE PRESENTS BROOKLYN PRIDE
Kick off Brooklyn Pride with Brooklyn’s beloved dance party centering queer and trans people of color. Enjoy sets from resident DJs Oscar Ni and Adam R. with special guests Dee Diggs, Mazurbate, and Adam R. with special guests Dee Diggs, Mazurbate, and Zenobia, plus drinks and curator tours of the exhibition “Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall” happen-
THE JEWSH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., Mhnthn

THU JUNE 13
6:30PM–8PM • FREE TALK: MAPPING BLOOMSDAY
In honor of Bloomsday, an international commemoration of Joyce’s novel
on the day it takes place in 1904, experts examine the many ways in which the author’s masterful work was inspired by, and functions as, a map.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Avenue at 42nd St., Mhn

THU JUNE 13
7PM–9PM • FREE
PERFORMANCE: NYC DOES DADA
Prepare for an evening of disruptive, challenging and controversial art and writing hosted by Three Rooms Press. The event will feature performances by modern-day Dadaists whose work continues the spirit of the avant-garde art movement sprung from the horror of World War I. Costumes encouraged. (LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St., Mhn

SUN JUNE 16
7PM–9:30PM • Donations welcome
READING: CARTA MONIR WON’T STOP SCREAMING
Award-winning cartoonist Carta Monir reads some of her most intimate work, and debuts a new zine. Content warning for child abuse, gender dysphoria, and parental death.
BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE, CAFE, & ACTIVIST CENTER
172 Allen St., Mhn

SUN JUNE 16
8PM • $75–$99.50
MUSIC: WU-TANG CLAN: 8PM • $75–$99.50
SUN JUNE 16
10PM–1AM • FREE
PARTY: DISCOVOGUE WITH ESCORT, DJ LINA & MIKEQ
DAMROSCH PARK
60 Lincoln Center Plaza, Mhn

FORD AMPHITHEATER
AT CONEY ISLAND
BOARDWALK
3052 W. 21st St., Bklyn

JUNE 20–JULY 8
Dates and times vary • $12
FILM: PRISON IM-AGES: INCARCERATION AND THE CINEMA
Spinning the 1950s to today, this series brings together a broad selection of films, each reflecting different aesthetic and critical relationships to the prison institution: from provocative, activist documentaries to inmate-made films, from commercial exploitation cinema to classic escape dramas, and more.
ANTHOLGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., Mhn

SAT JUNE 22
1PM • FREE
PARADE: MERMAID PARADE
A one-of-a-kind celebration of ancient mythology and honky-tonk style, the Mermaid Parade is a map.
CONEY ISLAND
Surf Ave. & W. 21St., Bklyn

SUN JUNE 23
10AM–5PM • FREE
FAMILY DAY: ALL AGES PLAY AT CONEY ISLAND
CONEY ISLAND
Surf Ave. & W. 21St., Bklyn

SAT JUNE 22
6:30PM–8PM • $35
PERFORMANCE: ANDY SUMMERS, A CERTAIN STRANGENESS
Guitarist Andy Summers weaves an audiovisual spell by combining surreal imagery and innovative guitar techniques.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 Fifth Ave., Mhn

THE JUNE 21
6PM–11:30PM • $18–$22
PARTY: DISCOVOGUE WITH ESCORT, DJ LINA & MIKEQ
DAMROSCH PARK
60 Lincoln Center Plaza, Mhn

MON JUNE 24
6PM–9PM • FREE
PERFORMANCE: SNACK TIME
Time to get gussied up and go back to that one magical, lustrous, and unforgettable night at this variety show, featuring drag, burlesque, music, comedy and so much more.
STARR BAR
214 Starr St., Bklyn

THE JUNE 27
8PM–11PM
PARTY: DISCOVOGUE WITH ESCORT, DJ LINA & MIKEQ
DAMROSCH PARK
60 Lincoln Center Plaza, Mhn

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A TRUE SENSE OF PRIDE, P4
Queer liberation activists say it’s time to protest, not just party.

BOZO PUBLISHER HIT WITH BOYCOTT, P6
Yemen-run bodegas are making the NY Post pay for its Islamophobic reporting.

BRIEFING ROOM, P7
There’s lead in the water, the planet is on fire, a killer cop is on trial, the mayor is running for president. All this and more…

ON CALL, P8
In NYC and across the country, bosses are increasingly relying on temp workers.

SUNNYSIDE UP, P10
Plans for a sprawling new development in this Queens neighborhood have locals up in arms.

THE LAW ON OUR SIDE, P12
Meet Tiffany Cabán, the public defender who wants to be a people’s DA for Queens.

FACEBOOK ON STEROIDS, P15
Mark Zuckerberg says his company is reforming itself, actually it’s become even more diabolical.

ALL I WANT FOR FATHER’S DAY IS PLANET EARTH, P18
Reflections on parenting in an era of global warming.

GAY OLD BROOKLYN, P20
A new book examines the borough’s oft overlooked queer history.

AFTER AN UPRISING, P21
On the 50th anniversary of the revolt, a new exhibition highlights art made post-Stonewall.

DREAMING THROUGH RAZOR WIRE, P22
Poet Deborah Tobola takes readers into the California prison where she taught creative writing.

THE TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE, P23
Advice columnist Rev. Bily on what happens when your movement goes mainstream and more.

HOTLINE, P23
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ON CALL, P8
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IN THIS ISSUE
Frustrated that the annual New York City Gay Pride parade has become dominated by corporate floats, a group called the Reclaim Pride Coalition announced in May that it will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots with a separate march. Reclaim Pride’s Queer Liberation March will begin 2.5 hours before the official parade on June 30, and will not allow either corporate or police contingents.

“The use of the word ‘parade’ signals a celebration,” said Reclaim Pride member Leslie Cagan, a longtime activist who organized some of the biggest protests in the city’s recent history, against the Iraq War and the climate crisis. “We are calling this a march because while we certainly have things to celebrate… there is a lot more fight to be had.”

The organization’s biggest complaint is that the official parade has become more like a corporate party and less about politics, community solidarity and liberation. Last year’s parade had more than 150 corporate floats, and this year’s corporate sponsors include T-Mobile, Mastercard, TD Bank, Delta Airlines, Target, HSBC, Skyy vodka and the Omnicom Group corporate-marketing agency. Last year, Heritage of Pride, the official parade organizers, instituted a policy that limited community contingents to 200 marchers, while corporate sponsors were allowed up to 800.

For corporations, says Reclaim Pride member Robin Scott, a trans Brooklyn-based designer, the event “has stopped being something that is dangerous for them and just something that is a smart marketing move.”

Tensions have escalated since the Trump administration came into office. In 2017, a number of community groups organized a Resistance contingent to protest the administration’s anti-LGBTQ+ policy changes. But last year, Heritage of Pride tried to ban them from participating in the parade, Cagan says. The Resistance contingent was eventually allowed to march, but at the back of the parade, behind all of the corporate floats, starting five hours after it kicked off and after all of the live broadcasting was over.

“We bring what we think is a more comprehensive view, not only about the queer struggle, but how we are part of it and in relation to oth-
er struggles,” Cagan says. “The queer movement doesn’t even talk about liberation anymore, let alone positioning itself as part of many communities.” Reclaim Pride met with Heritage of Pride several times earlier this year to encourage it to incorporate some of these concerns in the parade, she adds, “and they said no.”

“The reason the New York City Pride march matters is because Stonewall happened here,” says Reclaim Pride member William Dobbs, a veteran gay-rights activist who worked with Cagan organizing demonstrations in the 2000s and was a member of the Occupy Wall Street press team in 2011. The 1969 Stonewall riots, which began when police raided a gay bar in Greenwich Village and patrons resisted arrest, were not the first time LGBTQ+ people resisted or protested, but catalyzed a larger, sustained movement. “Without the organizing that Stonewall sparked, this event would have been a footnote in history,” Dobbs says.

That, he explains, means that the Pride march should be about supporting justice and human rights, not banks and fast-food chains. “How are you going to get economic justice when you are dancing with Fortune 500 companies?” Dobbs asks.

Another of Reclaim Pride’s concerns is the police presence in the official parade. Last year, Heritage of Pride incorporated a police contingent, which saw a large number of officers acting as official marchers. “Not just out and gay officers, but an official police contingent, with officers in full uniform and with weapons,” Cagan says.

That, Reclaim Pride believes, is incongruent with the parade’s original mission, which, after all, commemorates LGBTQ+ resistance to police brutality. No one knows who at Stonewall threw the first bottle or was the first one to kick back, but many in the bar and the crowd were transgender women, drag queens and more subtly gender-nonconforming “scare queens” and “flame queens.” Among them were Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, transgender women of color who emerged as leaders as the gay liberation movement grew. Those issues haven’t gone away: A 2015 survey of more than 27,000 trans people by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that 58 percent of those who reported having an interaction with police in the previous year said they’d been mistreated, from being repeatedly referred to by the wrong gender to being forced to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest.

“The parade was never just about pride, says Reclaim’s Robin Scott, but is about political action. The “corporatization of Pride has gotten in the way of that mission.” By holding the Queer Liberation March, she adds, Reclaim Pride is attempting to revive the community spirit of the first Gay Pride parade in 1970 and to put the politics back into the event.

“Most of us would say victories like the right to be in the army, or the right to marriage — those are not the kind of victories we are talking about,” says Cagan. “We would like a more comprehensive and thorough analysis of the institutions that oppress people.”

On June 30 at 9:30 a.m., the Reclaim Pride marchers will attempt to reignite that revolutionary spirit and desire for change, not just inclusion, by taking the same route as the 1970 march, then called the Christopher Street Liberation Day March — beginning on Christopher Street near the Stonewall Inn, and going up Sixth Avenue to Central Park.

“It’s about structural change, instead of just a seat at the table,” says Dobbs. “I hope the march sends a message about justice, about something that’s as big as the sky: liberation.”
Bounced From The Bodegas
Yemeni Grocers Ditch ‘Racist’ NY Post

By Ben Weiss

In 2007, the New York Post ran a photograph of Debbie Almontaser on its front cover, describing her as a “sheik.” At the time, Almontaser was caught up in a controversy that soon blew over, but not before costing her her job as principal at the Khalil Gibran International Academy. Her resignation was in no small part thanks to the tabloid’s reporting, which accused her of running the Brooklyn-based, Arabic-language school as a kind of radical madrasa.

Flash forward to 2019: Almontaser now heads the Yemeni American Merchants Association (YAMA) and she says the Post has used its front page to attack the Muslim-American community again — this time, by placing an out-of-context quote from Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a practicing Muslim, over a photograph of the World Trade Center in flames.

“I was just absolutely outraged,” Almontaser tells The Independent.

While she and other Muslim Americans didn’t explicitly challenge the Post in 2007, they are this go around. Almontaser’s nephew, Mohammed Almontaser, and approximately 900 Yemeni-American bodega owners have banded together in an indefinite boycott of the publication.

Among their demands, as reported by Bklyner when the boycott kicked off in April: that the Post “change their cheap and sensational tabloids that undermine national unity and [incite] violence and hate for the sole purpose of circulation and sales against minority communities.”

“They’re very racist,” said Mohammed, 29, speaking with The Indy at Downtown Gourmet Deli, one of his four bodegas.

An analysis of the Post’s archives backs up both aunt and nephew. Sorting through thousands of articles published over the past five years, The Indy found that the Post was almost twice as likely to use words like “terrorist” or “extremist” when referring to Muslims rather than when referencing Christians.

The publication’s lack of engagement has added fuel to the Yemeni-American boycott’s fire. What was planned as a limited 30-day affair has turned into a protest with no end in sight.

Despite the Post’s silence, the drop in revenue is probably getting their attention. With 900 stores currently participating in the boycott, Almontaser estimates the newspaper lost about $270,000 during the boycott’s first two months, based on the estimate that bodegas sell between 10 and 15 papers per day for $1 each and split the proceeds. The Post typically sells about 150,000 copies of its print edition a day.

Of the approximately 10,000 bodegas in New York City, 4,000 to 6,000 are Yemeni-American owned, so there’s plenty of room for the boycott to spread, explains Almontaser.

The effort to boycott the Post isn’t limited to the Yemeni-American community, either. YAMA has formed a coalition with Black Lives Matter’s New York chapter, Rise and Resist, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and other anti-hate groups. The organization is also reaching out to other ethnic groups in the city who sell newspapers to form a broader boycott, including the Bengali and Dominican bodega operators.

Her nephew, Mohammed, though, needs no more convincing. “I don’t want them in my store. I’m never gonna deal with them again.”

Hate By The Numbers
Percentage of NY Post articles from 2014 to 2019 that allude to Muslims and Christians respectively and also include the following terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalism</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbarism</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanatic</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militant</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremism</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jihad</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL ARCHIVES
**BRIEFING ROOM**

**STILL NO JUSTICE FOR ERIC GARNER**

The NYPD disciplinary hearing for Daniel Pantaleo, the white officer captured on video placing Eric Garner in a fatal chokehold in 2014, continues to drag on. One of the more recent hold-ups in the delay-plagued trial came after the defense asked presiding Judge Rosemarie Maldonado for a recess so that Pantaleo could use one of his vacation days. The judge initially refused but eventually granted a two-day recess when Pantaleo’s lawyers couldn’t produce the witnesses they called. As The Indy went to press, the trial was in the midst of a two-week hiatus, because a Missouri-based medical examiner expected to dispute the cause of Garner’s death — homicide — was unavailable. A Staten Island grand jury declined to indict Pantaleo and a federal civil rights investigation into Garner’s death petered out, making the disciplinary hearing the only legal setting at which Pantaleo will be held accountable for his actions. If found guilty, he could be fired or, at a minimum, lose vacation time for killing the black father of six.

**DYING FOR CLIMATE ACTION**

Youth activists concerned with climate change took part in mass school walkouts on May 24. According to organizers, 1.8 million people participated in the protest, up from an earlier climate strike in March in which 1.5 million people took part. In New York, several hundred children and teens marched from Columbus Circle to Times Square where they staged a die-in. Young activists laid on the pavement for 11 minutes, representing the 11 years scientists say the world has to slash greenhouse gas emissions before the catastrophic effects of global warming are irreversible.

**NOT SO REFRESHING**

Early results of lead tests conducted at the city’s public drinking fountains indicate concentrations of the contaminate exceeding the federal safety threshold at a number of water sources. Lead levels from one fountain at the Bronx’s Pelham Bay Park were 50 times the federal standard of 15 parts per billion (ppb). At Cunningham Park in Queens the water was 23 times above the limit. The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is conducting the tests as part of the LeadFreeNYC campaign initiated by the Mayor’s office. So far about 500 fountains have been tested with nearly 5 percent containing dangerous amounts of the metal known to cause learning disabilities in children and heart disease in adults. Testing on all park fountains is expected to conclude by June 15. Regular updates are available at nycgovparks.org.

**HOMETOWN ZERO**

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced he is making a presidential bid May 16, making him one of 23 Democrats seeking the job. Seventy-six percent of New Yorkers do not believe the mayor should run, an April Quinnipiac University Poll found. Meanwhile, zero percent of Democratic voters in the early primary states of Iowa and New Hampshire say they would vote for him, according to virtually every major polling agency. While the mayor campaigns out of state, school segregation, deteriorating public housing and homelessness are among the pressing issues awaiting him when he decides to return. Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan, an unelected bureaucrat few New Yorkers have heard of, will run the city while the Blaz is away.

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Disposable Labor: My Journey Inside the $450 Billion-Per-Year Temporary-Help Industry

By David Van Arsdale

In the waiting room of an employment agency in Queens, laborers gather to be dispatched to warehouses and factories in New Jersey and upstate New York. Only their names are recorded before white vans arrive and the workers step in, cramming into seats and crouching on the floor to be transported to the day’s job. The job might last a day or two, and the agency acts as the workers’ employer. It deducts transportation costs and the fees it charges for the job from their paychecks, which they provide.

Other types of employment agencies record the skills and personal information of workers before attempting to arrange a more permanent position for them. In this situation, the agencies make money through some combination of a charge to the worker or a charge to the business client for supplying labor.

Once called an intelligence office, this type of hiring agency helped launch the at-will employment relationship in feudal Europe and one of the oldest newspapers in the world, La Gazette, which began in Paris in 1630 by advertising the skills of servants. During the British Empire, intelligence offices proliferated in London to supply the unemployed and migrants to the colonies as servants, in intelligence offices mimicked the English proto-industrial workers and to crew on colonial ships. In colonial times, intelligence offices were called the White Slave Traffic Act, sought to criminalize the trafficking of women (mostly immigrants) into brothels and prostitution, which some intelligence offices were involved in. In a 1914 referendum, voters in Washington State outlawed employment agencies, given their mistreatment and abuse of laborers. Around the same time, unions, particularly dockworkers and the building trades, began expanding hiring halls to serve as a fairer way of connecting employers and workers. The staffing industry’s lobbying power has grown too, helping ensure that “flexible” employment policies remain the law of the land. It is thanks to these lax labor regulations that I was able to cramp into vans in Queens and land on factory floors upstairs and in New Jersey, where I manufactured and packaged goods with hundreds of other temps without one manager knowing my name.

Most of my colleagues had migrated earlier in their lives from further south in the Americas. They depend on the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting slavery of workers when demand requires more labor and to dump them after that demand is met — without providing a single employee benefit — and at no cost beyond paying the agency.

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Workers at large pay the price. The greater the ease at which employers can hire flexible workforces with minimal rights, the more they are used, and the greater the pressure on businesses to compete by using this model, thus destablizing traditional employment and associated rights and privileges on a grand scale.

Donald Trump’s Department of Labor has come down strongly on the side of reducing regulations that limit employers’ power to set the terms of how they hire workers. The department recently issued an opinion letter siding with an employment agency and another siding with Uber, stating that their respective workers are independent contractors, not employees. Trump’s appointees on the National Labor Relations Board are also trying to reverse an Obama-era ruling that Browning-Ferris was legally a “joint employer” of workers who were technically employed by a temp agency.

If Uber and hiring agencies are not responsible as employers, and the business clients of the agencies are not responsible either, workers are left without basic protections and rights, including minimum wage and overtime pay, various health and safety standards, and the right to collectively bargain for better working conditions.

This is not the first time this has occurred in the United States, but there are precedents for reform. During the British Empire, intelligence offices proliferated in London to supply the unemployed and migrants to the colonies as servants, in intelligence offices mimicked the English proto-industrial workers and to crew on colonial ships. In colonial times, intelligence offices were called the White Slave Traffic Act, sought to criminalize the trafficking of women (mostly immigrants) into brothels and prostitution, which some intelligence offices were involved in. In a 1914 referendum, voters in Washington State outlawed employment agencies, given their mistreatment and abuse of laborers. Around the same time, unions, particularly dockworkers and the building trades, began expanding hiring halls to serve as a fairer way of connecting employers and workers. Various benevolent and worker-run associations have also existed as alternatives. Revising these solutions would take us much further toward truly helping working families, rather than granting business more power to hire workers on one-sided standards.

David Van Arsdale, author of The Poverty of Work, is a sociologist and labor scholar. He can be reached at theworkingbeat@gmail.com or followed on Twitter @theworkingbeat.
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THE DARK SIDE OF SUNNYSIDE YARD
QUEENS MEGA-PROJECT MET WITH SUSPICION

By Derek Ludovici

I t a New York City Economic Development Corpora-
tion proposal goes through, western Queens would become
the site of a massive development eight times the size of the recently completed Hudson Yards. Like Hudson Yards, the project would require building a deck over an active railyard: Sunnyside Yard, a 180-acre site owned mainly by Amtrak and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, now used for train storage, Long Island Railroad tracks, and Amtrak’s routes to Westchester County and New England.

The new neighborhood built on top of that deck could hold 14,000 to 24,000 new market-rate units, according to an EDC feasibility study completed in 2017. “The initial phase of market-rate residential development at Sunnyside Yard could reach current price levels observed in the Court Square/Queens Plaza submarkets,” the study said. Residential condominium sale prices, it added, are expected to be comparable to those on the Long Island City waterfront, “given the level of amenities and finishes expected.”

Another 4,200 to 7,200 apartments would be permanently “affordable,” in order to receive tax breaks and gain permission to build taller under the de Blasio administration’s Mandatory Inclusionary Housing guidelines. What is “affordable” would be determined by the federal area median income for the metropolitan area, so those apartment residents actually could afford them.

The cost of building the deck is estimated at $16 to $19 billion, depending on what kind of structures are to be constructed on top of it. It would require reconfiguring the railyard, creating enough space between the tracks to build the deck supports. Larger towers would require additional planning, and it would cost more to anchor them to the deck or the ground below the platform.

Like the city and state effort to have Amazon build its satellite headquarters in Long Island City, the plan has drawn substantial opposition from area residents. The public meetings to discuss it have been very contentious. Because building on the site would be so expensive, “the only thing that would support its cost and still be lucrative for developers and investors would be luxury housing and national and international businesses,” says Emily Sharpe, a resident of Sunnyside and founder of Stop Sunnyside Yards.

Many don’t believe the project will actually deliver affordable housing. “Units promised never materialized, or the federal guidelines for setting the income brackets are much higher than most people can afford here,” says Joanne, an elderly resident of Sunnyside who asked that only her first name be used. “We’ve tried [looking] before when the first buildings went up in Long Island City, and the income rates were ridiculous.”

Accessibility and transit will also be major issues. The deck will sit up to three stories above Sunnyside. Most accessibility points will be pedestrian stairways, with fewer ways in and out for vehicles. The EDC study also suggests building a new station for the #7 subway line and the LIRR.

Another concern of residents is the environmental impact. The federal and state Environmental Protection Agency has named Amtrak and the LIRR as “potentially responsible parties” for the nearby Newtown Creek Superfund site. The EDC feasibility study also projected that the development would have 6.97 acres of public space such as parks per 1,000 residents, less than the city Environmental Quality Review target of 1.25 acres. It says that would be “equal to or above what is provided by other large-scale developments in New York City.”

Both the EDC and the lead consultant, Practice for Architecture and Urbanism, discount the feasibility study. “There is no plan for Sunnyside Yard — yet,” the project’s website says. “We are in the middle of an 18-month process to collectively develop a plan for the site and determine what would be built there over many decades.” The actual master plan, it goes on to say, will build “off the technical findings of the Feasibility Study” and take “a fresh look at the site in partnership with local and regional stakeholders to create affordable housing, open space, transportation, schools and more in Western Queens.”

Practice for Architecture founder Vishaan Chakrabarti, who headed the Department of City Planning’s Manhattan office during the Bloomberg administration, gave a similar answer to neighborhood residents at a public planning meeting March 26. Emily Sharpe calls meetings like that, supposedly to get input from neighborhood residents and businesspeople, “a sham.” “The EDC or Department of City Planning meet with residents and ‘stakeholders’ multiple times over the course of a year or so and keep a tally, which they frequently tour, and intimate that that means approval of their plan by the community,” she explains.

“Are we going to be a pale imitation of Midtown East?” asks local historian and Astoria resident Mitch Waxman. “The problem we have is Manhattan. Manhattan does not present the solution. Manhattan is how we ended up in the situation we are in right now municipally.”

“Part of the way that you get away with doing development projects in areas that you shouldn’t in north Brook-
lyn and western Queens” he adds, “is by creating a very narrow, almost looking-through-a-soda-straw view of the particular lot you want to build on, and you stop looking at things holistically in terms of transit, where the drainage and parts of the deck are going to go.”

As with the Amazon plan, local elected officials are also becoming suspicious of the proposed mega-development. “My issue is always the same, if they want to do this, they better explain to us first how the neighborhood is going to handle it,” state Sen. Michael Gianaris told residents April 6, in his mobile office at the Woodside Library. “How the trains are going to handle the people. Where the schools are going to be.”

“You are doing exactly what you need to be doing,” Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez told project opponents at that meeting, “because you are right. What happens is that we’ll go out and take that bold stance and as we saw [with Amazon] what happens is people turn around and try to slam you with ‘This is wrong. Everybody disagrees with you.’ I feel very confident in our position, because we know the community organized against it.”

The surrounding communities are gearing up for what could be a long fight. “Even many homeowners feel that the predicted increases in home values will not be worth living in the towers’ shadows,” says Sharpe.
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The Independent

Contested Queens District Attorney Race.

First, it was AOC. Now Tiffany Cabán, a Career Public Defender, Is Surging in the Hotly Contested Queens District Attorney Race.

By Laura Ransey

Tiffany Cabán stood in front of a crowd in Jackson Heights, megaphone in hand. It was the first beautiful day of spring, and families were gathered at Travers Park on 34th Avenue to protest a car dealership that was moving into the area. Cabán, a grassroots candidate with more volunteers, money and visibility. But it’s also an opportunity that had previously seemed unthinkable: “We're so used to operating in a politics of fear and ‘let's not make it worse’ that we don’t support and back the people we have, and we help people prosper. We deserve Tiffany Cabán.”

“We’re so used to operating in a politics of fear and ‘let’s not make it worse’ that we don’t support and back the people we have, and we help people prosper. We deserve Tiffany Cabán.”

The time was ripe for a candidate like Tiffany Cabán. The Queens DA office that for decades has sowed distrust in the most communities, if we are holding people first, over profits, always.”

The local candidate, known for making these reforms a reality. President Melinda Katz, who served six years in the Assembly and eight years on the City Council before being elected borough president and won of nearly $40 million.

Born to Puerto Rican parents, Cabán spent her childhood in Corona, Queens. “Who do you trust?” she asked in her closing statement.

In late May, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez spoke about the disparities in Queens that have long negatively impacted communities of color. “This is the epicenter of deportation in Queens.”

Continued on next page

Endorsements from grassroots organizations and local politicians begin to stack up. The community organizer has grown from dozens to hundreds.

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The contrast is pretty strong,” said Cabán’s campaign manager, Luke Harms. “The message has been an influence and it's working hard with Kate, but a lot of people have seen on the machine (first) and that we actually did.”

First, it was AOC. Now Tiffany Cabán, a Career Public Defender, Is Surging in the Hotly Contested Queens District Attorney Race.

Tiffany Cabán

When she decided to run, I said it would be a win if we're just moving the conversation to the experiences of my clients and their communities, if we're holding people first, to the first,” Cabán told The Independent. “What surprised me was we were out in the streets we got a place to stand and we got that.”

Just weeks before the June 23 primary, Tiffany Cabán has emerged as one of the top candidates in a field of seven contenders, all of whom are promising to reform the justice system. She has been on the road to becoming one of the most progressive prosecutors in the country, staging around 350 community events and a budget of nearly $40 million.

“Who do you trust?” she asked in her closing statement.

Tiffany Cabán speaks outside a Town Hall in Corona, Queens.

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Continued on next page
Tiffany Cabán

Continued from previous page

childhood playing at the Woodside Houses where her grandmother, a foster parent, lived. She experienced both the policing of her neighborhood and the transformative power of community-based solutions. When she was a child, her family allowed her grandfather, an alcohlic Korean War veteran who had physically abused her grandmother, to rejoin the family after a prolonged estrangement. He would tell Cabán stories, make her laugh and play guitar for her.

That relationship taught Cabán that people were not simply the sum of their worst actions. As she got older, she wondered what it might have meant for her family if there had been public services to help her grandfather when he returned home from combat traumatized. Instead, the main government presence in her neighborhood was often police.

Caban left New York to study at Penn State, and then earned her law degree back home at New York Law School. Despite being advised not to, she then became a public defender. She saw her clients trapped by the criminal-justice system. One man faced jail time for jumping a turnstile to get to a meeting with his parole officer, and spent more than a year in court fighting the charge. Another, who was struggling with his mental health, was arrested multiple times at the emergency room after going there seeking medical attention.

Caban returns to those stories again and again. Her voice tends to speed up as she rattles off examples of how the system has failed people she knows. When she talks about the reforms that she wants to implement, she slows down to make her case.

“This new way of prosecuting is actually the thing public defenders have been fighting for, for decades,” Cabán said. “A lot of these things are common sense.”

The result of the Queens DA race will likely depend on turnout. With community organizations behind her, Cabán’s campaign is following a model laid out by the prosecutors behind her, Cabán’s campaign is following a model laid out by the prosecutors.

The Queens DA race into the spotlight and mobilized more than 300 volunteers for canvases for Cabán at subway stations, schools, street corners and doorways for months. Some are veteran activists. Others were inspired by Ocasio-Cortez’s win.

“Our standard narratives about who wins and who needs to win are no longer gospel,” said Susan Kang, an associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Queens DSA member who has been regularly canvassed.

“Caban has the strongest volunteer base—that’s not questionable.”

Some of these volunteers gathered on a sunny Saturday in May in Cabán’s Jackson Heights campaign headquarters to prepare for a day of door-knocking. Sasha Weinstein, a Cabán staffer, was there advising volunteers on talking points.

“A lot of people don’t know that they can vote for district attorney. There’s this whole pre-conversation that you have to get to before talking about why Tiffany is good,” Weinstein says. “When you present the DA as this person (who) chooses which cases go through the system, you see this look on people’s faces that are like, ‘Yeah I do have opinions on this.’ We get to entirely redefine the DA in this race.”

Caban told The Indypendent that if she wins, she plans to throw out the typical metrics of success for prosecutors, such as percentage of convictions won, and instead judge them by their ability to reduce recidivism, decarcerate, and apply the law fairly regardless of class or race. She promises to create units within the office to release and clear the records of people incarcerated for offenses no longer being prosecuted, and end civil asset-forfeiture practices. She’ll also work with communities to distribute the more than $100 million the Queens DA has received from federal forfeiture seizures to local groups, using a participatory budgeting process.

“This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform our criminal justice system here in Queens and really be a model for the rest of the country,” Cabán said. “This is not a time for meering in the middle and incremental change. We can have restorative change right now, and we may not get this opportunity in our lifetimes again.”
By Renée Feltz

Tiffany Cabán’s attempt at an upset victory in the Queens District Attorney race comes as voters around the country have already elected other progressive prosecutors with platforms of police accountability and racial justice. Below we look at some of their efforts to dismantle the broken criminal justice system from the inside.

LARRY KRASNER
PHILADELPHIA

The push for criminal justice reform reached a turning point after outrage over police violence failed to result in accountability for killer cops in court. One of the earliest confirmations of the potential for change through the ballot box came in 2017, when Philadelphians with seven candidates for District Attorney to choose from elected a career criminal defense and civil rights attorney who had sued the police department more than 75 times on behalf of groups like Black Lives Matter.

Almost immediately after Larry Krasner took office in January 2018, he rolled out a series of policies described as “an effort to end mass incarceration.” He has since replaced dozens of old guard prosecutors with young radical lawyers, eliminated most cash bail, diverted low-level offenses from the justice system and charged crimes at a lower level.

Krasner now appears open to overturning more than one-third of the death sentences for the 45 Philadelphians on death row based on claims that they lacked effective lawyers, or should have been found intellectually disabled and ineligible for capital punishment.

One of his next priorities is to address correctional supervision in Philadelphia, where one in 22 adults were on probation or parole in late 2017 and 40 percent of the city’s jail population was held for related violations. Prosecutors have sought shorter sentences under Krasner and he says parole “should not be longer than the period of incarceration.”

RACHEL ROLLINS
BOSTON

In Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which includes Boston, the push for criminal justice reform led last November to the election of Rachel Rollins, a longtime lawyer who campaigned on ending cash bail and said non-violent property crimes were often “crimes of desperation.”

Soon after taking office in January she issued a 65-page memo mandating that low-level offenses such as trespassing should “always be declined, even when attached to another charge,” along with shoplifting, larceny, disorderly conduct, possession of alcohol for minors, possession of non-marijuana drugs, destruction of property, breaking and entering to escape cold or sleep, driving with a suspended license and other charges. In an accompanying statement, Rollins said: “We start with a presumption that, in most cases, these charges don’t need to be prosecuted. Dismissal, diversion, treatment and services are much more often the appropriate outcomes.”

This prompted the National Police Association to file a complaint with the state’s bar association that she had “authorized certain illegal conduct.” But an analysis of Rollins’ first 100 days in office conducted by CourtWatch and co-sponsored by the ACLU found nearly half of the cases it observed in municipal court involved charges from Rollins’ “do not prosecute” list and that assistant district attorneys were still making bail requests.

WHO ELSE IS NEXT?

In addition to Tiffany Caban in Queens, Chesa Boudin in San Francisco appears to have a chance of being elected District Attorney on a progressive platform in the country’s first open race for the position in more than 100 years. The job was a springboard for Democratic senator and presidential hopeful, Kamala Harris.

As a deputy public defender, Boudin led a major challenge to money bail and pretrial detention, but perhaps most interesting is his personal story: he is the Yale Law School-educated son of Weather Underground radicals David Gilbert and Kathy Boudin, who are in prison and on parole, respectively, for their role in a botched 1981 robbery that left two policemen dead.

Boudin has vowed to make “public safety” encompass the rights of both victims and defendants, amid a campaign dominated by candidates who are tough-on-crime. He counts Larry Krasner among his supporters.

LARRY KRASNER

RACHEL ROLLINS

WESLEY BELL

ST. LOUIS

Perhaps the clearest link between the movement demanding police accountability and the rise of activist district attorneys can be found in last November’s election of Wesley Bell as St. Louis County Attorney. Bell is an African-American son of a police officer, as well as a public defender, municipal court prosecutor and Ferguson city councilmember who loudly criticized the decision not to prosecute officer Darren Wilson for shooting unarmed teenager Michael Brown, calling it an example of why police and prosecutors should remain “separate and independent.”

Before he was sworn in, prosecutors in Bell’s office voted to join the local police union, which had endorsed his opponent. On his second day in office, Bell fired longtime assistant prosecutor Kathi Alizadeh, who was largely responsible for presenting evidence to the grand jury that declined to indict Wilson. He also fired prosecutor Ed McSweeney, who posted on Facebook after the primary that “voters will soon regret what they did” and wrongfully claimed Bell was a “Ferguson councilman with no trial experience.”

Bell previously worked with the Department of Justice to implement recommendations from its report that found Ferguson profited from demanding large fines from low-income residents of color for petty misdemeanors like traffic violations. After his election he issued instructions to stop prosecuting the possession of less than 100 grams of marijuana and failure to pay child support. He also told prosecutors not to overcharge defendants to pressure them into pleas or threaten witnesses to force them to participate in prosecutions. In April he tweeted that during his first 100 days in office, “we’ve reduced the jail population by 12% which is the lowest since 2002.”

Chesa Boudin

As Rollins faces a spectrum of critics who accuse her of being both too soft on crime and on police, she has ramped up her opposition to the arrests of immigrants in the state’s courthouses. She filed suit against Immigration and Customs Enforcement over the “chilling effect” these arrests have on immigrants who are victims, witnesses and defendants and now frequently avoid coming in to testify, making it much more difficult to prosecute cases. Rollins has also instructed prosecutors to avoid charges that could hurt the immigration status of a defendant.

LARRY KRA NER

WESLEY BELL

CHESA BOUDIN

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YOU’VE BEEN ZUCKED
FACEBOOK SAYS IT IS CHANGING. IT IS. IT’S GETTING EVEN SCARIER.

BY PETER RUGH

Facebook is like a bar that used to be a fun place to hang out with friends until the owner put cameras in the bathroom and replaced the shot glasses with digital economics at City University of New York and host of the Team Human technology podcast, tells The Indypendent.

According to a March blog post from the Zuck himself, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp chat services will be integrated. All messages will be handled with end-to-end encryption, meaning their contents will be visible solely to the sender and receiver — a privacy tool already baked into WhatsApp. Taking another page from WhatsApp, users on Facebook’s other networks will have the option of allowing their communications to disappear after brief intervals. Meanwhile, Facebook itself will shift the emphasis it places on its news feed, the bottomless scroll of friend and advertiser distracter, to group and person-to-person networking.

“I do think there’s some sense in them returning to the idea of being a social network, rather than a propaganda publisher,” says Rushkoff. “But the only way I will believe they are serious is if they liberate themselves from the need to achieve continued exponential growth. If they need to keep growing, then they will need to find new ways of violating our privacy and eroding our social integrity.”

Zuckerberg seems to have anticipated the scepticism he’s been met with and attempted to get ahead of it, acknowledging that “frankly we don’t currently have a strong reputation for building privacy protective services, and we’ve historically focused on tools for more open sharing.”

When it comes to open sharing, the Zuckerberg has lost his appetite for it. His March post directly contradicts another, published four months earlier, in which he pledged Facebook would be more vigilant in rooting out disinformation. Now he’s pushing it into the shadows instead. How can Zuckerberg’s sites root out disinformation if the messages they carry are private and temporal? The answer, so far, is they can’t. Evidence of this comes to us from Brazil, where the Trump of the Tropics, Jair Bolsonaro, landed in the presidential palace on Jan. 1 in what observers have termed the WhatsApp election.

Broadband happens to be costly in the country, where the average household income per capita comes to just $400 a month. But mobile carriers offer plans through which customers can access the internet on the cheap through select pathways the false information could have traveled, but he’s worried for other democracies in the Global South — and for the United States — where similar conditions exist: weak data protections and a monopolized internet landscape void of net-neutrality laws that prevent the walling off of the web.

Yet despite the potential for spawning political rumor mills, end-to-end encryption means that at least the Zuckerberg and his cronies won’t be tracking our conversations, right? Sort of. Sending encrypted messages won’t prevent the Zuckerberg from gathering your metadata, i.e. the who, when and why of your communications. “Without transparency about how Facebook will monetize its end-to-end encrypted services,” writes Genevieve Gebhart of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, “users and advocates cannot scrutinize the various pressure points that business model might place on privacy and security.”

The integration of Facebook’s platforms appears to have less to do with generating more meaningful connections than it does with the Zuck’s desire to build a super app, a la China’s WeChat — one all encompassing, self-contained intraweb within the internet through which all manner of communication and commerce take place.

“That at this moment is the dream of Facebook,” says Belli. “Facebook is the only social network that has the critical mass to make it such an effective propaganda tool. A coalition of wealthy business interests backing Bolsonaro spent millions of dollars on WhatsApp disinformation campaigns ahead of voting. Drawing on data — some of it collected through Facebook — marketers established astroturf! WhatsApp groups and flooded cell phones with doctored photos and fake news that the average Brazilian had limited means of validating.

“Propaganda is very effective when you do not have the possibility to either fact check or to receive different kinds of information,” notes Luca Belli, a professor of internet governance at Fundação Getúlio Vargas’ School of Law in Rio de Janeiro.

In response to a report in São Paulo’s Folha newspaper, Facebook said it deleted thousands of fake accounts, but the damage was already done.

Exactly how much of a role WhatsApp played in the presidential vote is difficult for researchers to gauge, says Belli, given that the messaging service is encrypted end-to-end and the plethora of pathways the false information could have traveled, but he’s worried for other democracies in the Global South — and for the United States — where similar conditions exist: weak data protections and a monopolized internet landscape void of net-neutrality laws that prevent the walling off of the web.
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-Frederick Douglass

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Diaper Change, Climate Change
A Parent’s Love & a Planet in Crisis

By Nicholas Powers

As I took off his diaper, my son shit again. It happens. But he focused and pumped out of his tiny anus a mushy so deep it was biblical. I gave up on changing him. “When global warming destroys the soil,” I said, “let’s grow potatoes in your shit, like Matt Damon did in The Martian.”

Raising a child in the Anthropocene and the possible end of an inhabitable Earth at human hands requires a grim sense of humor. I like to think of it as acceptance, the last stage of grief. I’m not sure if it is but I do know, I’ve gone through the other four stages — denial, anger, bargaining and depression. Laughter was closure. I had let go of hope.

Then my son forced me to reach beyond grief. We were in the park and he let go of my hand. Legs wobbly, he looked at me. We were both scared as he unsteadily walked. Pride burst in me like fireworks. I wiped away tears and cheered. Each new footstep took him into a future I won’t be alive to see. In that instant, I felt love, gigantic, immense, immeasurable love for him that forced me to go beyond acceptance to action.

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DENIAL & ANGER

“He’s kicking,” she said, and pressed my hand to her belly. He was. He was pushing out to the world. I leaned close and told him how much we loved him. For months, I was delirious with joy. I was so full of fatherhood, I thought I was big and strong enough to protect him. I had a job. I had good health. I could take care of my son. I would do a hell of a lot better than my no-show father ever did. Denial insulated me.

Months into the pregnancy, Hurricane Maria ripped up Puerto Rico and relatives vanished. No phone. No e-mail. Nothing. I went to the island, drove around until I found them. Along the way, I saw mothers alone with children in hilltop homes with no gas or food. I saw fathers waiting in lines for ice and water for their families.

I came back shaken and angry. The world was filled with forces so much stronger than any of us. Just one superstorm, one war or financial collapse and we’d be begging for food. I hated how America betrays the poor and vulnerable.

By the time my son was born, I was humbled. The doctors passed him to me, I held him like a breathing pearl, beautiful and fragile. I just wanted him to be safe.

BARGAINING

“What about Canada,” I asked. “Isn’t the ice going to melt? Let’s move. Let’s grab land.” She nursed our son and made the calculations. We saw the writing on the wall. Fires in the west. Superstorms wrecking the coasts. White people elected Trump. How long before America collapsed?

She shrugged. “Then what? Live behind a barbed wire, steel fence gate?” A dark vision crossed her face. “People will get hungry and eating the rich won’t be a metaphor.”

I was bargaining. What if we fled? What if we moved inland? What if we stockpiled guns? They were dreams of privatized escape, 1990s militia survivor stuff. Noodle those dreams with a logical question and they popped. None of us, not even the rich, can escape the climate crisis. Some can hide for a while, but no safe zone, no walls, no borders can keep out millions of refugees desperate to live. We’re all in this together.

DEPRESSION & ACCEPTANCE

“I, I, I…” my throat knotted. Around the table friends looked at each other, then me. We were talking about the climate crisis and I was in professor mode until I mentioned my son. Sorrow choked me.

When I got home, I hugged my son as if to apologize for the hell he was going to inherit. He slept on my chest and I kissed him over and over. We were trapped in systems that left us little room to maneuver. Every plane in the sky, every car in the street, all meat in stores — all the ways in which capitalism polluted the planet were sold to us as the good life. Disaster was coming.

He didn’t ask for any of it. He didn’t ask to be born. It was our selfish decision and we both would be gone as he faced nightmare Earth.

I began to celebrate the smallest things. When he held up his head, I danced like a clown. When he babbled “ma ma” and “da da,” I wrote it on the calendar. If the future was going to be painful, I clipped the moments of joy and held them to my chest. Today was what mattered. And when grief spilled into my thoughts like drops of ink, I joked it off.

“Just remember,” I told him as he gobbled an egg, “in the future when you buy Soylent Green, it’s made from people.”
“I THINK CLIMATE CHANGE IS BASICALLY LIKE A NATIONAL DISASTER, AND IT’S GOING TO AFFECT EVERYBODY” USA, LEE (AGE: 10) “THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY IS AFFECTING EVERYONE ON THIS PLANET IN A DEADLY WAY.” USA, DAVID JEROME FOSTER (AGE: 22) “THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ARE ALREADY DYING DUE TO AIR POLLUTION AND RESOURCE SCARCITY, AND SO MANY THINGS RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE.” USA, ARIELLE MARTIN (AGE: 17) “WE ARE ALL IN IMMINENT DANGER” JOORZ (AGE: 17) “PUT THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF OUR CLIMATE AND OUR PLANET AHEAD OF SHORT-TERM PROFIT.” AUSTRALIA, DOHA KHALIFA (AGE: 17) “SKIPPING CLIMATE CHANGE IS WORSE THAN SKIPPING SCHOOL.” BELGIUM, ANUNA DE BELLEMEDE (AGE: 17) “TO US, IT IS SO SELF-EVIDENT THAT WE CAN’T KEEP ON GOING IN THIS DIRECTION.” XELLE KIAMBI (AGE: 17)
YE OLDE QUEER BROOKLYN

When Brooklyn Was Queer: A History
By Hugh Ryan
St. Martin’s Press, 2019

By Jessica Max Stein

Hugh Ryan got the idea to write When Brooklyn Was Queer when he held pop-up queer history exhibit parties in his Brooklyn apartment; when one such event drew 300 people, and another was shut down by the police, he knew he was on to something. Contemporary queer Brooklyn was hungry for its history.

Ryan has cooked up a delicious first taste of Brooklyn’s pre-Stonewall LGBTQ+ community history, a fun read of narrative nonfiction. Ryan shows clear respect and affection for his colorful cast of characters, honoring their identities (such as their presumably preferred pronouns) as well as their idiosyncrasies. He generously uses “queer” as a catchall term to discuss both sexuality and gender identity, which enables him to observe how the two have historically interacted, as well as to expand who he can include in his motley crew. The geographic narrative is also a thoughtful, flexible framing, allowing Ryan to discuss how physical and social changes in the city landscape affected where queer people lived, worked, and played.

Ryan’s spry, chatty narration makes you feel like he is walking you through one of his exhibits. As he tells it, the urbanization of Brooklyn in the late 1800s enables queers to discover each other, as people increasingly participate in the public sphere — particularly around the waterfront, where many queers work as sailors, artists, sex workers, entertainers or factory workers at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. But having found each other, queers are in turn discovered — by straight people. The narrative arcs rise as increasing visibility triggers a backlash from doctors, the judicial system and zealous “moral” reformers. Ryan populates the pages with colorful characters, from the poet Walt Whitman to the black lesbian dancer Mabel Hampton, with a keen eye for how each person exemplifies their times. Hart Crane, who wrote the earnest ode “To Brooklyn Bridge,” exemplified the 1920s: the passionate poet burns bright and then burns out. For things are never quite the same once the Great Depression hits, particularly for queers already on the economic margins. Yet havens remain, such as February House, a queer house in Brooklyn Heights inhabited by a “literary menagerie” from Carson McCullers to W.H. Auden to Gypsy Rose Lee (who later inspired the play Gypsy). Queer sailors and female factory workers, in particular, find respite during World War II — but see it snatched away again when the war ends.

Ryan puts it best: “After 1945, the physical and mental suburbanization of America would rip right through the heart of queer Brooklyn (sometimes literally).” The Lavender Scare (it wasn’t just a Red Scare) forces queers out of government and entertainment. The American Psychiatric Association includes homosexuality in their first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), thus classifying it as a mental illness. The police crack down on cruisers, using entrapment to arrest men for “disorderly conduct — degeneracy.” Dispersed by these social forces, queer milieus can’t survive the body’s physical changes. Ryan lays much of the blame at Robert Moses’ feet. The arrogant city planner sees Brooklyn as a mere obstacle for Long Islanders commuting to Manhattan, ringing the waterfront with roads. The on-ramp to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway wipes out great swaths of queer Brooklyn history “in one vicious swoop,” knocking down February House as well as Hart Crane’s former home. By the time of Manhattan’s Stonewall uprising, the queer people and places of Brooklyn aren’t just gone, they are forgotten.

Ryan has his work cut out for him excavating such a well-buried history. Biographer Stacy Schiff describes this daunting task as “writing around the holes.” At times I wanted the book to be less anecdotal and more comprehensive — which might frankly be impossible given the lack of material available. Once you accept the holes, however, Ryan is exemplary at deftly guiding you over and around them. He cherry-picks illustrative details to spin into vivid scenes, such as his cinematic description of a bustling Fulton Ferry Landing, back when the ferry was how you got to Brooklyn. He also engages you around the possible holes in your own historical context, offering efficient off-the-cuff explanations and modern-day parallels: one mid-19th century Manhattan queer bar is likened to “a candlelit version of CBGB — the hottest hangout for the city’s most outré artists.” Occasionally Ryan stretches his definitions in order to include material. While this flexibility is refreshing when he discusses 19th century Boston marriages between women, many historians don’t read as queer because they were ostensibly sexless, it doesn’t quite work for Marianne Moore, who neither lived nor identified as queer because they were ostensibly sexless. But Ryan is not trying to be the be-all end-all, just the beginning. He understands the book’s place in an ongoing dialogue, a shared stewardship of community history. The book is an open thank you to those who preceded him in this work, such as George Chauncey and Allan Berube, as well as those who might want to take up the torch. “I look forward to the book that comes after this, and the one that comes after that, and the one that maybe you’re going to write,” Ryan affectionately darts the reader. Let the conversation begin.
Children of Stonewall

Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall
THRU DEC. 8 AT BROOKLYN MUSEUM 200 EASTERN PKwy, BROOKLYN, NY

By Jessica Max Stein

“Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall,” now showing at the Brooklyn Museum, seems like a direct response to Hugh Ryan’s affectionate challenge to rediscover our queer history and to create our queer future. The 28 LGBTQ+ artists, all born after 1969 and currently working in Brooklyn, use everything from oil paints to photographs to light boxes to the artist’s own used, indented foam mattress topper to weigh in not just on what is queer and what is contemporary, but the very question of what is art.

The first room honors the artists’ activist ancestors, playing with themes of “Stonewall Uprising,” “Heritage” and “Revolt.” Some pieces directly correct the myth of Stonewall, the three-day police raid-turned-revolt that is widely considered the beginning of the American queer movement — and widely whitewashed in the retelling. I particularly appreciated Tuesday Smillie’s “The Hudson River Jordan,” a banner in homage to Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), whose members included Stonewall leaders Sylvia Rivera and Marsa P. Johnson. The multipurpose textile piece is made of blue tarp, silver fabric, a pretty hint of pink, and bedecked with a bouquet of fake flowers. “The banner alludes to the lived experiences of STAR and its members — marked by both precarious material conditions and glamour,” explains the museum. You can appreciate it on the wall as art — but you could also wrap it around your shoulders or sleep on/under it. Similarly, LJ Roberts’ light box installation “Stormed at Stonewall” literally illuminates the whitewashing of Stonewall history — inspired by a suggestion from Hugh Ryan (small world). The flashing on-screen cut-and-paste collages of modern-day counterparts: Black trans women who were murdered in 2017 and 2018. They stare directly at the viewer with a gaze that is part seduction, part implication. Similariy, I appreciated the detailed small drawings of haimisch queers with expressive faces in Smillie’s collage of fake flowers. “The banner alludes to the lived experiences of STAR and its members — marked by both precarious material conditions and glamour,” explains the museum. You can appreciate it on the wall as art — but you could also wrap it around your shoulders or sleep on/under it. Similarly, LJ Roberts’ light box installation “Stormed at Stonewall” literally illuminates the whitewashing of Stonewall history — inspired by a suggestion from Hugh Ryan (small world). The flashing on-screen cut-and-paste collages of modern-day counterparts: Black trans women who were murdered in 2017 and 2018. They stare directly at the viewer with a gaze that is part seduction, part implication. Similariy, I appreciated the detailed small drawings of haimisch queers with expressive faces in Smillie’s collage.


The exhibition can’t quite decide whether it’s an art show, an activist vehicle or a random archive. This works, most of the time. The best pieces are those that maximize both the medium and the message. I was particularly captivated by David Antonio Cruz’s gorgeous oil paintings of STAR’s modern-day counterparts: Black trans women who were murdered in 2017 and 2018. They stare directly at the viewer with a gaze that is part seduction, part implication. Similarly, I appreciated the detailed small drawings of haimisch queers with expressive faces in Smillie’s collage.

The centerpiece of the exhibit — or certainly of the Care Networks room — is LJ Roberts’ gargantuan textile piece, The Queer Houses of Brooklyn in the Three Towns of Breukelen, Boswyck and Midwout during the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era, previously shown at the Smithsonian. Picture a fabric recreation of Brooklyn, a three-dimensional quilt made largely of knotted bundles. Appliqued across it, thick and readable, are the names of Brooklyn’s old neighborhoods and the names of 24 contemporary queer houses. It looks like a three-dimensional quilt, a relic from the 19th century, particularly intriguing from the same artist who did the light box installation, comfortable both in textiles and high-tech. The queer house theme is used slightly less effectively in the wall display devoted to Lavender Hill, a 1970s queer house in Inhaca, New York. While I enjoyed the photos and flyers and chore calendar and other fun ephemera, it feels more like artifact than art. Similarly, in the last room, a catch-all with the wide theme “Desire,” Mark Aguilar’s “I’d Rather Be Beautiful Than Male” is little more than glitter script on a white background, even if the lettering does evolve perfectly from blue to pink as the viewer reads left to right. But most creative use of materials goes to Constantinza Zavitsanos for a Freedom, 2015: “We Can’t Live Without Our Lives, STAR 2012 and Police Van, Trans Day of Action. The joyful, delightful depictions of queers continue in the work clustered under the theme of “Care Networks,” with Mohammed Fayyaz’s lively, colorful cartoon Armory next to flyers for Papi Juice parties, both featuring queer POC Brooklyn parties in full glory. The show even nods to the

Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2019. The Independent

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From 1992 to 2008, award-winning poet and playwright Deborah Tobola taught writing to inmates at several men’s prisons in California. Her memoir about this experience, *Hummingbird in Underworld*, not only indict the inhumane U.S. criminal justice system, but offers a deeply moving reflection on the frustrations and joys inherent in this work.

Her own story, as the oldest daughter of an unconventional band of hard-working, hard-drinking, working-class immigrants, is interwoven with tales of the incarcerated men who spent hours under her tutelage. The juxtapositional mash-up is sometimes jarring, but it’s also inspiring.

In fact, Tobola notes that her father had worked as a guard at the Men’s Colony, a post he held while attending college. “He liked the inmates better than the guards,” she writes, a lesson that was not lost on Tobola as she began the job.

But this is not to say that the prisoners were easy to deal with. Tobola admits to fear. “Urkel,” she writes, “is smarmy.” Smiley, she continues, has been found guilty of “L&L — lewd and lascivious acts with a minor. He’s a child molester.” This detail gives Tobola pause as she contemplates hiring him to assist her in running the Arts in Education Program, a plum assignment that pays between $42.50 and $52.50 a month. As she considers his application, she has to confront her biases and assess feelings both rational and not. This, she reports, happened frequently.

To wit: one man she interviews had been convicted of rape. As she peruses his file, she learns that he was not what she calls “a he said/she said rapist, but the kind who climbs into your bedroom in the middle of the night and puts his hand over your mouth so no one can hear you scream. Do I want to be locked up with this guy ten hours a day? No.”

Thankfully for Tobola, most of the men in her classes — as well as the men she hired — had been incarcerated on drug charges. “Substance abuse underlies their criminal activity,” she writes, and it is clear that the help they need is nowhere to be found within the prison walls. Unless, of course, redemption can be found through word play.

Tobola starts her classes with a poetry unit and utilizes a poem by Seamus Heaney: “Once in a lifetime/The longed-for tidal wave/Of justice can rise up/And hope and history rhyme.” Is this true? Tobola asks. Although the Department of Corrections bureaucracy ultimately stifles this and other discussions — and constantly threatens to halt the program for fiscal and ideological reasons — Tobola persists, eventually provoking the inmates to write and revise not only poems but original theater pieces. Everyone, she says, is enriched by the experience. Indeed, Tobola ultimately left the prison system to found the Poetic Justice Project, the country’s first theater company for the formerly incarcerated.

Throughout, her goal has been the consis- tent. Using the hummingbird as an example, she describes the tiny creature as “a quick- hearted warrior who beats back the darkness with iridescent wings/It sucks the evil out of men/Leaves them with a thirst for beauty and the trick of flying while appearing to stay perfectly still.”

While I wish that the memoir had provided more insight into how racial dynam- ics impacted her classroom, *Hummingbird in Underworld* nonetheless depicts teaching as a calling, and Tobola’s account is beautifully wrought. Her belief that a different future for the men in her classes is possible, and that they might live free from violence, drug use, alcoholism and economic instability will likely strike many readers as unrealistic. Not Tobola. “In one legend,” she writes, “the god of music and poetry became a hummingbird and flew to the underworld where he learned the secret of transformation.”

And if a bird can do it, why not men?
Hi Bill, I was pleased to learn that the Williams Pipeline won’t be pumping fracked gas through New York Harbor anytime soon. But I worry we keep fighting these small battles while a larger war is underway for our planet. How do we know what to prioritize? Is there a better way? Earthalujah!

— HEATHER, Red Hook

Dear Heather,

Every small victory builds toward the Earth Revolution. But we are out-matched by the fossil fuel industry, their bankers and the police.

The average person in the United States has lost their sense of courage. Our strongest form of courage starts from the gentlest source, our love for children, neighbors, from the Earth around us. This ain’t no half-mark card. The revolutionary coming from a theory or a paycheck is never as fierce as the one who arrives from love.

Our loving isn’t igniting our warrior-ness right. The capitalism matrix sees this intimate place as a profit center and pours in super heroes with no politics, luxury condos and 10,000 ads a day. Product-life!

Our urge to survive and to protect our loved ones is embedded in our common sense, our quiet sense of self, what we naturally have within us. I remember a rally against the Williams Pipeline at City Hall just two days before the postponement of the metal snake. Ladonna Brave Bull Allard spoke to us. She is the mother of the Standing Rock Movement, making a proclamation alone that summer of 2016 that became a gathering of hundreds of Earth peoples standing in the way of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Before sending us off marching over the Brooklyn Bridge she told us to “stand up with the Earth!”

“You are the Earth!” she said. “You have the power!”

— Earthalujah!

Dear Dexter,

Let’s cut the shit. You say Pride is “so corporate.” What do you mean? Let’s ask: What corporations are sponsoring the Pride parade in 2019? Let’s go to the website. There, clear as day, is the sky-blue hexagon logo of JPMorgan Chase, the number one funder of fossil fuel in the world.

Let this number sink in: 250,000. That’s the most-quoted estimate of dead in 2018 from climate-caused floods, wildfires, drought and superstorms. People are burned alive because of Chase. They drown. Roofs cave in and babies are crushed in basements. Chase puts millions of tons of carbon dioxide in the air. They make profits for their speculator stockholders by moving money into oil wells, open pit mines and cluster bombs. (War is the human event that hurts the climate the most.) Chase is a city-state of ghouls in suits. CEO Jamie Dimon makes $31 million a year.

Can we stop pretending for a minute? The reason Jamie Dimon isn’t in prison is because the laws are not being enforced and most of us know this. It’s people like the organizers of Pride who accord respect to Dimon, this Al Capone crossed with Idi Amin, by taking his money. By playing along we keep his performance going. We keep his act real. So yeah, Pride is so corporate and we all are.

Try the Reclaim Pride march, Dexter. Same day, different route, and very different feel.

REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. HAVE A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REVBILLY@INDYPENDENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.
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