COVID GOES TO CLASS

THE MAYOR IS EAGER TO HAVE KIDS RETURN TO THE CLASSROOM IN SEPTEMBER. BUT IS IT SAFE?

KATYA SCHWENK, PIO
ONLINE BLACK LIVES MATTER RESOURCES

PROTEST GUIDE
Centralized information and updates on protests in NYC for Black Lives Matter and George Floyd.
justiceforgeorge.nyc/join
instagram.com/justiceforgeorgeinc

PETITIONS
A compiled list of reliable petitions to sign in defense of Black life.
blacklivesmatter.card.io/petitions

MEETING
Anti-Eviction Training:
bit.ly/3xYFqfG
Weekly meeting to discuss and take part in the cancel rent campaign.

DATABASE
Prison Abolition: A Curated Collection of Links:
bit.ly/2CMXDKB
In these records you will find the most recent and the most authoritative articles on the topics, people and events that are shaping the criminal justice conversation.

ARCHIVE
Black Archives:
blackarchives.co
bhvkarchives.com
A collaborative multimedia platform featuring archival histories and modern day stories from across the Diaspora.

REPARATIONS
Resource Generation: resourcegeneration.org
A multiracial membership community of young people with wealth and/or class privilege committed to the equitable distribution of wealth, land and power.

DATABASE
Black-led Worker Co-ops to Support:
nycworker.coop/blackcoopsmatter

DATABASE
175 Black Healers and Wellness Spaces:
bit.ly/3g9aQzx
This is a list of 175+ incredible Black herbalists, healers, doulas and energy workers.

ZINE
“Assata’s Testimony”: bit.ly/2CEz7M
A zine that features an interview with former Black Panther Assata Shakur about her treatment by police and prison guards when she was arrested in 1973. Shakur escaped from a New Jersey state prison in 1979 and fled to Cuba where she lives to this day.

STAY ON TOP OF IT: …With these helpful links.

FILM
The Spook Who Sat by the Door:
bit.ly/2CMztsV
The fictional story of Dan Freeman, the first Black CIA officer and of the CIA’s history of training persons and political groups who later used their specialized training in gathering intelligence, political subversion, and guerrilla warfare against the CIA.

FILM
Tongues tinted:
vimeo.com/ondemand/tonguestinted
Filmmaker Marlon Riggs gives a voice to communities of gay black men, presenting their cultures and perspectives on the world as they confront racism, homophobia and marginalization.

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PEDAL POWER

WEEKLY BLACK-LED BIKE RIDES DRAW THOUSANDS OF CYCLISTS

By Kiara Thomas

Thousands of bicyclists converged on Gracie Mansion this July, protesting police brutality and racism and calling on Mayor Bill de Blasio to reform or disband the NYPD.

Their shirts soaked in sweat, protesters biked in 90-degree heat from meetup points in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan toward the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Although the participants were encouraged to wear blue to symbolize the water that connects cultures, most didn’t know where they were headed until the end of the ride. Despite that they stopped traffic and halted business as usual the entire way there.

“We figured, ‘You guys pull up to our neighborhood and bother us all the time. We’ll pull up to your crib and bother you a little bit,’” said Orlando Hamilton, co-founder of Street Riders NYC, a weekly, roving Black Lives Matter protest pedaling through a neighborhood near you.

“In our rides, we have people from all over,” Hamilton added. “It’s not a couple of people complaining in the Bronx or a couple of people complaining in Brownsville. It’s a whole community of people that feel like ‘What the fuck you guys are doing with your system is not working for us.’”

It was Hamilton and fellow Street Riders co-founder Peter Kerre’s seventh bike protest when The Independent caught up with them. Riders are regularly met with police cars and helicopters during their rides, and so the organizers wait to tell their 50 or so volunteers the final destination of each ride in order to avoid interference from law enforcement. The number of participants on each trek continues to grow, with their passion for the Black Lives Matter movement turning many from riders into medics, mechanics and traffic blockers.

“Just seeing how many people support the cause and try to make a change, knowing that I want to make a change myself,” said Justin Seaborough, an 18-year-old traffic blocker from Harlem, describing what drives him to take part.

The bike rides are one of many forms Black Lives Matter demonstrations have taken nationwide following the death of George Floyd while in Minneapolis police custody in May. Through marches, sit-ins, street art, the destruction of monuments and regular pedal protests in New York each Saturday, protesters are calling for an end to systemic racism and for justice for those who died at the hands of law enforcement.

“The ‘get your knee off my neck’ that literally all of America was able to see with George Floyd has been a part of my experience throughout life and a lot of Black people’s experience throughout life in general,” Althea Smith, a Westchester resident explaining in Brownsville. It’s a whole community of people from all over, explaining in the Bronx or a couple of people coming to your crib and bothering you a little bit,” she said.

“In our rides, we have people from all over,” Hamilton added. “It’s not a couple of people complaining in the Bronx or a couple of people complaining in Brownsville. It’s a whole community of people that feel like ‘What the fuck you guys are doing with your system is not working for us.’”

Hamilton, a laid-off chef who had never been an activist before, and Kerre, a music producer and filmmaker, began to see familiar faces at protests and formed friendships. They exchanged contact information and established themselves with their first cycling protest in June. Now they’re leading the largest collective bike rides in New York City history.

The demonstrations follow in the footsteps of past cycling movements for social justice, such as Critical Mass, which regularly shut down New York City’s traffic arteries in the 1990s and early aughts. In a way, Critical Mass was propaganda by deed: Demonstrators called for safer streets at a time when the city had few dedicated bike lanes. They were often met with gratuitous brutality from the NYPD. The cyclists also used their mass power to rally in opposition to the Iraq War and denounce the Giuliani-era gentrification around them, among other social causes.

Kerre’s own activism was shaped by his encounters with police brutality while living in Minneapolis and he has been advocating against racist policing for years.

“Living in Minneapolis as a Black person, you’d be hunted by the police,” he said. “Just existing as a Black person, it’s crazy. Police in Minneapolis have been out of control for a while.”

The video of Floyd’s killing brought back painful memories for Hamilton as well. He was a teenager when his friend Elwood White was fatally shot by Deputy Michael Astorga of the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department in 2012 after showing signs of being mentally unstable, speaking incoherently and attacking people.

“The police killed my homie when I was 15,” he said. “They never even got desk duty or nothing. They stayed on the beat and I ain’t never got over it.” Now he says, “Whenever we are protesting the police, I’m there.”

Street Riders NYC covers its expenses out of pocket and avoids soliciting donations, but that hasn’t stopped supporters from showing their appreciation. Two weeks ago, one found the organizers’ Cash App profiles and shared them online. They’ve been taking in funds since.

Every Thursday they train new volunteers at McCarren Park in Brooklyn and are looking for a more permanent place to store their equipment.

“This is not a trend or the height of the movement,” Kerre said. “There is so much stuff that is planned for the future. We are only beginning. We are going all out. We will serve the community the best we can.”

Kerre and Hamilton plan to continue the demonstrations every Saturday. Keep up with them on Instagram: @StreetRidersNYC.
A FAMILY DEMANDS JUSTICE
AFTER JAMEL FLOYD IS PEPPER SPRAYED TO DEATH BY GUARDS AT BROOKLYN JAIL

By Kiara Thomas

Two months after the death of Jamel Floyd, his family and friends continue to fight for justice, protesting weekly outside of the Metropolitan Detention Center, where Floyd died after correction officers pepper-sprayed him in his cell.

The results from the independent autopsy are expected on Aug. 11 after an autopsy performed by the New York City medical examiner's office listed the cause of Floyd's death as inconclusive. They hope the second autopsy, which includes genetic and microscopic testing, will shed light on the death of the 35-year-old.

“This hurts to the bottom of my heart but we are going all the way to fight for justice for him,” James Floyd, Jamel's father, said. “We pray that justice would be served and that they shut this jail down first and foremost.”

Last month, family and friends of Floyd attended his funeral. Although Floyd's story has unfolded almost entirely outside the eye of the media, he was a well-known athlete in Hempstead, a sprawling Long Island town located about 22 miles east of the Metropolitan Detention Center in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

“They used around trying to get them to play because they were the best baseball players,” said Donna Mays, Floyd's mother, recalling Floyd and his siblings when they were young.

At a moment of unprecedented scrutiny of police misconduct, Floyd's death stands out as another shocking case of brutality and callousness by law enforcement. According to Floyd's family, officials at the federal jail knew he was asthmatic and diabetic. Correctional officers nevertheless pepper-sprayed him in his cell on June 3.

According to the Bureau of Prisons, Floyd broke his cell door with a metal object that morning and “became increasingly disruptive and potentially harmful to himself and others.”

After the pepper-spraying incident, Floyd was removed from his cell. Medical staff found him unresponsive and performed “life-saving measures.” He was later pronounced dead at a local hospital.

Floyd's parents learned about his passing through the media the day he died. His parents said they tried calling the Metropolitan Detention Center and didn’t get a response.

The Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General says it is looking into the incident in coordination with the FBI, but has refrained from commenting further. Legal aid and rights groups are calling for an independent investigation. They want video footage to be preserved to determine whether excessive force was used.

“Pepper spray, under normal circumstances, when it's used the way it's supposed to be used, is not supposed to be fatal,” Jose Saldana, director of the organization Release Aging People in Prisons, told CNN. “But when it's used excessively, it might trigger a heart attack or something else that may lead to someone dying. They had to have done something in addition to just giving a regular dose of pepper spray.

Floyd was in the hospital the Friday before his death due to an assault by correction officers, according to his family.

“We know the cause of death, but they're acting like they don't know,” Mays said. “It didn't look like an asthma attack, doesn't look like a heart attack and it doesn't look like anything genetic that they need to look at our genetics for. His hands have defense wounds.”

Floyd, who was set to be released in 120 days following a 2007 burglary conviction, was moved from state prison to the federal facility in Oct. 2019. It is unclear why, although his mother told NBC News in June that it “had to do with a particular case and that he was supposed to be protected.”

Family members say he endured regular mistreatment at the Metropolitan Detention Center, where inmates weren't allowed regular showers and there wasn't enough heat in the winter.

“I'm hurt,” said Floyd's younger brother, Ramel. “It's disgusting how the system works. How you go to extract someone out of a cell and they end up dead. It took the media for us to find out what took place as opposed to a phone call. The whole process of it is disgusting. It's dehumanizing. The first time we got to visit him was in a morgue.”

The last time Floyd saw his family was in February before the facility was locked down due to the pandemic. He and Ramel planned to get their CDL license to start a moving business together. His girlfriend Shaquanna Wright was looking forward to being called Mrs. Floyd.

“No matter what a person is in jail for, no matter what they did, they don’t deserve to die at all — especially like that,” Wright said.
A PANDEMIC OF EVICTIONS LOOMS

TENANT GROUPS IN NEW YORK & AROUND THE COUNTRY URGE LAWMAKERS TO CANCEL RENT

By Steven Wishnia

Mllions of Americans could face losing their homes soon, as the end of various moratoriums on evictions overlaps with the expiration of extra unemployment benefits for people who lost work in the COVID-19 epidemic.

Almost 12 million households nationwide could receive eviction notices in the next four months, the Chicago-based consulting firm Stout projects, based on figures from a Census Bureau survey released July 22. In New York State, it estimates that there will be more than 1 million eviction cases filed in the next four months — more than 12 times the usual average of 86,000.

“The levels are inconceivable,” says Jenny Laurie, executive director of Housing Court Answers.

Even before the epidemic crashed the economy, more than half of New York City’s renters were already spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent, according to city Rent Guidelines Board figures.

Now, says Kim Statuto, a tenant leader with Community Action for Safe Apartments in the southwest Bronx, more than half of the residents of her Claremont Village building are having trouble paying their full rent, and “some can’t pay, period.” In the surrounding neighborhood, she estimates that up to three-fourths are having trouble. Some people have been waiting four months to receive unemployment benefits. And workers in restaurants that closed “are not getting their jobs back.”

As The Independent goes to press, much remains up in the air, particularly whether the federal $600-a-week supplement to unemployment benefits, which expires July 31, will be renewed. A ban on evictions for nonpayment in housing that receives federal aid, from the same March relief bill, expired on July 24.

State restrictions on evictions from early in the pandemic are also eroding. According to Princeton University’s Eviction Lab database, Texas allowed eviction proceedings to resume May 19, California on May 31, North Carolina on June 21 and Michigan on July 15.

In New York, landlords are currently able to get a court to order tenants to pay back rent they owe, but not to get them thrown out of their apartments. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s executive order halting evictions is scheduled to expire Aug. 6. The Tenant Safe Harbor Act, which lets tenants use having lost income in the pandemic as a defense against eviction, will expire Aug. 20.

Without deeper rent relief, Lisa Macaulay of the Metropolitan Council on Housing said in an online anti-eviction forum July 15, those measures were just “prolonging the inevitable” for tenants who lost their jobs. The Stout study estimated that New York State tenants already owed $2.2 billion in back rent as of July 15. And proving that they lost income is difficult for those who didn’t have a consistent paycheck, such as freelance workers, tipped workers and undocumented immigrants who work off the books.

In July, the state launched a program to provide $100 million in rent relief for tenants who were already paying more than 30 percent of their income for rent before the epidemic. If they could prove they’d lost income, it would cover the difference between 30 percent of their current income and their rent. Applications, open for two weeks, closed July 30.

Esteban Giron, a leader in the Crown Heights Tenant Union, called it “a lottery for a little bit of money.” “They need to cancel rent. I don’t know what Cuomo is waiting for,” says Statuto.

HOUSING COURT RETURNS

Meanwhile, the legal machinery of eviction is slowly cranking back to life. In New York City, landlords have been able to file eviction cases by mail since June 22, says Jenny Laurie, Brooklyn Housing Court reopened for in-person cases July 27, if both sides have lawyers, and Staten Island’s is scheduled to do the same in early August.

The situation upstate is much different. Rebecca Garrard of the Housing Justice for All coalition describes it as “mass confusion.”

Only Buffalo has a court dedicated to housing cases, she explains. In other cities, it’s handled through civil courts, and in small towns, by local judges who are often not lawyers. Garrard says she is “100 percent certain” that some of these courts won’t give tenants protections they’re entitled to, and some tenants will get scared into moving because they don’t know that a threatening letter from a landlord is “not an eviction notice.”

Another problem, she adds, is that all apartments north of Westchester County are unregulated, so tenants have no legal right to renew their lease.

“The lack of protections tenants have upstate is problematic in the best of times,” Garrard says. Unless the legislature or the courts take action, “we’re going to have a massive wave of evictions.”
PARTY ON

By John Tarleton

Termaine Wright served on her neighborhood's community board for more than a decade before being elected to the State Assembly in 2016. When State Senator Velmanette Montgomery, a 35-year incumbent, announced she would not seek re-election, she endorsed Wright to be her successor in Senate District 25 which stretches from Bedford-Stuyvesant to Red Hook.

Wright also gained the backing of her fellow Brooklyn elected officials, labor unions and Democratic Party clubs. Normally, Wright's ascent to a potentially decades-long stint in the state Senate would have more its share of a coronation than a contest. But these aren't normal times for New York City's once-invincible Democratic Party machines.

On election night, Wright found herself trailing Jabari Brisport, a public school teacher and a democratic socialist who has never held public office, by 12 points. When mail-in votes were counted in mid-July, Brisport's lead grew to 18 points and he declared victory as New York's first out-LGBTQ Black state senator.

Brisport's demolition of a machine-backed candidate was duplicated across the city. Incumbents Felix Ortiz (Sunset Park), Walter Mosley (Fort Greene) and Aravella Simotas (Astoria) were all ousted from the state Assembly by first-time candidates backed by the Democratic Socialist of America.

"Let today's results be a lesson to incumbents all across the city," tweeted Aaron Taube of the Queens DSA Electoral Working Group. "Live every day like Aaron Taube of the Queens DSA Electoral Working Group. "Live every day like a radical democrat fighting for the outside the halls of power fighting for the fiercest grassroots organizers inside and outside the halls of power fighting for the power of the people - that's what today's results should mean to everyone else."

Other progressive groups got in on the fun too.

"The Justice Democrats backed middle school principal Jamaal Bowman who defeated hawkish 31-year congressman Eliot Engel in a district that encompasses parts of the Bronx and Westchester County. "The Working Families Party played a major role in the Bowman race. WFP also backed Jessica González-Rojas in her victory over a pale male incumbent whose self-confidence was a hallmark of the party's candidates."

When mail-in votes were counted in mid-July, three races had been decided, two of which you can't even imagine. "When mail-in votes were counted in mid-July, three races had been decided, two of which you can't even imagine."

Emily Gallagher edged out 24-term incumbent Joseph Lentol to win a Brooklyn Assembly seat. Gallagher was backed by NY Communities for Change and the New Kings Democrats, an Obama-era reform group that has wrangled with the Brooklyn Democratic machine over the past decade.

Why is this happening now? It begins with the ideological divide between older and younger Democrats that emerged in Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential race. Two years later, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shattered the myth that challenging an incumbent was a fool's errand in her historic congressional primary victory against Joe Crowley.

Turns out the machine is a hollow shell, a monopoly whose product appeals to relatively few people but thrived because it could smother any competition with big donor money, endorsements and arcane ballot access rules. Since a real opposition finally got organized, the machine has been overwhelmed. Brisport told The Independent he had 1,000 volunteers participate in his campaign. According to Brisport, his campaign made 350,000 phone calls. He also set a record for most donors in a state legislative race with 7,500 who donated a total of $280,000. The other DSA candidates mobilized similar grassroots efforts on their behalf.

Here in the City, the floodgates will pour in open in next year's municipal elections with all citywide offices plus 35 out of 51 Council seats open. Ditto for state and congressional primaries in 2022. Like the moa, the giant flightless bird who dwelled unthreatened in New Zealand for millennia before humans landed on the island, a whole generation of mediocre machines have been more a coronation than a contest. But these aren't normal times for New York City's once-invincible Democratic Party machines.

PROPUBLICA RELEASES (SOME) NYPD DISCIPLINARY RECORDS

Propublica has released thousands of NYPD disciplinary records, following the state legislature's repeal of New York's "50-a" law, which kept the records confidential, in June. Last month, a judge issued a temporary restraining against the New York Civil Liberties Union in response to a lawsuit from unions representing the city's police, firefighters and corrections officers seeking to prevent the release of the information. The nonprofit investigative news website, however, is not subject to the ruling. Propublica's online database of complaints filed with and investigated by the Civilian Complaint Review Board omits about 9 percent of the records, those which the CCRB has determined to be unfound, yet it features more than 20,000 abuse of authority complaints and nearly 8,000 allegations of excessive force, including 244 chokehold incidents. It is available at projects.propublica.org/nypd-ccrb/.
HOW NYC LEARNED TO LOVE AUSTERITY

By John Tarleton

On June 30, the New York City Council approved a budget with billions of dollars in cuts as the city continues to reel from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the city’s schools to its parks and libraries to its support for the arts — almost every department and agency will take a hit. And there may be worse to come as the city’s budget cuts could continue well into 2021 and 2022.

New York has been down this path before. And while there are some significant differences between the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s and the emergency we face today, the similarities are striking as well, especially the harm that could be done to the city’s multi-racial working class.

To help make sense of this moment, we spoke with Kim Phillips-Fein, a professor of history at New York University and author of *Fear City: New York’s Fiscal Crisis And The Rise of Austerity Politics*. Published in 2017, *Fear City* is widely considered to be the definitive account of the fiscal crisis that did so much to shape the neoliberal politics and the economics of the New York we live in today.

What is your reaction to the budget that was passed by the City Council and the impact it will have on the people of New York City?

This is a pretty depressing budget. The budget features substantial cuts at a moment of real crisis. These cuts threaten to make the city’s problems worse by raising unemployment and by ending important services. But more deeply, the city’s inability to invest in public health and in the improvements that might make it possible for schools to open safely reflects a failure to meet the demands of the health crisis in a meaningful way.

Cycling back to the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, can you describe what that was and why our understanding of what happened then is relevant today?

In the early 1970s, there was a growing gap between New York City’s expenses and its revenues. For some time, the city tried to paper this over in different ways, primarily through short-term borrowing and by disguising the gap in its budget. Eventually there ceased to be a market for the city’s debt. The banks that financed the city said that they would no longer do so. Over most of 1975, the city actually looked like it might have to go bankrupt or default on its debt and enter into bankruptcy court because there was no clear way that it was actually going to continue to meet its payroll.

At the end of that year, the federal government came forward with a set of loans — buttressed by public sector worker unions that bought a lot of city debt — on the condition that the city move towards a truly balanced budget and make a set of intense budget cuts that ultimately led to the layoffs of about 20 percent of the municipal workforce.

This was a very sharp reduction of resources at a moment when the city was reeling from a set of political and economic problems — rising poverty, a much higher homicide rate than we have today, a wave of arson in the South Bronx and Bushwick.

New York in the post-World War II period had a very ambitious, expansive city government. There was a much larger public hospital system. The public transit system was unparalleled, as was the library system and the parks. In the City University of New York, it had a free public university that was growing and expanding its student body and its number of campuses over the post-war years.

But what tripped up the city wasn’t just that it had all these expenses. It also got caught in the snare of federal policies that had encouraged suburban flight and deindustrialization and local policies that failed to keep the city’s industrial base. There was also the deregulation of the financial sector in the 1970s, which meant that many banks were less interested in municipal debt than they had been earlier. These factors together among others are why the city was not solely responsible for the problems it faced. It was caught in this moment of change. That’s really what led to the fiscal crisis.

*Then as now, there was a Republican administration in Washington with Gerald Ford as president and the famous Daily News headline, “Ford to City: Drop Dead.” We seem to be facing a similar indifference from the Trump administration right now.*

The Ford administration was actually split in some ways about New York. Ford’s vice president was Nelson Rockefeller, who had been the governor of New York State and had overseen the expansion of debt in both New York City and State. On the other side, there was a set of people, including Treasury Secretary William Simon, who came out of the municipal bonds industry, who was furiously, ideologically opposed to aiding New York. Ford’s chief of staff Donald Rumsfeld was also very intensely opposed. They believed the city was too generous, that it was an example of liberalism in microcosm and that the city’s failure would teach a lesson to any government, including the federal government, of the dangers of entitlement programs.

You can hear echoes of that in Mitch McConnell saying there would be no “blue state bailouts.” But there are differences as well. Today, there is an absence of commitment from the federal government to devising any coherent national response to the pandemic. The airlines can get more than tens of billions of dollars in federal bailouts while it’s unclear if public schools can be safely re-opened in the fall.

With Trump, there’s the additional irony: he really got his start in Manhattan real estate coming out of the 1975 fiscal crisis with property tax breaks that he was able to get from the city as it attempted to rebuild its image as an exciting, glamorous place to do business.

**So how was the fiscal crisis resolved at the expense of New York’s multiracial working class and in favor of the bankers?**

The city went through this really wrenching set of budget cuts. Hospitals and health clinics were closed. Drug treatment programs were canceled. There was disinvestment in transit even as fares rose. Thousands of teachers were laid off. Class sizes swelled, sometimes up to 45 or 50 kids per class. Arts and music programs in the schools were cut. The school day was actually shortened for a period of time by about 90 minutes.

Continued on next page.
and wealthy individuals and that’s what can to craft policy to attract corporations. Therefore, you need to do anything you need to do to be better for the city.

The plan that was repealed after things got rollback of free tuition was an emergency. It's not as if the return to free tuition. It's not as if the system was woefully inadequate. It's not as if the system was woefully inadequate for many. It involves the patchwork of child-care centers, pre-K, family care, nannies and unlicensed care. Despite the massive movement of women into the workforce beginning in the 1950s, we have never had a unitary federal policy to address child-care.

We provide some minimal tax benefits primarily for the middle and upper classes and subsidize some care for the poor. Those in between and those who are poor and technically eligible but unable to find a spot for their child are left to fend for themselves despite the high cost of care, which is predicted to rise as a result of efforts to reduce enrollment to comply with safety requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Thanks to the pandemic, the Center for Law and Social Policy estimates that child-care centers need a $9.6 billion bail out per month as a result of their unexpected closures and the need for lower child-to-staff ratios and new sanitary guidelines. Instead of just bailing out the patchwork child-care system we currently have, let’s go all-in on creating the comprehensive one we need.

We also need free universal healthcare for all, including child-care workers. Between 11 and 15 percent of workers are currently unemployed in the United States. As COVID-19 continues to spread, it seems likely that this number will increase. Those who get sick will still need health care as someone who is sick usually cannot work. As a result, it does not and has never made sense for healthcare to be tied to employment.

All workers need paid family leave as well. Those in high-risk jobs such as childcare providers have a special need for this leave so that they are not encouraged to return to work when they have not fully recovered and put others at risk. When people are ill or need to care for sick relatives, they still need income to pay for food and housing. If they have any contagious illness, they risk sharing it with co-workers (and children in the case of teachers and childcare workers) if they return to work.

This was true before COVID-19. Research on California’s paid family leave policy by the National Partnership for Women in 2018 demonstrated that it did not hurt businesses but rather reduced their costs as a result of reduced employee turnover the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides two weeks of fully paid sick leave for quarantined employees or employees needing to care for children without child-care as a result of COVID-19. It also provides an additional 10 weeks of 2/3 pay if the employee does not have childcare as a result of COVID-19.

That is a great start but parents will need this benefit extended if schools and childcare centers are not able to fully open safely in the fall. These two weeks of paid leave and the 10-week extension should be made permanent and should apply to all illnesses and not just the coronavirus.

We also need to pay some parents to stay home and care for their children. This is not a radical idea. Many European countries provide government support for children. In 2018, Germany provided paid leave for new parents and subsidized childcare. Paid families received on average 200 Euros ($250) a month per child without harm to the economy.

The $1,200 stimulus check that families received this spring was a good first step but families continue to need assistance. This need will only grow as more people lose work as a result of the pandemic. Some parents will need to cut back on working hours to care for and educate children.

Capitalism needs families to care for and raise the children who will become its future workers and consumers. But it seeks to displace all the costs onto them. If we can bail out banks and corporations, why can we not bail out families and children?

Elizabeth Palley is a professor of social work at Adelphi University and co-author of In Our Hands: The Struggle for U.S. Childcare Policy.

NYC AUSTERITY
Continued from Page 7

WASH, RINSE, REPEAT: A custodian works in the Manhattan prepares for a limited return of students scheduled to begin in August.

8 SAFETY NET

RETHINKING CHILD CARE
SCHOOL REOPENING CONTROVERSY POSES FALSE CHOICE FOR PARENTS

By Elizabeth Palley

should parents stay home with their children during the pandemic and risk losing their jobs and the much-needed income they provide? Or must they send their kids to school and risk them becoming infected and sharing COVID-19 with the rest of the family?

This is the false choice parents are currently being subjected to. There’s no reason we can’t protect ourselves from this dreaded disease and keep families economically stable at the same time. Now is the time to talk about a national childcare policy, a child allowance, paid family leave and universal healthcare that is not tied to employment.

Existing childcare in the United States is woefully inadequate and unaffordable for many. It involves a patchwork of child-care centers, pre-K, family care, nannies and unlicensed care. Despite the massive movement of women into the workforce beginning in the 1950s, we have never had a unitary federal policy to address child-care.

We provide some minimal tax benefits primarily for the middle and upper classes and subsidize some care for the poor. Those in between and those who are poor and technically eligible but unable to find a spot for their child are left to fend for themselves despite the high cost of care, which is predicted to rise as a result of efforts to reduce enrollment to comply with safety requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Thanks to the pandemic, the Center for Law and Social Policy estimates that child-care centers need a $9.6 billion bail-out per month as a result of their unexpected closures and the need for lower child-to-staff ratios and new sanitary guidelines. Instead of just bailing out the patchwork child-care system we currently have, let’s go all-in on creating the comprehensive one we need.

We also need free universal healthcare for all, including child-care workers. Between 11 and 15 percent of workers are currently unemployed in the United States. As COVID-19 continues to spread, it seems likely that this number will increase. Those who get sick will still need healthcare as someone who is sick usually cannot work. As a result, it does not and has never made sense for healthcare to be tied to employment.

All workers need paid family leave as well. Those in high-risk jobs such as childcare providers have a special need for this leave so that they are not encouraged to return to work when they have not fully recovered and put others at risk. When people are ill or need to care for sick relatives, they still need income to pay for food and housing. If they have any contagious illness, they risk sharing it with co-workers (and children in the case of teachers and childcare workers) if they return to work.

This was true before COVID-19. Research on California’s paid family leave policy by the National Partnership for Women in 2018 demonstrated that it did not hurt businesses but rather reduced their costs as a result of reduced employee turnover the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides two weeks of fully paid sick leave for quarantined employees or employees needing to care for children without childcare as a result of COVID-19. It also provides an additional 10 weeks of 2/3 pay if the employee does not have childcare as a result of COVID-19.

That is a great start but parents will need this benefit extended if schools and childcare centers are not able to fully open safely in the fall. These two weeks of paid leave and the 10-week extension should be made permanent and should apply to all illnesses and not just the coronavirus.

We also need to pay some parents to stay home and care for their children. This is not a radical idea. Many European countries provide government support for children. In 2018, Germany provided paid leave for new parents and subsidized childcare. Paid families received on average 200 Euros ($250) a month per child without harm to the economy.

The $1,200 stimulus check that families received this spring was a good first step but families continue to need assistance. This need will only grow as more people lose work as a result of the pandemic. Some parents will need to cut back on working hours to care for and educate children.

Capitalism needs families to care for and raise the children who will become its future workers and consumers. But it seeks to displace all the costs onto them. If we can bail out banks and corporations, why can we not bail out families and children?

Elizabeth Palley is a professor of social work at Adelphi University and co-author of In Our Hands: The Struggle for U.S. Childcare Policy.

NYC AUSTERITY
Continued from Page 7

minutes. There were also cuts to the fire department, to police, sanitation, to shared resources such as the parks and libraries that, taken together, represented an assault on the collective life of the city.

In many cases, spending did not begin to rise again until the late ’80s. In the case of CUNY, hardly anyone has talked about returning to free tuition. It’s not as if the rollback of free tuition was an emergency plan that was repealed after things got better for the city.

More broadly, the thinking regarding city government shifted. What crystallizes coming out of the fiscal crisis is a sense of the ultimate weakness of the state and its dependence on private economic actors. Therefore, you need to do anything you can to craft policy to attract corporations and wealthy individuals and that’s what should guide the city’s thinking.

Even more than the coronavirus, the greatest threat to New York’s long-term future may be the dramatic reduction in government services that sends the city into a downward spiral amid a pandemic and mass unemployment and causes people to flee in ever larger numbers, further eroding the tax base.

Given that, should city leaders go against 40-plus years of orthodoxy and ask the State of New York for permission to borrow money on the private markets to cover its budget deficits instead of enacting draconian budget cuts?

I don’t think that borrowing money is actually going to be a solution here in the long run. My concern is that it would defer the political question about how to pay for New York’s government to the future and that it would empower the city’s creditors. Instead, I think the city needs to address its problems more directly and to keep pushing for higher taxes on wealthy New Yorkers, as well as a revision of state and national priorities.

I also think that the questions about what the city spends its money on should be echoed on the national level. Moving money from police to social services is a good start. But why should the military budget remain untouched in the throes of a public health disaster?

Finally, can you talk a little bit about the resistance to austerity that took place in New York during the 1970s and what we can learn from that?

The common wisdom has long been that people kind of accepted the budget cuts, that there was no choice so they had to deal with it. But I found in my research that wasn’t actually the case. For example, there were large, sustained protests that saved Hostos Community College from being axed, which would have been a huge blow to the Puerto Rican community it served.

This too is a moment when that kind of popular mobilization is again needed. There’s no question that the Black Lives Matter movement is responsible for focusing much more energy and attention on the city budget than usual, and even though the billion-dollar cut to the NYFD has not turned out to be what we were told, the fact that people are even talking about it is very important and shows how crucial popular mobilization is if we hope to change the situation going forward. Waiting for Washington to act is a non-solution. We need instead to put popular pressure on the ground here in New York State and to work together to call for the city to rise to the moment of this crisis.
“Clifford Conner’s remarkable study does so much more than simply ask and answer how American science has become weaponized over the past century.

‘. . . Despite its unflinching disdain for the corporatization of research, policy, and practice, Conner’s story is not a pessimistic one. Instead, with keen insight, wit, and an empathetic eye on the future, Conner helps rescue the promise of science from the tragedy it has become.”

—Jacob Blanc, author of Before the Flood:
By Katya Schwenk

New York City teachers and parents are questioning a return to school, saying their safety concerns are well-founded.

By Katya Schwenk

The city is also strapped for cash. While schools around the country are getting federal aid from the CARES Act, New York City is not. “The city is the one that is left behind,” says Amanda Vender, a fifth-grade teacher at P.S. 703 in Elmhurst, Queens. “Instead of being in the best position, we’re absolutely in the worst position.”

The city’s most under-resourced schools, teachers say, will bear a disproportional burden if reopening plans go awry. “The city has really no idea what it’s doing,” says Amanda Vender, a fifth-grade teacher at P.S. 703 in Elmhurst, Queens. “Instead of being in the best position, we’re absolutely in the worst position.”

While the city says it is providing additional cleaning equipment to the classroom but doesn’t want to abandon its schools for good.

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To date, the Department of Education (DOE) has released plans for cleaning and social distancing in high schools, but the DOE has yet to provide satisfying answers.

She says the DOE has yet to provide satisfying answers.

“Nobody knows what to do. We have our backs against the wall. We are waiting on the DOE to do the right thing. We are looking for solutions,” she says.

The DOE has yet to provide satisfying answers.

“We had teachers that would bring in their own soap,” she says. “It’s terrifying. We have our backs against the wall.”

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BOUNDLESS KNOWLEDGE
WHY I’LL BE TEACHING OUTSIDE THIS FALL

By Kristin Lawler

For weeks, I’ve been telling colleagues, administrators, anyone who would listen, really, that I plan to teach all my fall classes outside on the grounds of my beautiful riverside Bronx campus. The response has generally been a mildly dismissive chuckle. But I am dead serious.

What we know about COVID-19 is tentative but, so far, it seems that there are three things that will allow us to live in public and still keep each other safe: staying outside, wearing a mask and social distancing. My small Catholic college plans to hold in-person classes through person-to-person classes. Unlike top tier elite private institutions or public universities like CUNY, we can probably not weather a fully online academic year without losing a catastrophic number of students. Besides, real education flows through embodied interactions, and there is simply no substitute for that. This is especially true for our working-class, largely first-generation student population.

Of course, there is a plan to make the indoor air safe: filter, mask, distance. But this virus has proven again and again that it does not abide by the tenets of wishful thinking and there is just no evidence that indoor air won’t transmit the course of a class session or a day of teaching.

So why not head outside? The weather’s fine. Even when it’s not, tents overhead, heat lamps, hell, coats and hats will work. I can’t help braggading here: I teach at one of the most beautiful spots in all of New York City. Seventy rolling acres, all the buildings historic landmarks, Hudson River and Palisades views, lots of gorgeous patio. I can take my pick of idyllic spots on campus, and I know this is not the case at every college, especially in big cities.

So I recommend that we take a cue from what restaurants are doing: take the streets. Claim space for what matters — in New York, eating out is a basic part of city life. So space is given over to it. And just as the city looks extraordinarily beautiful these days, in a dreamy European café society kind of way, I think outdoor college classes could add something even more magical. Every park should be buzzing with the intellectual life of the city. Streets around campuses should be closed and open-air tents set up for masked professors and students.

I am working hard to figure out how to do this well, until the inevitable winter hibernation (and we finish up via Zoom). In addition to getting something to amplify my voice, I am considering what kind of outdoor setup will best engage students. It’s actually a wonderful exercise: I have not thought about the spatial arrangement of my classes for a long time and it’s a welcome shake-up, a breath of fresh air.

I teach sociology and one of its subjects is the way that space conditions social relations. The chance to think concretely about this in my own classes and engineer sessions around new spatial flows is invigorating.

I hope my colleagues follow suit. Most are not part of Trump’s death cult, so I have a feeling they will. And I am well aware that this is quite easy in the context of higher education, far easier than for elementary or even for secondary schools. Still, teaching outside requires a certain level of planning that professors must consider, and I know this is not the case at every college, especially in big cities.

Switching to a remote fall “has always been a possibility,” says Rosier-Rayburn, who sits on the UFT’s roughly 90-member executive board. Though she did not give specifics on UFT’s negotiations with the DOE, she says remote learning is “absolutely being discussed. It is absolutely on the table.”

But it is hardly an ideal solution. Pedagogues and psychologists warn that children’s learning and mental health are put at risk when instruction is fully virtual and parents will be left without consistent childcare, hot meals and the many other critical resources schools provide.

De Blasio has touted his plan for free childcare for 50,000 students per day in the fall, but that accounts for less than 10 percent of the city’s 560,000 elementary school students, many of whom will be out of school for most of the week. Working families say they are left with no good options.

“It’s really difficult for parents to answer how they feel about September,” says Joey, a mother whose two children go to school in the Bronx and who asked that The Indy only use her first name for this story. “It’s very hard. We need to make a living. I want my kids to go to school, but I’m afraid.”

Joey says her concerns and those of fellow parents are not being heard by the DOE. Many are like her, Chinese immigrants, and the language barrier, she says, is not addressed by their school or city government.

“They send people into these meetings and they don’t offer to translate. Then they say there were no questions, no anything,” she says. “Nobody knows our concerns.”

Rodriguez, who leads Bronx Educators United for Justice, says teachers feel similarly. “I don’t think we have been given a platform as teachers to say what we need,” she says. “They are not listening to us.”

Among parents, among teachers, among school staff, there has arisen a gradual sense that the city is steamrolling ahead toward the fall, leaving all else behind. As September approaches, families and educators say, they will need to take matters into their own hands.

“This is our life,” says Rosier-Rayburn. “This is much bigger than things we’ve fought for in the past.”

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Kristin Lawler is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City.

THE INDYPENDENT

August 2020

#WeWontDieforDOE.
WE ARE LIVING INSIDE RONALD REAGAN’S DYSTOPIA

By Danny Katch

The nine most terrifying words in the English language are “I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”

Ronald Reagan made this joke at a 1986 press conference and it has since become a cherished chestnut in conservative circles. It’s kind of sad for Republicans that they find this weak one-liner witty and it’s fully tragic for society that they genuinely think it’s a statement of profound wisdom.

Today, we are in desperate need of the kind of help that only government can provide: unemployment relief, a national system of COVID testing and tracing, centralized public health information and laws that strip police of their limitless powers to brutalize protesters and people of color. Instead we’re confronted with the truly terrifying sight of a government that is only here to harm by sowing distrust, spreading disinformation and stymieing all attempts to implement measures to lower the COVID infection rate.

Four decades of free-market fundamentalism popularized by Reagan have had deadly impacts that were already accelerating. The years leading up to 2020 saw global temperatures steadily rising and U.S. life expectancy steadily falling. Accelerating. The years leading up to 2020 saw global temperatures steadily rising and U.S. life expectancy steadily falling. The unstoppable force of the coronavirus has met the impenetrable wall of government “handouts.”

Reagan was reassuring farmers that receiving government aid didn’t make them like the Black “welfare queens” he inveighed against with absurdly got’s symbols of liberated dependency. No, these were hardworking men who had hit a temporary obstacle on their path to rugged individualism.

In reality, it was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), or “welfare,” that was used by most recipients as a short-term cushion until they found their next job, and farmers who were permanently dependent on government funding, which didn’t stop small farmers — white and Black — from continuing to go under while big agricultural firms gobbled up the subsidies.

Reagan was a master at hitting all the false notes of race and class in the classic American songbook. His “nine most terrifying words” joke flattered the egos of his white country club base (and many more who yearned to join them), who took massive tax breaks and subsidies to be their God-given right while sneering at poor Black people for taking far smaller government “handouts.”

But wait — there’s more. Shortly after announcing the new agricultural aid, Reagan urged the Senate to restore aid to the Contra guerilla army — the same Contras who had been introducing crack-cocaine into Black neighborhoods in South Central LA while working on the CIA’s payroll to overthrow Nicaragua’s socialist government.

For succeeding generations of his followers, Reagan’s lighthearted quip would curdle into a paranoid dogma that saw dark conspiracy theories in the most mundane federal attempts to regulate guns or expand healthcare access. Meanwhile, in the same speech, Reagan lobbied Congress for the brutal paramilitaries who were a part of a secret government program that is perhaps the most outrageous real-life conspiracy in recent American history.

See, it’s a joke that works on so many levels.

Ten years after Reagan’s speech, Bill Clinton disastrously killed AFDC, a historic victory for the long right-wing campaign against government “entitlements.” But rich people’s sense of entitlement would only grow more powerful and self-delusional until, at some point, much of the U.S. ruling class seems to have completely detached itself from the recognition that it depends on a functioning government, which is, of course, how we ended up with the Trump presidency.

Like George W. Bush before him, Trump rose by projecting an image of strength through impunity. His power to get away with being supremely ignorant and incompetent inspired followers and riled up opponents. But in the face of challenges that can’t be bluffed away from the table, the White House has been reduced to throwing a catastrophic temper tantrum.

They want schools to open back up and they’re not going to let stupid science stand in the way! They want the economy back the way it was before COVID so people need to get back to work! And no, they don’t want to hear the facts about rising infection rates or the logic that this is wasting all the economic sacrifices people made during the spring!

And yet even now, Trump is not as much of an outlier from his class as he seems. Business leaders are losing faith in Trump’s ability to govern without lighting himself on fire, but they too have been pushing for schools and the economy to reopen. Many are betting on Joe Biden to put a more human face on their inhuman agenda and there’s decades of evidence to support that wager.

As bad as things are, this is also a time of inspiring hope that we are finally on the verge of escaping the nightmare of Reagan’s joke (or is it the joke of Trump’s nightmare?).

In recent years, issue polling and Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaigns have revealed a sea change away from the 40-year bipartisan worship of the individual and the market.

Polling during the pandemic has shown a continuation of this trend, as strong majorities want the government to prioritize protecting lives over protecting the economy. It that seems like simple common sense, congratulations, you’re a socialist.

But what has made this a moment of rare power and opportunity is the historic Black-led uprising in response to the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the sudden drop in support for police and widespread approval of confrontational Black protests, both of which are as unusual in American history as the recent popularity of socialism.

The rebellion has rapidly undercut support for the dark underside of Reaganism’s vision of freedom, a corporate-libertarian ideology that started in Jim Crow Virginia as a reaction to the “tyranny” of federal desegregation efforts — one of the few moments in U.S. history that the government tried to create for Black people the same freedom of movement that it champions for capital.

If the growing U.S. left can find a way to strengthen and fuse these two developments, we have the potential to redefine freedom for generations to come. In recent years, the movement has produced a beautiful slogan, the nine most inspirational words I can think of for all of us trapped in Reagan’s America:

“When Black people get free, we all get free.”
BLACK LITERATURE HOLDS UP A MIRROR TO AMERICA

By Nicholas Powers

Black literature saved my life. It made the deadly or just weird power dynamics around me instantly readable. I could see myself and my world clearly. Turn the pages of, say, Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies or Percival Everett’s 2001 novel Erasure and you’ll find a mirror. Black writers more accurately reflect our reality, in part because they are less burdened by loyalty to our patriotic myths.

So instead of assuming America is the “City on a Hill,” you can see it as open-air prison in Harriet Jacobs’ 1861 Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Against the trope that America is the “Land of the Free,” you can read how it faxes apocalypses in James Baldwin’s 1963 The Fire Next Time.

Black literature reflects the shadow of the American Dream. And then it holds a mirror to the mirror. The infinite space that appears is the reality of the human spirit.

In light of that tradition, let me introduce you to parts of my syllabus. Over the years of teaching, I found that some books on their own or in odd pairs really spoke to my students. You’ll find here authors who never met holding hands and new ways of understanding familiar names.

Our first pairing is 1845 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass and 50 Cent’s 2005 From Pieces to Weight. The first is a foundational classic of the African-American canon. The second is decidedly not. Read them back to back. See the same obsession with freedom. See the backdrop leap from Southern antebellum plantation to New York Queens in the midst of the Crack Era. See emancipation redefined from a communal act to an individual one. See the projects remake the violence and plantation to New York Queens in the midst of the Crack Era. See emancipation redefined from a communal act to an individual one. See the projects remake the violence and

Our next pairing is the 1996 novel Push by Sapphire and the 2001 satire Erasure by Percival Everett. In Push, meet Precious Jones a kind of Frankenstein character stitched into a whole by the author from the stories of traumatized youth she encountered while working as a social worker. Imagine Celie from Alice Walker’s The Color Purple born in 1980s Crack Era Harlem. Celie and Precious have been raped, molested and abused for being dark skinned. Add to that Precious is obese and is HIV positive. Both find liberation in literacy. Damage imagery hits Middle Passage level in this novel.

Five years later, Everett published Erasure that satirizes Push. In it we meet Monk, a middle-class Black writer who finds no audience for his Postmodernist books and decides to write a fake ghetto novel. It sells mountains of copies,

the silences of the original slave narratives with magic realism and let its sorcery lift the truth to the surface.

Next read Ann Petry’s 1946 novel The Street. Meet Lutie. She’s a single, Black, working-class mother. And she believes in the American Dream. Clawing her way, paycheck by paycheck, to a middle-class life for her son Bub, she is tripped up by men who want to harm her. It is a masterful novel that has yet to get the credit it deserves. Long before the term “intersectionality,” Petry shined a light on the crisscrossing of racism, sexism, and classism into a barbed-wire knot that choked Lutie’s dream. See again the Structuralist analysis implicit in the plot. Her panicked launch out of the Harlem ghetto shows, in the moment she almost escapes, a brief glimpse of the panorama of American life.

Next read Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and Image of the Damaged Black Psyche 1880 to 1996 by Daryl Michael Scott. He describes the use of “damage imagery,” the image of Black people damaged psychologically by racism, and how it was used by Black radicals to argue for nationalism, liberals for reform and conservatives for racial quarantine of the “interior races.” The imagery was politically useful but was also a warped reflection of the complex reality of Black life. The stereotype of broken Black people remains to this day a bottomless mine that politicians and artists tap for easy-to-consume characters. Reagan vilified the “welfare queen,” and Malcolm X exhorted the “lost Black man.”

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Five years later, Everett published Erasure that satirizes Push. In it we meet Monk, a middle-class Black writer who finds no audience for his Postmodernist books and decides to write a fake ghetto novel. It sells mountains of copies,
making him wealthy. Readers don’t realize it’s a joke but think he’s a real “voice from the streets.” The satire hits hard as one realizes the hidden appetite for Black suffering that drives too much of liberal culture.

The next pairing is Piri Thomas’ 1967 classic Down These Mean Streets and Junot Díaz 2007 magnum opus A Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Both Thomas and Díaz crafted New York/New Jersey/Long Island-based coming-of-age stories, the former an autobiography, the latter a novel that maps the fluid landscape of Blackness. They both bridge the Pan-Latino and Pan-African Diasporas. Both show protagonists struggling under the mask of masculinity and both challenge the current fashionable idea of racial essentialism by following characters who are Black and Latinx and pick up the flotsam of cultural debris to beat and solder a new identity in a vortex of poverty and violence.

Our next pair is conservative writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s 2006 autobiography Infidel and Jamaica Kincaid’s 1997 memoir My Brother. The shared center of gravity is male supremacy. In Infidel, Ali comes to maturity in a family on the move from Somalia to Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia to Kenya. She chafes against the patriarchy and religious fundamentalism of her clan. She has her genitals mutilated as part of a tribal tradition. She is married off to a stranger. And she escapes. Scarred but tenacious, Ali embraces the liberalism of the Netherlands. In her autobiography, Ali, an African woman, is the victim of patriarchy. In Kincaid’s My Brother, the victim is her gay brother Devon. He hides his homosexuality by chasing after women, even as he secretly goes to a gay meeting house on the island of Antigua. When he contracts HIV, which blows up to AIDS, he dies with his secret. Only later does Kincaid realize who her brother truly was and eulogizes his passing with the book. Read these books back to back and Blackness becomes a dynamic geography that has at its center the shibboleth of patriarchy that these women bear witness to by reading the scars it left on their lives like fingertips on braille.

I’ll close by recommending these five books. Read Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good by Adrienne Maree Brown, Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins, The Color Purple by Alice Walker, Confessions of a Video Vixen by Karrine Steffans, and Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. Yeah I know. I just went full professor, just gave you a semester’s worth of books, but bear with me.

Of course five books are a lot but they are a beginner’s guide to how women of color have safeguarded their bodies from patriarchy, survived violence and exploited blind spots in a capitalism that trades on youth and beauty. You will read about sex traffickers imprisoning poor village girls in the brothels of the Global South. You will walk the halls of Hollywood and rap video shoots where fame, money and power distort sexuality into a farce. You will hear how women healed themselves with sensual joy.

**SPORTS**

GRIFTERS, BOMBERS, DESPOTS OR ... SWAMP RATS?

By Independent Staff
Illustrations by Leia-lee Doran

AFTER promoting genocide and settler colonialism for 87 years, the Washington NFL franchise previously known at the R’sk™ is mulling what to call itself next. Sports franchises often choose names that celebrate something widely associated with their hometown or region be it an industry — Pittsburgh Steelers, Detroit Pistons, Milwaukee Brewers — or iconic historical moment or figure — Philadelphia ’76ers, Dallas Cowboys, San Diego Padres — or something drawn from the natural world — Miami Dolphins, Colorado Rockies, New Orleans Pelicans.

With that in mind, here are four new team logos we designed to help the Washington football team celebrate our nation’s capital in style. Which one would you choose?

**THE WASHINGTON BOMBERS**

**THE WASHINGTON GRIFTERS**

**THE WASHINGTON SWAMP RATS**

A tremendous mascot. Believe me. Many are even saying that this is the greatest mascot they’ve seen, ever. You know it. I know it. Everyone knows it. Except the fumbling New York Times.

Middle East, South and East Asia, Southern Africa, Europe, “Turtle Island” and South America. The collection was compiled “based in part on who knew someone who might want to do this, and could, in such a short amount of time,” writes editor Marina Sitrin. “Decisions were never based on where there were known solidarity groups and networks, as I assumed they were everywhere. And they are.”

Sitrin is perhaps the perfect person to edit this project, given her background as an international activist and academic who previously wrote about horizontal organizing in Argentina and Greece. She collaborates with Colectiva Sembrar, a collective “dedicated to facilitating voices of those less heard who are... creating a new society in their actions.”

In addition to contributions from people engaged in immediate responses like food distribution that rely on long-established networks, the essays include key insights from disability activists in South Korea who call for support that promises “more than mere survival. We also hear from members of emerging civil society networks in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa, like the C19 People’s Coalition, started in March 2020 with about 300 organizations.

“[T]here is something about the time of the crisis and the possibility that the coalition has afforded to have people sit down and actually work together regardless of their differences,” says member Kelly G., in an interview. “The kinds of relationships that have emerged out of that have been very important.”

“Solidarity is a must. We don’t have a choice,” adds South African permaculturist Chuma Mgcoyi. “No one knows actually what will happen tomorrow and who will need whom.”

Many contributors note the foundations for mutual aid networks that already existed in their communities and cultures, like the Nguni Bantu concept of ubuntu in Southern Africa, often translated as “I am because we are.” Organizations in Lisbon, Portugal, describe a community-based solidarity initiative they launched called the DialogAR Network, which brings together four collectives to offer mental health services like “solidarity listening” and legal help, focusing on immigrants and low-wage workers during the pandemic.

“Even ordinary disasters never really end,” Solnit has observed. Members of Colectiva Sembrar note: “This is a story without end.”

The Common Ground Collective’s work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 shows the long term impact a project started in response to a disaster can have. In his 2011 book, Black Flags and Windmills, Scott Crow describes how he joined with former Black Panther Malik Rahim to fill the void left by FEMA and bring volunteers together to gut houses, distribute food and keep racist vigilantes and police at bay. Afterward, they went on to provide resources like a free health clinic that continues to offer care today.

Crow recalls a moment at Rahim’s kitchen table back in 2005, “when I was joking with Malik about how we were already doing things [that] hadn’t been done in [a] long time. It was weird to know it at that time. Then over the months it started to grow, despite all the challenges.”

Only the state can mobilize the trillions of dollars in public spending needed to lift us out of an economic depression. But whether or not we will see that kind of enlightened governance starting in 2021 will be an epic battle that depends in part on the outcome of a presidential election that is as uncertain as the length of this pandemic.

Aside the vagaries of politics, we can keep shared human needs in the foreground by scaling up mutual aid projects like those described in Pandemic Solidarity.
REKINDLING THE ‘ROMANCE OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM’

The Romance of American Communism
By Vivian Gornick
Verso, 2020

By Steven Weissna

If those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it, Vivian Gornick’s recently reissued *The Romance of American Communism* is a crucial book for today’s radical movements. In this oral history originally published in 1977, Gornick, a red-diaper baby from the Bronx and prominent second-wave feminist, wrestles with the complex legacy of the U.S. Communist Party, its major contributions to the labor and civil rights movements of the mid-20th century and its destructively authoritarian internal politics. It mostly consists of pseudonymous interviews with more than 40 mostly former party members, a spectrum of working-class Bronx Jews, Western migrant workers, artists and activists, and middle-class youths with a burning spiritual hunger.

Its main theme is the all-consuming rush of becoming part of a movement bigger than yourself and finding a purpose. The party offered an ideology to explain the poverty and injustice of the Great Depression, and an organization dedicated to spending it and creating a new world. In the introduction, Gornick writes that she’s now embarrassed by the purple romance-novel prose she used to describe her subjects, but the concept of “romance” fits their passion.

To the CP’s credit, the far-right cardinal that the labor and civil rights movements were heavily red-tinged contains a good bit of truth. Some of the hardest-core union organizers of the 1930s were Communists, organizing transit, textile and port workers by industry instead of limiting themselves to skilled craftsmen. They organized strikes by thousands of California farmworkers in the early 1930s, a time when one national craft union official Gornick quotes said “only fanatics are willing to live in shacks and get their heads broken in the interests of migratory labor.”

Meanwhile, Bayard Rustin, philosophical mentor and logistics specialist for the civil rights movement, was a party member in the early 1940s. Lester Rodney of the Daily Worker was the first white sportswriter to campaign for the integration of major-league baseball, and the second black person elected to the New York City Council was Harlem Communist Benjamin Davis, The New York neighborhoods where hundreds of people turned out to resist evictions during the Depression were those with the strongest Communist presence, and current and former party members later co-founded some of the city’s main tenant organizations.

Those seeds sprouted outside the party too. Harry Hay, who founded the Mattachine Society in 1950, the first major gay-rights organization in the United States, was a member, although he was expelled for being gay a few years later.

Losing yourself in passionate devotion, however, can open you up to manipulation and abuse. The Leninist/authoritarian model was probably essential for sustaining a revolutionary movement in Tsarist Russia, but its Stalinist offspring was a world-historical disaster for governing the Soviet Union and the socialist cause. The U.S. Communist Party defended Stalin to the point of endorsing the 1939 Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact. (My grandfather, a Warsaw-born Jewish immigrant active in the garment workers union, was one of the many party members who quit after that.)

The result was ruthless internal politics: Any disagreement with official dogma or minor screwup would be considered sabotage of the party’s global mission, “objectively counterrevolutionary,” and therefore the actions of an enemy. By the 1950s, members stand the thought of ever going to another meeting!” Personal discontent was considered a reactionary self-indulgence. Many of Gornick’s subjects, particularly the men, luminous and passionate when talking about politics, became tongue-tied when discussing their own feelings. Others say they hung on to the party like spouses in a bad marriage, feeling “a system of oppression older than God” and feeling part of a movement bigger than they ever knew existed, Marzani spied, and they were inevitably going to act on that understanding.

They were “impassioned by an ideal of social justice,” Gornick writes. And for that, she does not regret depicting them as heroic 45 years ago.
I’VE SURVIVED THE PANDEMIC. SO FAR. NOW WHAT?

By Karen Malpede

In April, when New York City was at the peak of COVID-19, when sirens were screaming in the streets and emergency rooms were overloaded with very ill people, when the elderly were dying first and fast, my husband and I jointly vowed not to go to the hospital, certainly not to be intubated.

If we fell ill, we would die consciously, with dignity. He is 87. I am 73. I did not wish to put younger doctors and nurses at risk caring for me and, firmly believing what we said, I tried hard to keep us well, as we never do know whether we can live up to the pledges we make to ourselves.

Now it is July and, a bit to my surprise, here we both are, alive. Doing what the living do.

In our case, that means making theater, even when the theaters are shuttered. It means marching with Black Lives Matter. When the protesters come streaming up our street, we throw on masks and join them, cheer them as they pass, shake our fists with theirs. The marchers are gloriously beautiful in that way of youth feeling what is new to them — their righteous rage, their sorrow and their hope, truth, possibility.

Sometimes, I think there is no such thing as private life anymore. My daily reality, my COVID-inspired dreams, my worries about my child and her children (living in Texas, one of the new hot spots, and she an essential worker), my boredom, inability to sleep, endless tiredness, my grief, my rage, determination to eat less (I’ve just started trying to fast 16 hours a day), are so like everyone’s.

Surely, we are all alone together in a maddeningly stufl y reality that keeps on getting worse with no end in sight. Is this, as a friend in Australia writes me on Facebook at 6 a.m., as bad as the Black Death?

How many millions are yet to die? Then, again, will the acceleration of climate change overtake the coronavirus in severity? Where do we go when the sea level rises? How do we evacuate while maintaining social distancing? What do we eat when drought destroys the crops?

“Will we live to see the end of this?” my husband and I and friends our age ask.

But, in truth, whatever age one is brings its own terrifying challenges: What will I do with my life? Will I ever have a job, a career, fall in love, have sex, marry, be produced or published, finish my degree, go on stage, have a child, do the work I long to do again? How? And for what?

At my age, I’ve at least done a great deal of what I wished — which does not mean I don’t want more of every effort, every joy.

The same questions remain for everyone, whether we have only one or 81 remaining years, or the next five hours. How do I live a life of purpose? How do I make meaning? How do I become of use?

The mistake is thinking we can go back. We’re in the middle of systems collapse and we might as well learn.

Open the schools, by all means, when it is safe enough to do so, but open them up outside, in nature — the forests, the parks, on the High Line. Let the young learn how things grow, how life struggles to renew itself; let them run and dance and tell stories, count stones, and build little huts. Hire young people supervised by teachers to run around with them. Teach survival skills, cooperation, regeneration.

Even in New York City enough open spaces might be found. Outside the cities, it’s easy. It’s safer and better educationally. There is plenty of theory to back this up. No more stigmatizing of “attention deficit” kids. Let them run and explore, find, describe, draw, and engage their particular abilities to focus intently. No more discipline problems, let them wrestle in the mud. Let them learn cold and wet and hot, and the stories that go with the seasons. Let them grow food.

In every way, we should not go back, but “open up” in the true sense of that term — to the unknown that is before us, the difficult path of survival, the true path of care for Earth and her creatures, all of us.

I’m attempting to learn how to teach online at CUNY John Jay College where I have nearly 100 students taking classes in theater and justice and in environmental justice. I’m thinking about what I have to teach now to the young. Age feels like an advantage.

I’ll be teaching theater in extremity, from Euripides through James Baldwin to the present. And climate science, concepts of “othering,” “sacrificial zones,” regenerative ecology. I’ll be asking students to understand and write about their own experiences in light of what I teach.

I know from last semester that many are essential workers, a number have experienced COVID-19, and deaths. I know they need to tell and be heard.

In my experience, two actions give life meaning. One is bearing witness to the suffering of others, to acknowledge and comfort them, to militate against dire circumstances, so that your suffering, too, may count. The other is imagining a brighter future, a better, more engaged, equitable way of being — what we can imagine we might yet be.

Without vision, we remain victims.

If we engage empathy and imagination fully now, in the midst of this pandemic, we live richly, humanly, hopefully, despite our sorrows and tears and our confinement, despite our age and inevitable losses. We reach out to one another empathically across divides. We bind to the life that continues, despite our age and inevitable losses. We reach out to one another empathically across divides. We bind to the life force, beleaguered by our own neglect, yet present, and longing to be embraced.

Karen Malpede is a playwright, writer, director and professor. She is the co-founder, together with her partner George Bartenieff of Theater Three Collaborative. They will do a live reading of her ecofeminist climate fiction drama, Other Than We, on July 26 on Andrew Revkin’s “Sustain What? Sunday Arts” program.
Dear Rev Billy,
I write to confess my sins. I frequently attend Black Lives Matter protests and I believe I understand the stakes involved in the movement. Black Americans are fighting for their lives against systemic racism. But I also have another motive. I'm single, and it is very hard to meet people these days. Should I feel guilty for hoping I might find love among my fellow demonstrators?

— PAUL, LES

Dear Paul,
Let's start with a famous quote from Emma Goldman: “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be a part of your revolution.” Guilt is old manure that doesn’t even stink anymore. It’s a nonsense emotion leftover from Puritans who died centuries ago. Puritans who died from the disease called NOT DANCING.

Dead emotions, like guilt and sentimentality and jealousy — they are dangerous only in that they are empty containers that capture anything funky that comes their way, usually neurotic fear. Example: Lots of guilty liberals keep their racism alive by arranging their guilt with conspicuous charity. They put off an honest look at themselves that might go deep, hurt, and change them. And like Emma says, a hook up and a demo are how you take the mountain by strategy.

— LINDA, Dumbo

Hi Billy,
I am a part of a large Irish Catholic family, only I am adopted and its sole Black member. Recently, a relative of mine forwarded an email to me and the rest of the family that, mixing cherry-picked facts with a whole lot of myth, claimed that the Irish were once slaves and that they were treated worse than Africans in the Americas. It concludes by using the phrase “Irish Lives Matter.” It’s not the first quasi-racist email I’ve received from this branch of the family. I don’t think they even understand how hurtful it is to see that garbage in my inbox. What is my obligation here? I want to educate them but I feel like if they loved me they would educate themselves and stand by me in the cause of racial justice.

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— LINDA, Dumbo

No! You have absolutely no obligation of any kind. And it seems trepily inconsiderate that this challenge to you would happen now, as Black Lives Matter is as sorrowing as it is angry, remembering the murders — “Say Their Names!”

Why would someone choose to be competitive, intruding into your claim on long-sought justice with their own historical grievance? This is an extreme case of white fragility. And do you really need them? Your letter suggests that they live at a distance from you. Good. Just turn away. If you did reach some sort of détente with them, their love for you would always be conditional. Let them go. Find your love in people who affirm justice as a generating basis of that love.

Amen?

— REV

 Reverend Billy is pastor of the Church of Stop Shopping. Have a question for the Reverend? Just email: revbilly@indypendent.org & unburden your soul.

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IN NEXT MONTH’S ISSUE, WE WILL CELEBRATE OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY. IT’S BEEN ONE HELL OF A RIDE. WE WILL ALSO SHARE OUR VISION FOR HOW WE CAN SURVIVE IN THE COVID-19 ERA.

STAY TUNED.