THE FALL OF ANDREW CUOMO
SEX SCANDALS, COVID COVER-UPS, HIS LIKELY SUCCESSOR & MORE
BY JOHN TARLETON, P8

NYC VACCINATION INFO, P15
IN THIS ISSUE

EVICTON NOTICE, P4
Crown Heights residents are fighting to save a longtime local grocery store that faces an April 7 eviction date.

WRONGFUL CONVICTION, P6
Was the Brooklyn DA’s office wrong about Ronnie Wright when they put him away on a murder rap?

CRUELTY AS POLICY, P7
Closing the subway system overnight to keep the homeless out is just one of the cruel policies the MTA has adopted during the pandemic.

NO MO CUOMO, P8
Andrew Cuomo is the product of New York’s civic and media culture that elevates style over substance, attitude over aptitude. We deserve better.

WHO’S NEXT? P9
The governor’s departure would create new opportunities for a rising cohort of progressive leaders.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE, P10
Take our Cuomo pop quiz and see how much you really know about New York’s chief executive.

TAX THE RICH, P12
Democratic socialists have been ramping up pressure on state legislators to support higher taxes on the rich. And they’re getting results.

VACCINES FOR ALL, P14
Community-based organizing and outreach is key to ensuring racial equity in who gets vaccinated.

NYC VACCINATION INFOBOX, P15
What you need to know, where to go and more.

AN OLD BIAS RESURFACES, P16
Asian Americans have gone from a “model minority” to pandemic scapegoats in one year’s time.

RUSH LIMBAUGH DOXXED ME, P17
She was a college student when Rush Limbaugh targeted her. It took years to recover.

TAKE A BREAK, P18
Your life should be about more than your work, labor journalist Sarah Jaffe writes in her new book.

REVEREND BILLY’S REVELATIONS, P19
Words of wisdom from our advice columnist on the coming post-pandemic life and what our new, new normal should be.

HOORAY!
THANK YOU TO ALL OUR READERS WHO HELPED MAKE OUR ANNUAL WINTER FUND DRIVE A HUGE SUCCESS. WE COULDN’T DO THIS WITHOUT YOU!

THE INDY
Black culture. Before she died in 2014, she made the home’s community members about the home’s history and celebrated her: a performing-arts and rehearsal space that taught commissioned by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC)domain eviction, with the help of Families United for Racially and access to transportation. The Truesdells were involved in the Underground Railroad, saving it from being demolished.

By Olivia Riggio

Beneath the imposing, angular structures of the luxury high-rise apartments and hotels of downtown Brooklyn sits an unassuming brick rowhouse, 227 Duffield St, on a block co-named Abolitionist Place in 2007. In February, the home, which was owned by abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Truesdell in the 1850s and 1860s, was recognized as a historic site by the city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission for its likely connection to the Underground Railroad, saving it from being demolished.

The movement to save the home began in 2005, when “Mama” Joy Chatel, who lived in the home and operated a salon out of the bottom floor, found an eviction notice taped to her door. Over the years, she had learned the history of persuading elderly and disabled homeowners to sell their properties to him for outrageously low-balled prices. In 2012, Hanasab tried to purchase a $600,000 home for $6,000. A judge later nullified the sale, saying it “reeked of fraud.”

Typically, buildings are designated landmarks for their architectural significance, but 227 Abolitionist Place’s design was nothing special. Instead, advocates had to make the case for the home’s historical significance. The 13 historian peer reviewers who contributed to the EDC’s 2007 report had recommended that it be preserved, but according to Rothblatt, the agency buried that information in the report.

Proving a site was part of the Underground Railroad relies largely on circumstantial evidence, as aiding escaped slaves was illegal under the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Truesdells would have faced jail if they spoke openly about their work — and the people they were helping would have been returned to slavery — but there are a few things we can deduce from what they could speak openly about, says historian Jim Driscoll. The area had many Black churches and access to transportation. The Truesdells were involved with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and other radical social movements such as women’s rights. And, of course, there was the passed down oral history.

“You have to show that they were in many other very similar causes for which they cannot be imprisoned,” Driscoll explained. “They could never admit they were involved in the Underground Railroad. … It means that the evidence about them being Underground Railroad conductors may be spoken evidence, but it may be true.”

The basement of 227 also has architectural abnormalities, such as what appear to be sealed-up tunnels. Driscoll said many Underground Railroad historians have debunked the existence of actual underground tunnels connecting Underground Railroad stops, but there were rumors to be other stops on the block, so it’s more plausible that there were tunnels connecting them. The basement spaces could have also been hiding places.

The Friends of Abolitionist Place now plan to turn the building into a heritage site that will teach visitors about Brooklyn’s abolitionist history and celebrate Black culture — much like the space Chatel created in her home. There are also reportedly artifacts in the house, which the group can learn more about once they’re able to get inside. Friends of Abolitionist Place appealed to the city to help them resolve mold and structural problems in the house, caused by the nearby hotel which pierced the water table and caused flooding. Friends of Abolitionist Place just received 501(c)(3) status and is hoping to form a public-public partnership with the city. The city will be purchasing the home from Hanasab this month. Friends of Abolitionist Place will also be reaching out to arts and historical organizations in the county and state for help restoring it.

“I think that this offers them a really wonderful opportunity — and also challenging their own institutions — to be part of maintaining a role in history and a positive part of our history,” Bacquie Vaughn said.

Advocates are still trying to get nearby Willoughby Square Park designated as a space honoring New York’s abolitionist movement, but that project is stalled.

“There’s still a want and a need to preserve our history,” Lee said. “And I have to say ‘ours’ because it involves everyone. It involves white people, it involves Black people... it involves women, children. It involves everything. And my mom put a human face and story and feelings to that, because people can relate to just being a homeowner and struggling, or single parent or grandparent, or a business owner and the possibility of it being taken away.”
GENTRIFICATION

By Julia Thomas

n an early March Saturday afternoon, Destiny Ciliberti walked three blocks from the Crown Heights apartment building where her family lives to the Associated Supermarket at 975 Nostrand Avenue to meet her mother to go grocery shopping. Outside the market, Ciliberti’s mother, Joyce McGearry, lingered in the cold air with her two young-er daughters, ages seven and 11, while waiting for Ciliberti to arrive, exchanging “hellos” with a market employee and fellow shopper near the store’s auto-matic doors in the meantime. The family had gathered to pick up a few items — snacks, spaghetti sauce, juice, chocolate chip Häagen-Dazs ice cream, and during this particular trip, bread for turkey burgers — as they have done every few days for as long as Ciliberti, who’s 22, can remember.

Now, as the Associated Supermarket faces an eviction notice from the store’s owner, many residents — including Ciliberti, McGearry and their family — who have long depended on the store are advocating that it remain, as an essential community business that sells affordable groceries in the historically Black American, Black West Indian and Caribbean neighborhood.

“I think that this neighborhood is going to see the same type of development that over by Franklin Av-enue has seen where we see a lot of small shops kind of get shut down and bought out and then gentri-fied so that it appeals to the mass mainstream,” said Ciliberti, who grew up in Crown Heights and is cur-rently serving as an AmeriCorps member. “It just feels like a losing battle in the gentrification of Brooklyn.”

The supermarket is a staple for many in the com-munity, particularly elderly residents who live nearby and can easily access the store or get their groceries delivered by Associated employees. Local residents also say it’s the only grocery store sourcing fresh pro-duce for half a mile within the area, meaning that if the store is forced to close, the cost for transportation to travel to another supermarket would become a bar-rier or significant hassle for many.

The Associated Supermarket, housed in a one-sto-ry building with a red metal roof bearing a glowing “Associated” sign with two burnt out bulbs, has been open at its current site, adjacent to a parking lot, since 1991. The market was predated by an A&P grocery store, which opened in 1970 when Midwood Invest-ment and Development acquired the property. In 2015, Associated owner Pablo Espinal signed a 5-year lease when his original 25-year lease expired, and has been on a month-to-month lease since June 2020.

On March 8, Associated received a 30-day notice from Midwood to vacate the premises. Negotiations between Espinal and Midwood about terms of the site’s development and payments for vacating the site have been ongoing since early this year. In January, ac-tivists and other news outlets reported that Midwood had previously presented a 90-day eviction notice, but Midwood said in a statement to the Indypendent that no such notice was issued. Midwood says that it will seek court intervention and pursue damages under the lease if the property is not vacated by April 7.

Neighborhood residents have been mobilizing to prevent such a day. Though the local Brooklyn Community Board 9 will not be officially involved in dealings over the property unless rezoning or construction permits are filed under the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), a ma-jority of the Brooklyn Community Board 9 members recently voted to support the fight to save Associated.

“If the Associated disappears, what comes back, if anything comes back? Will the community have af-fordable food options?” says Fred Baptiste, the Com-munity Board 9 Chair. “There’s definitely concern on our part.”

On January 30, dozens of people gathered to dis-tribute flyers and share information with local resi-dents about the possible closure. One week later, more than 100 people convened for a rally in support of Associated and spoke about their longtime connections to the store and its impact on the neighborhood.

Michael Hollingsworth is a longtime housing ad-vo cate, lead organizer with the Crown Heights Tenant Union and candidate for City Council District 35, where the Associated is located. He grew up shop-ping at the former A&P with his mother and brother. Looking at recent instances of gentrification and the impact of luxury grocery stores and housing develop-ments in Black neighborhoods, Hollingsworth fears that a new supermarket may not adequately serve the community or allow people “to get the same things that they’ve been accustomed to, to be able to afford the price points in this market,” he says. “When these new developments come in, the supermarkets that usually come with them don’t serve these folks well.”

Viviana Morgan, a candidate for City Council in nearby District 40, community board member, and li- censed real estate agent, questions the accessibility of housing rentals for working class people in the area, some of whom she says are making less than $20,000 per year. Morgan started a petition on Change.org to “Save The Associated Supermarket,” which currently has over 4,000 signatures.

“If you really want to come to my community and say you’re going to build affordable housing, let’s think about the people that’s working in McDonald’s, in those fast food restaurants, and the home health aides taking care of the elderly,” Morgan told the Indypendent. “When ... they said, ‘this is affordable,’ it’s not really affordable. You have to ask the ques-tion, who is it affordable for?”

Ciliberti recalls frequenting the Associated as a kid and feeling a sense of familiarity with the store’s employees, as well as comfort and fondness in know-ing that the market was a place she could consistently count on to buy necessities. “In case I ever need any-thing, I can come here, get something last minute,” she says. “The supermarket has always been the place to go. This is it for us, basically.”

Juan Contreras, 45, who works in maintenance and lives with his mother two blocks away from the store, has frequented the store for 20 years. As the person responsible for cooking in his household, he shops there every day and appreciates the store be-cause several of the employees are also native Spanish speakers. “I don’t see why they want to make it disap-pear,” he told the Indypendent. “We’re going to fight because this is the only one. We need it.”
WHEN PROSECUTORS HIDE THE EVIDENCE

DID THE BROOKLYN DA’S OFFICE GET RONNIE WRIGHT’S CASE REALLY WRONG?

BY THEODORE HAMM

I’m a murderer,” Demetrius Morris told a Brooklyn federal jury in the winter of 2019. “I took innocent people’s lives.”

In order to help prosecutors build their successful case against “G’z Up” gang leader Nicholas Washington, Morris confessed to committing two murders (ordered by Washington) in Bed-Stuy in 2005–6. One of the two people killed was Andrell Napper, an innocent bystander who Morris gunned down in a botched retaliation shooting outside the Tompkins Houses in August 2006.

Shortly thereafter, the Brooklyn district attorney’s office brought murder charges against two men for killing Napper, Stephon Williams and Ronnie Wright. During the preliminary hearings prior to trial, Williams changed his plea from innocent to guilty, but continued to implicate Wright. Williams, however, never took the witness stand at Wright’s trial.

In February 2008, a Brooklyn state supreme court jury convicted Wright of killing Napper. But amid the run-up to the 2019 federal trial, Wright learned that Morris had made statements to law enforcement officials shortly after the murder that were never turned over to his trial defense.

In the two statements, Morris denied he was a gunman and provided divergent accounts of Wright’s alleged role. The prosecution’s failure to turn over such potentially exculpatory material is a clear Brady violation, which may yield an overturned conviction.

All of these points raise a simple question: Why is Ronnie Wright still in prison, where he is not eligible for parole until 2044?

By 2005, New York City’s crime rate seemed to be in steady decline. That year’s total number of murders, 539, was the lowest the city had seen since the early 1960s. “People will be shocked to see how safe it is to live [here],” a John Jay College professor told the New York Times.

But as that same article noted, several areas of Brooklyn still experienced high rates of violence, including the 79th Precinct in northwest Bed-Stuy, home to the Marcy, Tompkins and Sumner NYCHA houses.

In early August 2006, a memorial service was held for a man known as “Popcorn,” brother of G’z Up leader Nicholas Washington. Ronnie Wright attended the event and wore a T-shirt that day honoring Popcorn, his cousin.

Around 10 p.m. that same summer night, a large throng of people were hanging out on Throop Avenue outside the Tompkins Houses. Suddenly, at least two gunmen showed up targeting a man nicknamed “Chizz,” whom they believed to be Popcorn’s killer. Their bullets missed Chizz and instead hit two other men, with Andrell Napper dying at the scene and the other man surviving.

The next day the cops arrested Stephon Williams, then 15, who told detectives that he had arrived at the scene with three accomplices, namely Washington, Wright, and a “light-skinned guy” (later revealed to be Demetrius Morris). Williams’ statements against Wright, however, did not surface in the trial.

Wright, moreover, was the only one of the four people named by Williams who was not directly linked to G’z Up. Wright’s legal team, led by Dennis Kelly, sees this as a key factor explaining why Wright was prosecuted. At the time the feds were investigating G’z Up and in the view of Kelly and company, they wanted to keep that fact under wraps.

The day after Napper’s murder, a woman with the surname Smith went with her cousin to the 79th Precinct. Smith had a close relationship with Chizz but also had known Wright for over twenty years, albeit not as a friend. She told detectives that Ronnie approached the scene wearing his “RIP Popcorn” shirt and identified Wright, Williams, and Morris as the shooters.

No physical evidence linked Wright to the scene. As Morris later told the federal jury, Wright, an aspiring rapper, was a well-known figure in the neighborhood and on parole (for a 1995 felony conviction as a juvenile), making it especially risky for him to show up to a large gathering with a gun. Defense lawyers found no other witnesses placing him at the murder scene.

Two months after Wright’s arrest, Det. Christopher Hennigan of the 79th Precinct traveled to Altoona, PA, where Morris had fled. Morris, who had been arrested on drug trafficking charges, gave two divergent statements about Napper’s murder.

Morris first told Hennigan that he arrived at the scene with five other gunmen, including Wright. He then stated that Wright pointed out Chizz to the other gunmen. But Morris claimed that two others—neither himself nor Wright—did the shooting. According to the transcription of a second statement to the FBI later that day, Morris now explained that the shooters were Wright, Williams, and one of the two others.

Prior to Wright’s trial, Brooklyn prosecutor Howard Jackson did not provide either of Morris’ statements to Wright’s defense counsel. In his summation, Jackson brought up Smith’s identification of Morris as illustration that she could also see Wright. But the jury never got to assess Morris’ conflicting accounts of Wright’s purported role in the murder.

Wright’s legal team is now seeking to overturn the conviction based on the Ready violations. Brooklyn State Supreme Court Judge Ruth Shillingford granted a full hearing last April to determine whether a retrial will be ordered.

In response to questions from the Independent regarding why the office refuses to overturn Wright’s conviction, the DA’s spokesman emailed the following statement: “The defendant was implicated by an eyewitness, by a codefendant who pled guilty to the murder and by another accomplice. That man, Demetrius Morris, pointed to the defendant’s involvement and contradicted his alibi defense in his 2006 statements and 2019 testimony. We intend to continue to litigate this case in court.”

As his legal team emphasizes, Wright was convicted as a gunman, not an accomplice. In his federal trial, Morris offered a third account of Wright’s role, this time repeating a version of his initial 2006 account, in which Wright was a shot-caller (allegedly urging Morris and Williams to “go, go, go”), not an actual shooter. The DA’s statement that Morris “pointed to the defendant’s involvement” does not match its trial theory that Wright shot Napper.

Last fall, in a ruling on another case in which the Brooklyn DA’s team fought to preserve a faulty conviction, Judge Shillingford expressed serious concerns about the office’s ability to investigate its own work. “There has got to be an evaluation of what happened in every case,” she wrote. “And that cannot be done by the District Attorney’s office.” Shillingford called for an outside review commission.

It was also Judge Shillingford who originally responded to Wright’s handwritten motion seeking to reopen his case based on revelations during the federal trial. Her final ruling in the case came in January, when she ordered the DA’s office to turn over all files from the NYPD’s collaboration with federal law enforcement during the G’z Up investigation. Shillingford is retiring this year, and Wright and his team are hoping that Judge Sharon Hudson shows a similar degree of diligence when she takes over the case when Shillingford retires later this year.
By Jordan G. Teicher

At one of his daily press briefings last April, Governor Andrew Cuomo held up the front page of the Daily News, which featured a photo of homeless New Yorkers camped out in a subway car.

“That is disgusting, what is happening on those subway cars,” he said. He called those conditions “disrespectful” to essential workers, who need public transportation to get to their jobs.

The moment might have seemed like just another one of the governor’s “New York tough” poses. But the day after Cuomo’s press briefing, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which the governor effectively controls, updated its Code of Conduct with new emergency rules ostensibly meant to “maintain social distancing” and “safeguard public health and safety.” One rule forbids the use of wheeled carts greater than 30 inches long or wide. Another forbids passengers from remaining in a station for more than an hour.

Since the one-hour rule makes exceptions for a litany of activities—including political campaigning, public speaking, and artistic performances—advocates argue that its real intention was to keep homeless New Yorkers out of the subway system.

The MTA made the emergency rules permanent last September.

“Folks who are unsheltered and take refuge on the subways have seen a huge reduction in the number of resources throughout the city to meet their basic needs. People’s lives have changed for the worse,” says Giselle Routhier, policy director at the Coalition for the Homeless.

In February, Barry Simon, a disabled 55-year-old man who’s experienced homelessness since the 1980s, filed a lawsuit against the MTA charging that the policies are discriminatory, backed by two homeless-advocacy groups, Picture the Homeless and the Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project.

He says he was forced to leave the subway dozens of times, and was often threatened with arrest or the seizure of his belongings. “They’d actually start writing up the ticket, and once I kind of envisioned all I’d have to do to get my stuff back, I’d just be like ‘OK, officer, I’m gonna get off the train now, and you won’t see me anymore,’” he told the Independent from the Queens hotel where he’s been staying since February.

The MTA has said that the rules were designed only to “protect the health and safety of customers and employees in the midst of a global pandemic.” In a statement to the Independent, MTA spokesmans Andrei Berman said that “sheltering in the transit system is not a solution to a severe housing, mental-health and substance-abuse crisis that needs an effective and holistic response from the city.” Any suggestion otherwise, Berman said, is “a gross misunderstanding of the problem.”

Danny Pearlstein, policy and communications director of the Riders Alliance, said he agrees with the MTA—to an extent. He doesn’t believe that public transit is the answer to the housing crisis. But, he says, the solution is “to make it so that no one has to live there—not to complicate the lives of the people who do.” And he says that power lies squarely with Cuomo.

“The governor is the governor of the housing crisis, as well as the transit crisis,” he said.

Cuomo once led a commission that recommended overhauling the city’s shelter system and expanding services for homeless New Yorkers, during David Dinkins’ mayoral administration in the early 1990s. But as governor, Pearlstein says, he has favored an approach based on law enforcement.

“The governor’s wealthy backers who object to taxes also object to the fact that there is a physical homelessness problem in the subway system. Whether it’s their own policy choice or his, the governor has resorted to a policing model rather than a housing or health-care model probably because it’s nominally cheaper,” he said. "But of course, it doesn’t resolve the problem.”

In recent years, according to the Coalition for the Homeless, homelessness in New York City reached the highest levels since the Great Depression. Last year, nearly 123,000 different people slept in the city’s shelter system. On an average night there were nearly 59,000 people in the system.

During the pandemic, however, many people experiencing homelessness have avoided the crowded congregate shelters, where COVID spreads easily. By June of last year, according to Gothamist, 120 homeless people in the city had died from COVID. The vast majority had been living in shelters.

With many other indoor public spaces closed, more homeless New Yorkers descended into the subway system. The day after the MTA announced its Code of Conduct updates, the governor declared that it would suspend all-night subway service for the first time ever, to clean trains more extensively. Homeless advocates say the shutdown provided another excuse to remove homeless people.

“The solution they’ve always had is ‘Let’s bring more cops to the trains,’” said Joe Loonam, housing campaign coordinator at VOCAL-NY. “The shutdown is a really dramatic version of a policy that has been carried out for decades in the city.”

On February 5, an MTA operative on Twitter responded to a passenger’s post about benches disappearing from some subway stations by explaining that the benches were removed “to prevent the homeless from sleeping on them.”

The MTA quickly deleted the tweet and claimed that the benches had been removed for cleaning. Authority officials told the Independent that it has never tailored a policy to a passenger’s housing status. They did not respond to a question about how many benches had been removed from the system in the past year.

Giselle Routhier says there are things the city and state could do that would help homeless people and address the root causes of homelessness. She’s been calling on the city to offer all homeless New Yorkers a single-occupancy hotel room instead of a bed in a congregate shelter. (A lawsuit filed in October by the Legal Aid Society and the law firm Jenner & Block makes the same demand.) She also supports a bill pending in the state Assembly that would create a housing voucher program, which would help homeless New Yorkers acquire stable housing.

“As soon as you have a new voucher program and you have more beds opening up in supportive housing units, then [Department of Homeless Services] outreach workers can go into the subway and offer people a permanent place to live. That’s going to be a lot more attractive to people. And you’re going to see a reduction in the number of people who are sleeping on the trains.”

Ideally, Barry Simon said, “peoples’ humanity, peoples’ situation, peoples’ stories should have some sort of weight” when MTA leadership decides how to treat homeless people in the subway system. But realistically, he said, he just hopes to be able to sit in the subway in peace and “get out of the cold for a little while.”
WHY CUOMO HAS TO GO
HE’S TOXIC, AND HE’S BEEN A DRAG ON NY FOR YEARS

By John Tableton

What a difference a year makes.
This time a year ago Andrew Cuomo was holding daily press conferences that captivated millions. His PowerPoint presentations and a calm, empathetic father figure persona that were oddly reassuring. It wasn’t exactly The West Wing, but for liberals sweating out the plague at home and still reeling their 2016 defeat, it was good enough.

Cuomo had mastered the aesthetics of authority and million-dollar sound bites of a man who seemed to be the opposite of Donald Trump in every way. Some of his most ardent fans proclaimed themselves “Cuomosexuals” and cried out on social media — “Gone me big daddy!”

Only Cuomo’s staunchest critics noted that New York was enduring one of the highest per capita COVID-19 death rates of any country or state in the world and that dead bodies were stacking up like firewood in its nursing homes. For his 111 consecutive daily press conferences, Cuomo received an Emmy Award.

You wouldn’t have guessed Cuomo was an Emmy winner when he showed up for his March 3 press conference. He had vanished from public view for a week after being hit with a string of sexual harassment allegations from young women who had worked for him or had the misfortune to cross his path at social events. Now, he had reemerged to issue a non-apology apology to any woman who had misunderstood his words, become emotional. And he insisted he had never touched any woman inappropriately even though there were published photos from days before of him holding a woman’s face in his hands just before he tried to force a kiss on her.

Was Cuomo’s cringe-worthy performance an attempt to make us feel sorry for him? Or, was this what happens to a lifelong bully who suddenly finds himself at the mercy of events? Mass death in the nursing homes and a subsequent public review had merged with a steady drip of sexual harassment allegations to become one big mega-scandal that was mutating too quickly for him to vaccinate himself against. For once, America’s most autocratic governor was not in charge.

• • •

How did we get here? And what will be the end game?
For starters, Cuomo is an overhyped product of New York City’s civic and media culture — just like Donald Trump and Rudy Giuliani before him. It’s a culture that elevates style over substance; that substitutes the ability to posture and strike an attitude for real achievement; that turns a failed businessman-turned-grifter into a once-in-a-generation tycoon, a petty tyrant into “America’s Mayor” and the son of a former governor into a model of rational, super-competent leadership even when the evidence suggests otherwise.

New York is a city of strippers who pride themselves on shagging off adversity and pushing forward. The likes of Giuliani, Giuliani and Trump seek to flatter us when they adopt a “New York Tough” persona. But we pay a high price for welcoming such flattery.

Like Trump, Cuomo is damaged goods. They are both heirs to family dynasties, one in business and the other in politics. Their fathers were workaholics — powerful, emotionally distant men from mid-20th-century America whose approval they are forever seeking and whom they are forever seeking to surpass. Like Trump, Cuomo must control everything and everyone in his world. Like Trump, Cuomo always knows best and drives away experts who tell him what he doesn’t want to hear. Like Trump, Cuomo’s mistakes are always someone else’s fault. Like Trump, Cuomo revels in being a vindictive bully no one wants to cross. And like Trump, he appears to have a penchant for sexually harassing women.

Unlike Trump, Cuomo is hard-working and highly intelligent. But his inability to listen to others often leads to bad outcomes. We saw this with the nursing homes, which he ordered to accept COVID-infected patients at the height of the pandemic with predictably devastating consequences.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of New Yorkers who voted for Cuomo because of his “experience” and ability to “get things done” who are now dead due to his negligence. Think about that.

• • •

Cuomo, 63, has spent the majority of his adult life at the pinnacle of state power in New York. Three terms at the side of his father Mario Cuomo, a term as attorney general and three more terms as governor on his own. Ultimately, the biggest problem with Cuomo isn’t psychological. It’s his allegiance to the ruling class and to the economics of austerity for everyone else, even during a once-in-a-century pandemic.

If he hasn’t been so great at actually preserving the lives of his constituents, Cuomo has perfected the art of his own political self-preservation. Albany has been corrupt forever, but this governor has gone to the next level with creating a pay-to-play paradise for the wealthy and the well-connected. Cuomo has kept spending and taxes down for his well-heeled patrons while the choicest govern- ment favors always seem to go to large campaign donors. For example, before sending COVID-19 patients back to nursing homes to ignite a mass die-off of the old, Cuomo gave full legal immunity to hospitals and nursing home companies and executives. The Greater New York Hospital Association and the nursing home industry have donated millions of dollars to Cuomo over the course of his career.

These kinds of arrangements allowed Cuomo to raise $36 million when he ran for re-election in 2018. Imagine a man barricaded in his office behind a wall of cash, determined to never leave.

Cuomo’s good fortune appears to have run out. His chances of winning a fourth term now seem remote. And his chances of completing his third term are shaky at best, with his fate now in the hands of Attorney General Letitia James. She is investigating sexual harassment charges leveled at him by six women as the Indypendent goes to press. If he’s forced out, little-known Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul would serve out the remainder of his term.

The younger, more progressive state Senate led by Andrea Stewart-Cousins would make quick work of Cuomo if they could. But in New York impeachment has to be initiated by the State Assembly, a bastion of old-guard machine Democrats that so far has stuck with Cuomo pending James’ report. A best-case scenario: In the three-people-in-a-room budget negotiations this month, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie plays the good cop to Stewart-Cousins’ bad cop and extorts a king’s ransom of concessions from a desperate Cuomo on taxing and spending and other progressive legislation — and then casts him aside.

If you would like to see Cuomo removed from office, this would be a good time to give your local Assembly member a call or an email. Many of them are wavering. However the end game works out with Cuomo, let’s keep one thing in mind. He was never indispensable to start with. We never needed his toxic masculinity, his neoliberal ideology, his systematic corruption or his blundering incompetence. We can do better. We deserve better. If we act on that insight in 2022, a new and better day is possible in New York State.
WHO’S READY TO MOVE UP?

BY JOHN TARLETON

Whether Gov. Andrew Cuomo limps to the end of his third term or is impeached or forced to resign in the coming weeks or months, his chances of winning a fourth term in office seem vanishingly small at this point. So who is likely to lead a post-Cuomo New York and if necessary finish him off in a 2022 Democratic primary if he refuses to exit the stage?

LETTITIA JAMES

The New York attorney general is the clear front-runner to replace Cuomo. She has won statewide office once (2018), citywide office twice as public advocate (2017 & 2013) and was a Working Families Party-backed Brooklyn City Councilmember for 10 years before that.

For resistance liberals, she can tout the scorched-earth legal war she has waged against Donald Trump and his scofflaw family since becoming New York AG. She’s also well-liked by the state’s powerful labor unions and could unlock the Black vote in New York City, which has been Cuomo’s bulwark. But she’s got just 3% of the vote in 2022.

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI

This progressive firebrand laid waste to Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) kingpin Jeff Klein in 2018 to win her state senate seat representing parts of northern Bronx and Westchester County. Since then, she hasn’t been afraid to mix it up with Cuomo. But she’s only 34 years old — so if Letitia James runs for governor, making a bid for attorney general could be her next move.

JESSICA RAMOS

Jessica Ramos is another dynamic, young state senator who rode into office on the 2018 blue wave and seems destined to run for higher office. And like Biaggi, 2022 may be too soon to take aim at the governor’s mansion, especially if James or Williams is in the race. A former aide to Bill de Blasio, she could run for mayor or public advocate in a future cycle (without risking her Queens senate seat) or snag a seat in Congress if AOC runs for higher office.

BILL DE BLASIO

Speaking of de Blasio, he’s now said to be interested in getting into the governor’s race. Ugh, please no. Not that. He still has a strong base of support in the Black community and his 2014 rollout of universal pre-K for four-year-olds was brilliant. But after spending much of his eight years as mayor pursuing a quixotic bid for the presidency, the last thing we need is more of his checked-out, lackluster leadership.

RON KIM

No one in Albany has been more consistent and fearless in holding Andrew Cuomo accountable for the Covid nightmare that unfolded in New York’s nursing homes than this fifth-term Assemblymember from Flushing, Queens. He would be a powerful foil to the corrupt, amoral Cuomo. When he ran in the 2019 special election for public advocate won by Jamaal Williams, he only got 3% of the vote. That won’t be the case if he runs for that office again. He’s already shown what one elected can do when they’re serious about advocating for the public.

JAMAAL BOWMAN

Okay, he’s been in Congress for less than three months, so running for higher office in 2022 would probably be premature. But let’s hope he does so before too long. The former middle school principal is unabashedly Black and left, yet has a disarming happy-warrior persona that makes him a natural to lead a broad multi-racial coalition like the one he mobilized last year to handily defeat the 16-term incumbent, conservative Eliot Engel.

AOC

For as long as this political supernova holds her Queens/Bronx congressional seat, there will be chatter about which higher office she will run for next. However, she’s shown little interest in state politics. Her destiny seems to be to run for higher office at the federal level. In case you were wondering, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez turns 35 on October 13, 2024.
TAKE THE CUOMO POP QUIZ
AND CHECK THE ANSWER KEY ON PAGE 13 TO SEE HOW MANY QUESTIONS YOU ANSWERED CORRECTLY

1. **EARLY SIGNS**
   - Andrew Cuomo has long been suspected of having been responsible for the anonymous poster titled “Vote For Cuomo, Not The Home” that appeared on the city streets during the final weeks of the hotly contested 1977 mayoral race between his father Mario Cuomo and Ed Koch, a lifelong bachelor.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

2. **NICKNAME**
   - While serving as an advisor to his father Gov. Mario Cuomo, young Andrew Cuomo was dubbed “The Prince of Darkness” for his ruthless ways.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

3. **HUD SECRETARY**
   - In the secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the late ’80s, Andrew Cuomo helped prevent the subprime mortgage crisis.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

4. **PUBLIC SECTOR**
   - Upon becoming governor in 2011, Andrew Cuomo blamed Wall Street for the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent Great Recession, vowing to protect the public sector by making the financial industry pay for the crisis.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

5. **DRAWING A LINE**
   - When he ran for governor in 2010, Andrew Cuomo promised to put a nonpartisan commission in charge of legislative redistricting in place of the partisan Independent Democratic Conference (IDC).
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

6. **BYE PARTISAN**
   - When Republicans lost their State Senate majority in 2012, Cuomo engineered the creation of the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), a group of four Democratic state senators who caucused with the GOP and kept it in power.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

7. **COMMISSION IMPOSSIBLE**
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

8. **UNOPPOSED?**
   - Since winning the governorship in 2010, Andrew Cuomo has been essentially unchallenged by progressives during his reign as the nation’s highest elected official.
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

9. **LADIES MAN**
   - During his 2014 re-election run, Andrew Cuomo was endorsed by the newly formed Women’s Equality Party (WEP).
   - **TRUE**
   - **FALSE**

10. **HE’S GOT A TICKET TO RIDE**
    - In the summer of 2017, as the news broadcast photos of absurdly overcrowded subway platforms, Andrew Cuomo apologized for the MTA’s poor performance and pledged to expand funding and invest in a 21st-century subway fleet.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

11. **READY TO FEAST**
    - In July 2018, Alain Kaloyeros, the principal architect of the Buffalo Billion, Gov. Cuomo’s economic revitalization plan for Western New York, was found guilty of steering hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts to a bid-rigging scheme. Executives from the two firms that benefited from Kaloyeros’s largesse were significant campaign donors to Gov. Cuomo.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

12. **BUFFALO BILLION**
    - In July 2018, Alain Kaloyeros, the principal architect of the Buffalo Billion, Gov. Cuomo’s economic revitalization plan for Western New York, was found guilty of steering hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts to a bid-rigging scheme. Executives from the two firms that benefited from Kaloyeros’s largesse were significant campaign donors to Gov. Cuomo.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

13. **NAMING RIGHTS**
    - While courting Amazon in 2018, the governor vowed he would rename himself “Amazon Cuomo” if the company opened its second headquarters in Queens.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

14. **THE DINNER PARTY**
    - At the height of 2019 budget negotiations, Andrew Cuomo brought his Budget Director Robert Muza to a $25,000-per-couple dinner with donors.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

15. **CUOMO, DE BLASIO & COVID**
    - As concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic grew in February and March of 2020, Gov. Cuomo deferred to Mayor Bill de Blasio on how New York City should respond to the looming threat.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

16. **HOSPITALS ON LIFE SUPPORT**
    - When New York State has lost 20,000 hospital beds over the past 20 years, during Andrew Cuomo’s decade in power, he has provided over numerous hospital closures and consolidations.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

17. **GOT WITH THE OLD**
    - As the COVID-19 death count soared in March 2020, Andrew Cuomo slipped an item into the state budget granting full legal immunity to nursing home companies and executives for the duration of the pandemic.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**

18. **CELEBRITY GOV**
    - Last fall, Andrew Cuomo published a New York Times best-selling book on the pandemic that included a full apology for his role in the nursing home scandal.
    - **TRUE**
    - **FALSE**
CHALLENGING AUSTERITY

FROM BROOKLYN TO BUFFALO, SOCIALISTS ARE ORGANIZING TO TAX THE RICH

By Rob M. Katz

Even before the looming COVID-19 pandemic tore open a $60 billion hole in New York State’s finances for the next four years, Sen. Liz Krueger, the chair of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, was hearing calls to raise taxes on New York’s wealthiest.

When a coalition of 40 organizations wrote to Krueger in February 2020 to propose a package of income taxes on wealthy individuals and large corporations, she told the New York Daily News that she supports a “robust progressive tax system” but insisted that only the governor, who has spent his decade-long tenure slashing taxes and social spending, could grow total spending for new or expanded programs. In the pre-pandemic world, Krueger made clear that while she supported the sentiment, she believed her hands were tied.

One year later, Krueger was hearing those demands louder than ever — this time from right outside her apartment in the Upper West Side. For the second week in a row, advocates from the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (of which this writer is a member) were joined by members of other organizations such as New York Communities for Change and Met Council on Housing for a rally outside of Krueger’s home apartment complex. A couple of NYPD officers watched from across the road and masked passersby hurried through the small crowd.

“We’re here to make a simple reminder to Liz that you are in office because of us,” speaker Robert Cuffy, a member of DSA’s AfroSocialist Caucus, announced. “You serve the people, we don’t serve you. And there’s a very clear message we want to send to you. Six bills are in the legislature targeting the rich. If you don’t sign them, you won’t be in the legislature. Because we’re going to primary you, and we’re going to mobilize against you.”

Cuffy’s promise to evict the chair of the Senate Finance Committee from Albany was rooted in a very tangible existential threat to the Democratic old guard. Left organizations like the DSA have orchestrated a dizzying succession of electoral upsets, from the ousting of seven incumbent Democratic state senators in 2018 to the socialist sweep of six state legislative districts last year. Even the most entrenched veteran legislator could be felled.

In a statement to The Indypendent, Krueger repeated her desire for “a robust progressive tax system.”

“Our conference is engaged in a thorough evaluation of many potential revenue-raising proposals, and we will continue to push to ensure that everyone pitches in their fair share, and no one is made to bear a disproportionate burden,” Krueger said.

One year since the Feb. 20 open letter, her public stance was one of the few elements of this political struggle that remained the same.

FIGHTING FOR A BIGGER PIE

NYC-DSA’s Tax the Rich Campaign joins a wider statewide project, the Invest in Our NY (IONY) Coalition. A report released by the coalition in January 2021 outlines six bills that would raise a combined $50 billion in annual revenue “to invest in our towns and our cities, our housing and healthcare, our schools and teachers, accessible transit and our people with disabilities, our workers and our youth.” The bills, if passed, would open up new revenue sources in the upcoming state budget, which is set to be signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo by April 1.

“Our coalition decided that we’re not going to go the route of the earmark,” Michael Whitesides, a campaign organizer, said. “Instead of all fighting for different pieces of the same pie, we’re all gonna get together and fight for a bigger pie. That way we’re not going to be easily divided. We’re all united in this fundamental belief that the wealthy need to pay more in New York to fund a better future for the working class.”

But the DSA’s Tax the Rich Campaign, which began in December and later merged with the sprawling IONY Coalition, attracted at-
FROM BROOKLYN TO BUFFALO, SOCIALISTS ARE ORGANIZING TO TAX THE RICH

Mo Madden, Buffalo DSA secretary and — have been placed above their own, “interests of capital and the private sector duration of the pandemic. Brian Higgins to cosponsor the Health second major effort following the Buffalo Their push to tax the rich has been their doors and calling neighbors in Sens. Timo-
can have chosen to focus their might on their lines with messages.

Outside of New York City, DSA’s statewide operation has discovered over 1,200 supporters and directly transferred about 500 to their representative’s office lines at preствие.

To pass, the IONY Act will require 76 out of 150 votes in the State Assembly and 32 of 63 votes in the State Senate. As The In-
dependent goes to press, 22 of 43 Demo-
cratic senators and 35 of 105 Democratic assemblymembers, plus one independent assemblymember who caucuses with the Democrats, publicly sponsor or co-sponsor at least one of the bills. No Republican is supporting the measure.

That leaves several unmoved and high-
profile Democrats like Krueger in NYC-
DSA’s sights, which have narrowed over the course of the campaign. One big fish, Senator Brian Benjamin — chair of the Committee on Revenue and Budget — an-
nounced his support for the package in mid-February. To ramp up the pressure on more obdu-
rate targets, DSA members across the state have recontacted New Yorkers supportive of the campaign and invited them to con-
stituent meetings, where electeds’ staffers are briefed on the IONY legislation and constituents can make their case face-to-

For the final grade, multiply the number of questions you answered correctly by 5.
1. True: Koch won despite the smear, but lost to Papa Cuomo five years later when they both ran for governor.
2. True: Andrew’s shadowy deeds to punish his father’s enemies and keep his supporters in line were so devileish that Albany insiders came up with “The Prince of Darkness” as his moniker. Andrew is reputed to be proud of his unofficial title.
3. False: As HUD secretary, Cu-
omo helped sow the seeds of the sub-
prime mortgage crisis of 2007–08 by pushing government-sponsored enti-
ties Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to get into the subprime housing mar-
ket while capitulating to mortgage-
industry players who didn’t want to disclose the terms of the mortgages they were making.
4. False: Cuomo relentlesslyscapegoated public sector workers for the state’s post-meltdown fiscal crisis. Rather than levy penalties or taxes on Wall Street, he becamedown opposition and convinced legislators to cut pension benefits for future state em-
ployees instead.
5. True: However, when Cuomo ac-
tually became governor, he scrapped the promise to win legislative support for cutting public sector pensions.
6. True: Cuomo liked this arrange-
ment because it meant bills passed by the Democratic-controlled Assem-
by would die in the Senate without Cu-
omo being blamed by progressive voters. The IDC greenlit the bill to eight Democratic senators. It was swept away in the 2018 midterms when en-
raged Democratic voters got wind of the scheme, and threw the turncoats out of office.
7. True: The Moreland Commiss-
ion was always meant to focus on the corruption of Cuomo’s rivals, though, not his own administration. When the commission turned its attention to Cuomo’s cronies, he promptly killed it.
8. False: In 2014, anti-corruption author and attorney Zephyr Teachout ran against Cuomo in the Democratic pri-
mary and won 34% of the vote and half the counties in the state, despite being massively outspent. Cynthia Nixon garnered 35% of the vote when she primaried Cuomo in 2018.
9. True: Cuomo created the WEP as a sham third party to sow confusion among supporters of the left-leaning Working Families Party (WFP).
10. False: Gov. Cuomo denied he was responsible for the MTA’s poor perfor-
mance even though he appoints the majority of its board, including its chair. In fact, it was the governor’s repeated raids on MTA funding sources that led to the subway system’s unraveling.
11. False: Although Percoco did take those bribes from two compa-
nies with state business in return for taking official actions to benefit the firms, and he was convicted and sent to prison, he called the money “citi,” just like Tony Soprano would.
12. True: And sadly the $595 mil-
lion solar panel factory that was cen-
tral to the project has been a dud.
13. True: He also generously of-
fered enticements including $3 billion in public subsidies and a private heli-
pad for CEO Jeff Bezos paid for with taxpayer dollars.
14. True: When three young female legis-
lators — Alessandra Biaggi, Jessi-
ca Ramos and Yuh-Lin Ngou — criti-
cized this action, a top Cuomo aide denounced them as “jesting idiots.”
15. False: Cuomo initially down-
played COVID-19 as no more dan-
ergous than the flu. By late Feb-
ruary, the State Department of Health ceased communicating with the NYC Department of Health. When de Bla-
rio tried to shut down the city on March 17, Cuomo overrode him but then reversed course and locked down the city on March 22, after thousands more people were infected.
16. True: The shortage of hospital beds would come back to haunt Cuomo at the peak of the pandemic when als-
in New Yorkers flooded safety-net hos-
pitals that didn’t have beds for them.
17. True: Cuomo required nurs-
ing homes to accept COVID-infected patients from hospitals, leading to thousands of preventable deaths. The nursing home industry and the Greater Hospital Association of New York are both major Cuomo campaign donors.
18. False: After presiding over the highest COVID-19 death rate in the country, Cuomo did publish a best-
seller (American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandem-
ic). Apologies, however, were in short supply. Cuomo has also received an Emmy Award for the daily press con-erences he held last spring.
20. True: Cuomo has denied he engaged in any inappropriate touch-
ing despite a published photo of him placing his hands on the face of a woman who said that he tried to kiss her against her will.

UPSTATE & DOWNSTATE, STRONGER TOGETHER

At the DSA and coalition levels, the join-
ing of political forces on the side of taxing the rich runs from the Big Apple to Roch-
ester, where four assemblymembers have co-sponsored the IONY Act and work-
ing-class organizations like the Rochester Organization of Rank and File Educators have hosted phone banks for congressman Devin 

continued on page 18

Pressure Campaign: Members of the Democratic Socialists of America and New York Communities for Change march through the Upper East Side to the home of State Senator Liz Krueger. some services we rely on are in jeopardy. Public school class sizes are growing. Here in Lockport, which is just north of Buffalo, there was a maternity floor closure, so people have to drive to a hospital in Amherst [a Buffalo suburb] to have their baby.” Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peo-

lines with messages.

While two senators preside over Syr-

cuse, freshman John Mannion and sopho-

more Rachel May, the Salt City socialists have chosen to focus their might on their more entrenched, conservative Democratic representatives, assemblymembers William Magnarelli and Al Stripe.

Further west, Buffalo DSA is skewing doors and calling neighbors in Sen. Timo-

thy Kennedy and Sen. Ryan’s backyards. Their push to tax the rich has been their second major effort following the Buffalo DSA Healthcare Work Group’s success in pressuring Democratic assemblymember Brian Higgins to cosponsor the Health Emergency Guarantee Act, which would provide single-payer coverage through the duration of the pandemic.

“I think that people recognize that the interests of capital and the private sector — health insurers, banks, corporations — have been placed above their own,” Mo Madden, Buffalo DSA secretary and a caseworker who works with expectant mothers, said. “We’ve lost health insur-

ance and some services we rely on are in jeopardy. Public school class sizes are growing. Here in Lockport, which is just north of Buffalo, there was a maternity floor closure, so people have to drive to a hospital in Amherst [a Buffalo suburb] to have their baby.” Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peo-

bles-Stokes, along with Kennedy, Ryan, and assemblymember Monica Wallace have found themselves in the crosshairs of Buffalo DNA, which hopes to build connec-
tions with their electeds through sustained pressure and advocacy. According to Mad-
den, the chapter has knocked on about 640 doors and identified about 200 supporters over the phones.

Outside of New York City, DSA’s statewide operation has discovered over 1,200 supporters and directly transferred about 500 to their representative’s office lines at preствие.

To pass, the IONY Act will require 76 out of 150 votes in the State Assembly and 32 of 63 votes in the State Senate. As The In-
dependent goes to press, 22 of 43 Demo-
cratic senators and 35 of 105 Democratic assemblymembers, plus one independent assemblymember who caucuses with the Democrats, publicly sponsor or co-sponsor at least one of the bills. No Republican is supporting the measure.

That leaves several unmoved and high-
profile Democrats like Krueger in NYC-
DSA’s sights, which have narrowed over the course of the campaign. One big fish, Senator Brian Benjamin — chair of the Committee on Revenue and Budget — an-
nounced his support for the package in mid-February. To ramp up the pressure on more obdu-
rate targets, DSA members across the state have recontacted New Yorkers supportive of the campaign and invited them to con-
stituent meetings, where electeds’ staffers are briefed on the IONY legislation and constituents can make their case face-to-

virtual-face.

On March 4, a group of teachers and students who had met with senators for Sen. Mi-

chael Gianaris, the deputy majority leader of the Senate who touted the support of progressive icons like Sen. Bernie Sand-
er was in his re-election campaign. The meet-
ing was organized by Michael Corsillo, a teacher at I.S. 145 in Jackson Heights and a member of the progressive United Fed-
eration of Teachers caucus Movement of Rank and File Educators.

On the Zoom call, students shared per-

sonal stories about how funding cuts to public schools had directly affected their and their friends’ lives. The staffers were
prominent figure in the South Bronx through his ministry and food pantry, Rev. John Udo-Okon sees the impact of COVID-19 on his community firsthand. He experienced the physical toll early last year, when he had to close his food pantry for a few weeks after he and family members contracted the virus. Nearly a year later, he still sees its effects when he welcomes people to the pantry, where he says that the foodline has grown during the crisis. And he has seen it as part of his religious vocation.

“We deal with a community which has been traumatized. As a pastor, I’ve conducted so many funerals,” he told The Indypendent. Reverend Udo-Okon estimated that, in a normal year, he conducts only two or three, but during the pandemic he has presided over 10 to 15.

But, new, life-saving vaccines became available in December. As The Indypendent goes to press, 18% of Americans have received at least one vaccine dose according to the Centers for Disease Control. However, there continue to be large racial disparities in who receives the vaccines nationally, as well as here in New York City.

Sixty-nine percent more Black New Yorkers and 88% more Latinx New Yorkers have died from COVID-19 than white New Yorkers, according to the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s data portal. According to the city, however, as of early March, the percentage of white New Yorkers who have been fully vaccinated is more than twice that of either Black or Latinx New Yorkers.

The reasons for these disparities are varied and include skepticism about the medical establishment among historically marginalized communities, pre-existing structural issues in U.S. healthcare, the high proportion of people of color working low-wage jobs with long hours, difficulties with making appointments online and traveling to vaccination sites, and the overrepresentation of whites in the ranks of the elderly that were among the first to be vaccinated.

To counteract this imbalance, community leaders like Rev. Udo-Okon are using their influence to encourage local residents to get vaccinated. Based near the Longwood stop on the 6 train in the South Bronx, Rev. Udo-Okon and his volunteer staff at Word of Life International’s food pantry spend their Saturdays preparing crates of food to hand out to those lined up outside. Sometimes they also offer other services, such as pop-up HIV testing, according to Reverend Udo-Okon.

And recently, the pantry has been working as a community partner with Dr. Zainab Toteh Osakwe, an assistant professor at Adelphi University’s school of Nursing and Public Health.

Dr. Osakwe is part of a team studying coronavirus vaccine hesitancy. She recruits people with concerns about the vaccine from the food line, and brings them to a desk in Word of Life’s main hall to speak about their worries.

The pantry’s commitment to being a location for discussing the vaccine has made it a central site for her research. She says that the pantry has started to forward questions to her from people who come to the site when she is not around.

“There’s a huge potential here,” she said of the impact Word of Life could have in providing information to the community as a trusted resource. “There’s a very strong trust factor here and sites like this are a great opportunity.”

Efforts by community members and local advocates like Rev. Udo-Okon to publicize the safety of the vaccine are already having an impact. For instance, Christine Culpepper De Ruiz, a Latina who lives in the Bronx, said that seeing other people talk about and post photos of getting the vaccine helped her feel more comfortable going to Yankee Stadium for her first dose, and she hopes to provide similar reassurance to others now that she has received it.

Cheikhou Oumar Ann, a community health advocate for Bronx Health Reach/The Institute for Family Health, is working to address the concerns of Muslim New Yorkers in the South Bronx, just a mile southeast of Yankee Stadium. He said that a local imam announcing his own vaccination after Friday prayer and in a Whatsapp group drove interest in one community from 10 New Yorkers reaching out
to him about the vaccine in a day to 50 or 60 over the course of a weekend.

BUILDING TRUST

The infamous 1932–1072 Tuskegee Study of 399 Black men whose syphilis cases were left untreated is frequently cited as a reason for distrust of the government and the medical profession. However, no empirical evidence has been presented to back up that claim.

Dr. Betty Kolod, who practices medicine at an East Harlem hospital, says she has patients who are hesitant to take the vaccine, but they don’t cite Tuskegee to explain their wariness if they are even aware of it. Instead, she believes it’s their interactions with today’s medical professionals that have given them reason to be skeptical. She says many have gone uninsured or underinsured; they have been left waiting for hours for treatment and given second-rate care when they are treated. When they try to talk to physicians about their experience, they have been ignored.

“I’ve noticed that, at the tiniest signal for patients that I’m listening to them, they will often become emotional,” Kolod said. “It’s so unusual to them that a medical provider would listen to them or want to hear what they have to say.”

This accords with the experience of Sandra Rivas. While she recently waited in line at the Word of Life pantry, she described how she caught COVID-19 in April but chose not to go to the hospital. She said she stayed home and medicated herself. When asked who she trusts most regarding the vaccine, she said: “In my own experience, anything is better than suffering. I trust myself.”

Others standing in line at the food pantry felt similarly.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

Visit on.nyc.gov/3op5Uu4 for details on the following categories.

- People with underlying conditions including cancer, heart conditions, pregnancy, Immune compromised, diabetes, and plenty more. Find them here: on.nyc.gov/3ogpC2l
- People 60 or older
- Group living facility staff and residents
- Correction, probation, or juvenile detention officers
- Fire, police, public safety communications officers, other sworn and civilian personnel
- Grocery/convenience store/bodega workers and restaurant workers, including delivery workers and unpaid food pantry/soup kitchen workers
- Health care workers, including coroners, dentists/orthodontists, and receptionists who come in contact with patients
- Hotel staff
- Public transit and TLC (Taxi and Limousine Commission) workers, including airline and airport staff and ferry/port security staff
- School, college and child care workers
- As of March 17: Public-facing non-profit workers and government and public employees and public-facing building service workers (not construction workers)

Between March and April, the city will designate more eligible at-risk groups and essential workers. The general public should be eligible by summer 2021.

Vaccination sites will require proof of eligibility for eligible workers and people over the age of 60. They will ask you to self-certify but will not require that you show proof if you have an underlining condition; they may ask for proof that you live in New York State.

NYC VACCINATIONS ROUNDUP

Having a hard time keeping up with how to get vaccinated in New York City? We’ve sifted through the latest information and complied some basics for you. As more doses become available and more groups are eligible for vaccines, the following information is subject to change.

- COVID-19 vaccines protect people from severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death.
- The vaccine is free and you do not need to provide a Social Security number to get vaccinated. You will not be charged, even if you do not have health insurance. If you have insurance, bring your insurance card (your insurance may be billed by the vaccination provider, but there is no copay).
- On February 24, the FDA authorized the Johnson & Johnson COVID vaccine, which only requires one shot, as opposed to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, which require two shots.
- You can find vaccine sites near you via the vaccine finder at vaccinfinder.nyc.gov.
- You can schedule an appointment, including home visits, at on.nyc.gov/20lwue or by calling (877) 829-4692.

Once you schedule an appointment, you must complete the form at on.nyc.gov/2FLpUr5

STATE SITES

On Feb. 24 community-based New York State vaccination sites at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn and York College in Queens opened. The MTA launched a pilot program to enhance bus service in Brooklyn and Queens to connect New Yorkers in these two boroughs to the two vaccination sites. See the ad

Sources and information.

On the first Saturday in March, the line of people waiting for food in 32-degree weather stretched a little over half a block, down from Word of Life to a nearby intersection and just around the corner. "Can you imagine if there were fliers being given out to all these people? That would make a lot of difference," said Rev. Udo-Okon.

In the morning, Omar Ann arrived by car at the pantry. In the trunk were boxes of the city’s informational signs and palm cards about COVID safety tips, including some in Arabic, and at least one box of fliers titled “What New Yorkers Need to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines.” Written on the box with a felt-tip pen was “2,000 Spanish, 2,000 English.”

NEW STRATEGIES

Toward that end, local pharmacies have started to give vaccinations. In early March, the city announced it would be doing in-home vaccinations for homebound New Yorkers. On March 6, the city opened a vaccination center at Co-op City, the massive union-built affordable housing complex in the northeastern Bronx. The move came at the behest of freshman congressman Jamaal Bowman and other Bronx elected officials and with funding from the Biden Administration.

“The best way to vaccinate people is in their own neighborhood,” Mayor de Blasio said at a Co-op City press conference. Meanwhile, local figures like Rev. Udo-Okon and Oumar Ann and medical professionals like Dr. Kolod continue working with the vulnerable directly, offering resources and information.

Ready for the Jab: Max Daniel says he tried to sign up for a Covid-19 vaccination with no success.

Being of Service: Rev. Felicia Lizbeth Rochez said via a translator that she wanted an understanding of what’s happening. She said she was vaccinated with no success.

Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. The move did not go unnoticed. As the city’s largest union-built affordable housing development, the massive apartment complex was already housing hundreds of thousands of people. And, in the months since the move, the city has been providing vaccinations to hundreds of thousands of people. The move came at the behest of freshman congressman Jamaal Bowman and other Bronx elected officials and with funding from the Biden Administration.

“The best way to vaccinate people is in their own neighborhood,” Mayor de Blasio said at a Co-op City press conference. Meanwhile, local figures like Rev. Udo-Okon and Oumar Ann and medical professionals like Dr. Kolod continue working with the vulnerable directly, offering resources and information.

On the first Saturday in March, the line of people waiting for food in 32-degree weather stretched a little over half a block, down from Word of Life to a nearby intersection and just around the corner. “Can you imagine if there were fliers being given out to all these people? That would make a lot of difference,” said Rev. Udo-Okon.

In the morning, Omar Ann arrived by car at the pantry. In the trunk were boxes of the city’s informational signs and palm cards about COVID safety tips, including some in Arabic, and at least one box of fliers titled “What New Yorkers Need to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines.” Written on the box with a felt-tip pen was “2,000 Spanish, 2,000 English.”

NEW STRATEGIES

Toward that end, local pharmacies have started to give vaccinations. In early March, the city announced it would be doing in-home vaccinations for homebound New Yorkers. On March 6, the city opened a vaccination center at Co-op City, the massive union-built affordable housing complex in the northeastern Bronx. The move came at the behest of freshman congressman Jamaal Bowman and other Bronx elected officials and with funding from the Biden Administration.

“The best way to vaccinate people is in their own neighborhood,” Mayor de Blasio said at a Co-op City press conference. Meanwhile, local figures like Rev. Udo-Okon and Oumar Ann and medical professionals like Dr. Kolod continue working with the vulnerable directly, offering resources and information.

On the first Saturday in March, the line of people waiting for food in 32-degree weather stretched a little over half a block, down from Word of Life to a nearby intersection and just around the corner. “Can you imagine if there were fliers being given out to all these people? That would make a lot of difference,” said Rev. Udo-Okon.

In the afternoon, Omar Ann arrived by car at the pantry. In the trunk were boxes of the city’s informational signs and palm cards about COVID safety tips, including some in Arabic, and at least one box of fliers titled “What New Yorkers Need to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines.” Written on the box with a felt-tip pen was “2,000 Spanish, 2,000 English.”
LOVE US LIKE YOU LOVE OUR FOOD

By Leia Doran

This year has seen a sharp rise in violent attacks against Asian Americans—Asian American elders in particular. Technically, I’m Asian American. Specifically, I’m half Korean, half Italian-Irish/etc. But before saying anything else I’d like to mention some of the victims’ stories and (where possible) names.

1) 12.15.20 — PORTLAND, OR
An Asian American man was attacked by another man who asked “Are you Chinese?” before punching him in the face and fleeing.

2) 12.17.20 — NEW YORK CITY
Six attackers hurled COVID-related slurs and beat an Asian woman after confronting her for not wearing a face mask on the A train.

3) 12.21.20 — ANTIOCH, CA
Police kneedled on the neck of 30-year-old Filipino American Angelo Quinto until blood flowed from his mouth. Angelo, who had been suffering a mental health crisis, died at the hospital three days later. His sister said “I’m always going to regret calling the police and hope no one has to regret doing what they think is the right thing.”

4) 12.30.20 — EAST BAY, PA
State Police responding to calls about a “distraught” man on an overpass claimed that 19-year-old Chinese American Christian Hall had “retrieved a firearm” and “pointed it in the Troopers’ direction” forcing them to fatally shoot him in self-defense. A witness video later surfaced, showing Christian standing on the bridge with his hands raised as the officers opened fire.

5) 1.18.21 — SAN FRANCISCO
84-year-old Vicha Ratanapakdee was taking his daily walk when an attacker ran across the street and threw him to the ground. He sustained brain hemorrhaging and died in the hospital without regaining consciousness.

6) 1.21.21 OAKLAND, CA
Three attacks in Oakland’s Chinatown district. A 91-year-old man “suffered lacerations, abrasions and a contusion” when a stranger approached him from behind and shoved him to the ground. The perpetrator attacked two more elderly Asians before being caught.

7) 1.24.21 — BROOKLYN
Noel Quintana, a 61-year-old Filipino American, was riding the L train when an attacker lashed out with a box-cutter, leaving a deep scar across Quintana’s face that would require 100 stitches. “I asked for help,” said Quintana, “but nobody helped. Nobody moved. I don’t want to think because I’m Asian. I don’t want to think about that. Because it could also happen to anybody, but — I don’t know.”

8) 2.16.21 — NEW YORK CITY
52-year-old Leelce Chin-Yeung was knocked out by a stranger. In unrelated incidents on the same day, a 71-year-old and a 68-year-old, both Asian, were punched while riding the subway.

This isn’t new. The historical precedent for anti-Asian prejudice in America is overwhelming and under-taught. In 1871, 18 Chinese boys and men were lynched by a mob in Los Angeles after a white civilian was killed in the crossfire of a fight between two Chinese men. The pursuit of justice in the massacre’s aftermath was complicated by an 1863 that which barred Asian Americans from participating in court proceedings as witnesses or victims.

From 1882 to 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act barred most Chinese laborers from immigrating or becoming citizens. The Immigration Act of 1917 went further, creating an “Asiatic Barred Zone” restricting all the way from Polynesia to Turkey.

Japanese internment camps. Yellow Peril. Vincent Chin. The “Model Minority” myth, which allows our perceived successes to be invoked at a bigot’s convenience, for the purpose of disparaging another group, almost always Black people. Kung Flu.

Despite this history, I struggle to accept that this current wave of violence is racially motivated. I search for excuses that diminish the very possibility. Surely it’s just a one who attacks an Asian person, and so this fear might happen to anybody, but — I don’t know.”

I don’t mean to assume the character of anyone else’s elders. My own don’t fit all the stereotypes. “Asian American” is a broad, problematic label, encompassing too many ethnicities, economic realities, and cultures to make sense as an indicator of anything. The richest Asian Americans in the country earn more than whites, while Asians in New York are the lowest-earning immigrant group. The Trump era exacerbated these disparities. For example, the Cambodian American refugee community suffered a 279% increase in deportations between 2017 and 2018, while 2020 saw Tony Pham, a Vietnamese refugee whose family arrived from Saigon in 1975, promoted to interim Director of ICE. Some of our countries of origin have colonized each other. Some of us trace our roots to places so geographically removed that before landing here in the melting pot our people might never have crossed paths at all.

But these distinctions probably won’t matter to someone who attacks an Asian person, and so this fear might be one of the few experiences shared by otherwise unrelated people who check that box when filling out a census. That is, the fear that someday soon, a bigot on the subway might punch us in the head, and the people around us might decide that we deserve it.

To learn more about organizations engaged in the fight for racial justice, visit stopaapihate.org, imreadymovement.org (AAPI Women Lead) and advancingjustice-aajc.org (Asian Americans Advancing Justice).
THE DAY I WAS DOXXED BY RUSH LIMBAUGH (AND THE LIFE AFTER)

By Ash Marinaccio

The threats were generally anonymous, though I still can recall an email from a woman in Pennsylvania describing how she brought her children into her living room to do a homeschool lesson on me as an example of what they should never become. There were, of course, several lone white men who insisted I had inside information on Osama Bin Laden and that they would put me on trial for treason. There were many comments about my body and weight.

I had daily panic attacks. I couldn't work and struggled to focus on my studies. I contemplated dropping out of school in my senior year, or at least transferring to a place where “they” couldn't find me. Most days I was scared to leave the house. Nobody around me quite knew how to handle what was happening, so it was with a lot of shame, especially because I had put my mother at such risk. I was told to toughen up — that if I wanted to dish it out, I'd have to be able to take it (because, of course, a 21-year-old college student had the same amount of power as Rush Limbaugh and it’s an even playing field … ). Some people thought it was “cool” and a “badge of honor.” I contemplated joining the Army to prove I was a “good American” and I contemplated suicide.

To the years to follow: “I did a lot of work in therapy to reclaim how I view myself. But I engaged in a lot of self-destructive behavior as well. Much of it still manifests in extreme anxiety, imposter syndrome, and general fear of verbalizing my opinions — or not taking credit for my work — which I have to constantly keep in check, even now.

I didn’t know there was a term for what happened to me until nearly 15 years later when I started working on my PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center and my ITF class was discussing doxxing. I tentatively raised my hand and said I was doxxed by Rush Limbaugh and the room fell silent. After sharing my experience many others have contacted me expressing similar stories and backlash. For the past year, I have listened to many others at this juncture. Erasing yourself is not an answer to combating a culture of online violence. I see doxxing as a systemic issue and part of the international epidemic of violence against women.

I do not know there was a term for what happened to me until nearly 15 years later when I started working on my PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center and my ITF class was discussing doxxing. I tentatively raised my hand and said I was doxxed by Rush Limbaugh and the room fell silent. After sharing my experience many others have contacted me expressing similar stories and backlash. For the past year, I have listened to many others at this juncture. Erasing yourself is not an answer to combating a culture of online violence.

I see doxxing as a systemic issue and part of the international epidemic of violence against women. It cannot be seen as separate from the offline violence that women endure. The violence women experience online is part of a larger culture of violence against women and should be addressed as such. In November 2017, Amnesty International conducted a survey on internet violence that found that a third of women in the United States experience violence online in the form of harassment and doxxing. I have known many public scholars, artists and thinkers who take extended breaks from social media because of the regular violence they face and the impact it has on their families. This can only be addressed through systemic change and collective efforts by communities, institutions and governments.
Economist John Maynard Keynes famously predicted in 1930 that his grandchildren would work 15-hour weeks. Universal basic income proponents claim that robots are coming for our jobs (and maybe they are). But here, in the dystopian present, those of us fortunate enough to have jobs mostly work too much. Professionals work unpaid overtime; service workers take on second jobs. Mystique. It will surprise few to learn that when the work is supposed to be its own reward, the pay and working conditions are often lacking.

Sarah Jaffe’s new book, Work Won’t Love You Back, examines the ideology and lived reality of work in the post-Fordist economy. Through a series of cases studies, bookended by an introduction and conclusion rich with theory, she explores how workers invest themselves in their jobs — and how they’re organizing for better working conditions across a variety of industries.

The first section chronicles those laboring in the helping professions and the service industry, engaging in affective labor. Jaffe “follow[s] the labor of love as it moves from women’s unpaid work in the home through paid domestic work, teaching, retail work, and the nonprofit sector.” Whether raising children, helping clients or delivering “service with a smile,” each job requires workers to “put themselves second to the feelings and needs of their customers or charges.” Traditionally coded as feminine, such jobs are typically devalued accordingly.

The second section focuses on those working (or trying to obtain) what one might call “dream jobs,” jobs where the work itself is supposed to be your passion. Jaffe investigates how the “myth of the starving, devoted artist has leapt from art workers to unpaid workers, precarious academics, computer programmers, and even professional athletes.” It will surprise few to learn that when the work is supposed to be its own reward, the pay and working conditions are often lacking.

Jaffe’s background as a labor journalist shows. The prose is crisp and compulsively readable. And her approach is grounded not only in academic research but also in individual interviews. Although the stories Jaffe tells are disparate, she synthesizes them as the story of how capitalism responded to two ’60s critiques. First, the critique of *The Feminine Mystique*: Women were isolated and miserable in their suburban homes/workplaces. And, second, the critique that work was boring. The first half of the book catalogs how women have been fully integrated into the workforce, albeit often relegated to care work. The second half describes how that work has been superseded as a corporate marketing and management strategy, forcing workers to profess to love their jobs. Rather than disrupting the accumulation of capital, capitalism has reconstituted itself around the twin crises of labor as the gains have been redistributed relentlessly upwards.

A reader may object, with some reason, that software engineers making $200,000 a year at a workplace with air hockey tables and catered lunches have little in common with retail workers fighting for $15. While some fractions of the professional classes, like adjunct professors, have lost control of the conditions of their labor and joined the ranks of the precarious, not all have been so affected. Jaffe’s urge to synthesize and find the commonality of struggles is admirable, but the two halves of the book could belong to separate projects — and the introduction and conclusion could belong to yet a third book. This is a minor quibble, however, with a deeply engaging work.

Many of us, to more to lose than our chains. Yet Jaffe convincingly insists that we all nonetheless have much to gain in uniting to throw off the shackles of work. In a lyrical and powerful introduction and conclusion, she urges us to abandon the idea that our jobs give meaning to our life or define us. Instead, she urges the reader to discover “the pleasures that are to be found in rebellion, in collective action, in solidarity” and to lay “claim to their time and their hearts and minds outside of the workplace.”

This is perhaps less of a political program than championing the right to be lazy or fully automated luxury communism. But it would certainly be a good start.
Dear Billy,

I want to swipe right on Tinder again. I want to go out dancing at a crowded bar with friends. I want to sit in a packed movie theater again. I want to go to a protest where it doesn’t feel like I’m in a hospital ward where everyone is standing 6 feet apart and wearing medical masks. It’s been a year. I want to live my full life again. Please don’t guilt me for that. I bet you do too.

JESS

Bed-Stuy

Jess,

Your letter looks like: “I want I want I want I want I want….”

Look, Jess. Our leadership at this time in history is the Movement for Black Lives, #metoo and the Women’s March, LGBTQ and Gender Rights, and Standing Rock and the fight for the Earth. From the Black body to water is sacred — these movements all have in common the demand for health and safety.

And now everyone is changing. If we used to get drunk and party a lot — now we can change. Desire is no longer the same thing as liberty. That’s what Republicans think. They have mask-burnings to celebrate their freedom. The infection spikes come straight from their “liberty.”

Now we desire a full life for everyone, and our individual cravings are no longer the first item. I’m from the Church of Stop Shopping, so let me preach that the consumerism of scratch-that-itch has trained us to ignore the larger good. We concentrate on ME.

….want want want want want…

The CDC has recently given fully vaccinated people permission to hug, bump and grind, and generally carry on — without masks. Here’s your chance, Jess! You are probably at the local watering hole as I write.

My parting advice: In the UK, what we call the “advice column” is called the “agony column.” Jess, you’re in agony over the disappearance of the crowded bar but you’ll have more agony the next time some desire is denied. Let that agony go, Amen? Come to the really HOT party. Let’s dance to the music of Justice For All!

DELIA

Woodside

NEWLY AVAILABLE FROM
INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

Alphaeus Hunton: The Unsung Valiant
The biography Alphaeus Hunton, leader of the Council on African Affairs and an important figure in the decolonization of Africa in the later part of the 20th century.

The Bittersweet Science
A new book from Professor Gerald Horne uncovering the seamy underside of boxing

The entire 5 volume set, The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, edited by the late historian Philip Foner.

Visit our website INTPUBNYC.COM or call: (212) 366-9815
A beautiful quarterly magazine fighting for socialism in our time

“The appearance of Jacobin magazine has been a bright light in dark times.” —Noam Chomsky

Get a year of print for $10 bit.ly/indysocialist