

DE BLASIO: AN UNENDORSEMENT || TRUMP'S UNDERTAKER

THE EDITORS

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

# THE Nation.

JULY 13/20, 2020

**Defund  
the  
Police**

How to make  
it a reality

BRYCE COVERT

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This is only the  
beginning

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# Letters

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## A Gamble Worth Taking

Bill Fletcher Jr.'s wish list for the reinvention of organized labor ["Labor: More Perfect Unions," June 15/22] is, as usual with him, insightful and incisive.

But his prescription for the crisis in health care costs is just plain wrong. To say that "unions should, of course, defend the health plans that they have" is saying that union leadership should continue to oppose the most sensible and cost-effective way to deal with that crisis: single-payer (otherwise known as Medicare for All).

Yes, there would be additional payroll taxes required. But they would be far lower than the "taxes" taken by employers from wages to support employer-provided coverage or the costs to workers of foregone improvements in other benefits that employers use the increased health coverage costs to justify.

Employer-linked health care is always tenuous, as we are seeing tragically during the current pandemic, when masses of union workers are being laid off and are losing their medical coverage just when they need it the most.

For large unions with contracts that include comprehensive health care insurance for their workers, it may seem like a big gamble to support proposals that would effectively switch from employer to public funding. But it's a bigger gamble for them

to continue to obstruct the revolution that single-payer would mean for all working people.

**BRENT KRAMER**  
BROOKLYN

## Protect Old Joe?

Re "On Tara Reade's Allegations" [Katha Pollitt, June 15/22]: I am very disappointed by what seems to be an all-out effort in *The Nation* to discredit and humiliate Tara Reade and bolster Joe Biden's reputation. I have no illusions about the absolute necessity of beating Donald Trump and Mike Pence in the fall. I will overcome my nausea and put aside my principles and vote for Biden, shaming myself for the greater good. Because no one denies Biden's long history of "handsiness" (what a convenient euphemism!), which has made numerous women uncomfortable for decades. It is repetitious to point out what the situation would be if Biden were a Republican.

Reade may behave in ways that are suspicious and incomprehensible today, but that doesn't mean she couldn't well have been sexually harassed by Biden back then in a way that was genuinely disruptive to her emotionally. It is discouraging to see *The Nation* go after Reade in this way in the frantic drive to protect Old Joe, to whitewash his past and his overall record to ensure his election.

There were other, much more principled ways of doing this without  
(continued on page 34)

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## Disarm the Police

**W**atch the harrowing video of Rayshard Brooks being shot in the back by Atlanta police and the conclusion is inescapable: These people should not be allowed to carry guns. The same can be said of the police in Louisville, Ky., who killed Breonna Taylor as she slept in her own bed, the

Minnesota cop who killed Philando Castile, the officer in North Charleston, S.C., who killed Walter Scott, and the Cleveland cop who shot 12-year-old Tamir Rice. The list of African Americans shot and killed by police is a shameful legacy that stretches back generations.

In a time when doctors, nurses, and hospital cleaners have to beg for protective equipment and bus drivers and postal workers are expected to risk death to keep our cities functioning, the demand to divert funds from often obscenely militarized police forces to health, education, housing, and other public services is irresistible. But perhaps it is also time to consider a corresponding measure that would fundamentally change the relationship between law enforcement and those being policed: taking away their guns.

Night watchmen in the North American colonies, like their counterparts in Europe, went unarmed, their ranks drawn from the communities they patrolled. Even as these volunteers were gradually replaced by professional police forces—first in Boston in 1838 and then in New York, Chicago, and other cities—they carried no weapon more deadly than a short club. It was slavery and the enforcement of racial subjugation that first led US police to carry guns. While Northern cities maintained a civilian watch, Charleston and other Southern ports instituted slave patrols—armed bands whose purpose was to terrorize the enslaved population into submission and return runaways to their enslavers. Texas Rangers, who were charged with patrolling the border with Mexico and enforcing the theft of land from Native Americans, also carried firearms.

The relationship between armed police and racism wasn't confined to the South or the West. In 1851, Boston abolitionists attempted to free Thomas Sims while he was being held under the newly enacted Fugitive Slave Act. Boston police equipped themselves with borrowed cavalry sabers to disperse

the demonstrators enraged by a court decision to send him back to Georgia. While slave patrols in the South were reborn after the Civil War as police departments to enforce black codes and Jim Crow laws, police departments in the North increasingly took on the role of strikebreakers confronting a militant and largely immigrant workforce, whether on the streets of New York's Lower East Side or in the steel towns of the newly industrial Midwest. At first, police were merely authorized to provide their own weapons. It wasn't until the 1890s that New York's reform mayor,



William Strong, and his police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt, outfitted the NYPD with pistols. Police needed guns not to protect themselves or the public but to defend capital from the claims of labor.

Disarming the police won't solve racism. Nor would it have saved George Floyd or Eric Garner or, lest we forget, Arthur Miller or Michael Stewart, but it is a step toward diminishing cops' wholesale impunity.

Over 90 percent of London's Metropolitan Police, whose creation in 1829 is regarded as the model for America's professional forces, remains unarmed. While police brutality can kill even without a gun, the extreme rarity of police shootings in Britain should give Americans pause. As should the reality—no mere utopian dream—of a huge, economically polarized, multicultural city where policing remains by consent rather than by superior firepower.

Addressing the epidemic of US gun violence will require confronting our culture, with its glorification of violence, and our history of colonial depredations. But we have to start somewhere. Why not seize this moment to remove the daily threat of death by police that haunts African Americans and their families? Why not remove one factor from the brutal calculus of ordinary American violence? Let's act—not just to save money but also to save lives—and disarm the police.

D.D. GUTTENPLAN



# De Blasio's Betrayal

*The mayor hasn't delivered on police reform.*

Seven summers ago, when Donald Trump was still a punch line and the biggest scandal rocking the political world was Anthony Weiner's stunning act of auto-destruction, New York City seemed to be on the cusp of a new era. After nearly 20 years of Republican and Republican-lite rule—under the autocratic Rudy Giuliani and the technocratic Mike Bloomberg—its residents were restless, desperate for change. As a cluster of long-simmering movements gained momentum, from the struggle to end the New York Police Department's policy of stop-and-frisk to the Fight for \$15 among the city's lowest-paid workers, a candidate stepped forward to champion their cause.

Bill de Blasio was, in some respects, an unlikely champion—a liberal, not a lion—but he spoke of the city's pain in words both moving and resonant. He lamented the inequality that strafed New York and bemoaned its descent into a “tale of two cities.” As *The Nation* wrote in our 2013 endorsement, “In placing the city's roiling inequality at the center of his campaign, de Blasio has offered not only the sharpest description of the problem—what he called ‘the most urgent priority of our time’—but also the most forceful solution.”

De Blasio seemed to understand that addressing the city's rampant economic inequality meant addressing its racial inequality. And this, in turn, meant ending the long reign of impunity by the country's largest police force. While his immediate predecessor, the billionaire Bloomberg, had once boasted that he had his “own army in the NYPD,” de Blasio spoke the language of reform, and he spoke in a way that suggested he understood the long racist history of policing in New York. He denounced stop-and-frisk, the discriminatory policy that illegally targeted black and brown New Yorkers; he called for an independent inspector general to monitor the NYPD; and he promised to give the boot to Ray Kelly, the city's longtime police commissioner and an unabashed booster of stop-and-frisk. As de Blasio told the National Action Network, “We are going to get on with a very, not only progressive, but aggressive agenda.”

Years later, as calls to abolish the police echo across the country, de Blasio's early agenda may not sound like much. But in 2013, after decades of police impunity—of “Giuliani time” and “Throw 'em against the wall” and the transformation of New York's “finest” into the shock troops of the gilded city—the promise of reform arrived like oxygen across the city's most vulnerable communities. Indeed, no one offered more thorough or forceful support for de Blasio's campaign than the African American community, which has always suffered the vilest of all NYPD abuse and whose votes he cultivated through a mix of solid policy proposals and careful messaging. In a video that captured the hearts and hopes of many voters,

de Blasio sent his biracial son, then just 15, into the spotlight to promise that his father was “the only Democrat with the guts to really break from the Bloomberg years.”

Seven years later, de Blasio has failed to live up to the promise of those words, failed spectacularly in recent weeks as tens of thousands of people came out to protest the murder of George Floyd and countless other black people—and were met by the pepper spray and batons of de Blasio's police department. With brute scorn, the police battered protesters, kettled them, and in at least once instance, drove their cruisers into them. And the mayor, who had risen to power on a promise to fight for black lives, instead defended the police. He insisted the NYPD had respected the protesters and even blamed demonstrators for inciting the cops' wrath. Then he imposed the first curfew the city had seen in 75 years.

For those who believed de Blasio's 2013 promises—for those to whom those promises were made—his response to the most vital racial justice uprising in decades has been a stunning betrayal. “We once thought de Blasio was with us,” the Rev. Kevin McCall, a civil rights activist who organized a memorial for Floyd at the behest of Floyd's brother, told *The New York Times*. “But he flipped the script on us.”

*What has made the betrayal of the past few weeks so bitter is that it's not new.*

That script was not flipped overnight. In fact, what has made the betrayal of the past few weeks so bitter is that it's not new. It's merely the latest in a long line of disappointments that began even before de Blasio took office, when he announced he would appoint former police commissioner Bill Bratton to replace Kelly. As New York's top cop under Giuliani and a committed evangelist for “broken windows” policing, Bratton hardly represented change. He was, rather, an exchange—a swap

to calm the jelly-legged elites who fretted that de Blasio would take New York back to the “bad old days” of high crime and busted budgets. With Bratton, de Blasio signaled the terms of his mayoralty: When it came to reform, he would always keep a foot on the brake.

The years that followed Bratton's appointment were, perhaps predictably, years of inconsistency. On the one hand, there was progress made on some of de Blasio's promises. During his first month in office, he agreed to a set of court-ordered reforms to the city's stop-and-frisk program—and during his first term, those stops began to fall dramatically, as did arrests. But people continued to be stopped by the NYPD, and they continued to be disproportionately New Yorkers of color; those targeted for “broken windows” infractions were also primarily black and brown.

Then in December 2014, the police rebelled. The proximate spark was the confluence of citywide protests over a grand jury's refusal to indict the officer who murdered Eric Garner and de Blasio's words of support for those protests, followed by a fatal attack on two NYPD officers. When police turned their backs on de Blasio at one of the officers' funerals and then engaged in a weeks-long de facto work slowdown, the mayor never quite recovered.

For many, that marked the moment when de Blasio

*(continued on page 8)*

BY THE NUMBERS

5

Number of Supreme Court justices who ruled on June 18 that the Trump administration may not immediately end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program

650K

Approximate number of DACA recipients in the US

7

Average age of DACA recipients when they came to the US

200K

DACA recipients who are essential workers in health care, education, food, and other industries

29K

DACA recipients who are front-line health care workers

256K

Children who are US citizens and have at least one parent enrolled in DACA

—Jessica Suriano

EDITORIAL

# Q&A ALEX S. VITALE

In 2015, Minneapolis was one of six cities selected by Barack Obama's Department of Justice to pilot a new kind of policing. Said to be grounded in social science

research, the initiative aimed to build trust between the police and the community being policed. The Minneapolis Police Department would undergo implicit bias training, wear body cameras, and practice mindfulness and racial reconciliation as part of a three-year, \$4.75 million project.

Five years later, Derek Chauvin, a white MPD officer, pressed his knee on the neck of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, killing him as onlookers recorded Chauvin and begged him to stop.

To many who saw it, Chauvin's display of brutality signals the failure of police reform in Minneapolis and elsewhere. Alex S. Vitale, a sociologist at Brooklyn College and the author of *The End of Policing*, told me that technocratic measures are a dead end. The only way to fix policing, he said, is to defund law enforcement.

—Zachary Siegel

**ZS: In the aftermath of George Floyd's death, caught on camera and watched by millions of people, does the cycle of police violence feel like déjà vu to you?**

**AV:** Watching over a period of about 20 years, we see a pattern of high-profile police abuse incidents that stimulate these localized, powerful

uprisings that then turn into demands to indict this officer, disband this unit, or hire a few more black police officers. And then the movement falls apart, and nothing changes.

We're not going to fix these problems by jailing a couple of killer cops or giving them body cameras or making them take implicit bias training. Instead, we need to challenge the scope and power of policing. We need to take their budgets away, take their toys away, take their authority away in as many dimensions as we can. After six years of attempted police reforms, we have nothing to show for it. The only leverage that remains is to starve the beast.

**ZS: I read a report published by the Minneapolis Police Department in 2018 that states, "MPD has become a national leader in procedural justice initiatives around the nation." What is procedural justice, and does it work?**

**AV:** Minneapolis was one of a half-dozen cities that were selected by the Department of Justice for a procedural justice intervention. The DOJ funded these procedural justice training types to go into Minneapolis and fix policing by surveying the public, surveying officers, setting up dialogue sessions, and

implementing implicit bias training. The research behind this is that if the police take the time to talk to people about why they're doing what they're doing, listen to everyone's side of the story, and act in a procedurally proper manner, then people feel better about the outcome, even if they get arrested.

**ZS: Where do you think this approach goes wrong?**

**AV:** The problem is that this approach does not deal with questions of substantive justice. What is the actual mission of policing, and what is its actual impact on people?

Instead of questioning why we're using police to wage a war on drugs, they ask the narcotics units to take anti-bias training. It ignores the fact that the War on Drugs is an inherently racist legal program designed by politicians to meet a racist political

agenda. Procedural justice is the reigning theory, and it's morally and intellectually and scientifically bankrupt.

**ZS: Others have called for abolishing the police, abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement and prisons. Do you consider yourself an abolitionist?**

**AV:** I think what the abolition movement adds to the conversation is a deep skepticism about the ability to reform institutions whose normal functioning is inherently unjust. In that sense, I consider myself a part of that movement. I understand abolition as a process more than an outcome. No one's in a position to flip some switch and then tomorrow there are no police or prisons. The question is "What is the process we use to analyze and change these institutional relationships?" ■

*Procedural justice is the reigning theory, and it's morally and intellectually and scientifically bankrupt.*



COVID-19

## Dangers of ICE

**T**he *New York Times* reports that the country's five largest clusters of coronavirus infections are in prisons and jails. Since many states are doing only minimal testing of inmates, many more people behind bars with Covid-19 probably haven't been counted yet. But state prisons aren't the only ones seeing a shockingly high number of cases. At the Eloy Detention Center in Arizona, where several hundred immigrants are being held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the number of confirmed positive test results increased more than 400 percent from June 11 to June 14. While some of that may be due to an expansion in testing, it is surely also related to the poor conditions in the detention facilities that allow the novel coronavirus to spread.

Such conditions are detailed in a lawsuit filed on June 8 that seeks to secure the release of medically vulnerable immigrant detainees from Eloy and a nearby facility, La Palma. "Infectious disease specialists warn that while conditions may be improved, *no* conditions of confinement in carceral settings can adequately manage the serious risk of harm for medically vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic," the lawsuit reads. "Even with improved conditions, Petitioners live in pods, or 'tanks,' and sleep in bunk beds, sharing common spaces and medical facilities with hundreds of other detainees. Even in improved conditions, Petitioners are forced to share necessities like showers, telephones, and sinks with dozens of others."

—Sasha Abramsky



# Katha Pollitt



## Goodbye, Columbus?

*It's time we stopped paying tribute to our worst moments and our worst people.*

**S**o many monuments to racism, slavery, and colonialism have been toppled, removed, or slated for removal in the wake of the George Floyd protests that Wikipedia's army of volunteer editors is keeping a running tally: Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and a slew of other Confederate generals and notable white supremacists and segregationists; Frank Rizzo, the notoriously racist mayor ("Vote white") of Philadelphia; even symbolic figures like the Pioneer and Pioneer Mother, formerly of the University of Oregon in Eugene. As I write, word comes that the embarrassing statue of Theodore Roosevelt mounted on a horse and trailed by a Native American man and a black man on foot will be removed from the main entrance of New York's Museum of Natural History.

Yesterday's heroes are history's villains. That nice Pope Francis thought so well of Father Junípero Serra that he canonized him in 2015, despite Native Americans' objections to Serra's harsh and coercive missionary work. He's now the patron saint of California. But protesters in San Francisco and Los Angeles recently tore down his statue. As for Christopher Columbus—19 statues and counting—New York Governor Andrew Cuomo defended his presence in Manhattan's Columbus Circle. (It "has come to represent and signify appreciation for the Italian American contribution to New York," he said at a press conference.) But I wouldn't bet on Chris keeping his pedestal much longer. Maybe Italian Americans could choose another compatriot, someone who brought joy to the world and didn't massacre and enslave vast numbers of people. Like Verdi or Puccini.

In fact, there already is a Verdi Square just a few blocks from Columbus Circle. (There's a Dante Park nearby as well, which is tiny and not well publicized. I've lived in New York all my life and found out about it only while researching this column.) Italy's contribution to the worlds of literature, art, music, science, and thought is so huge, every park in Manhattan could be renamed after world-famous, beloved Italians with no trouble at all. Gramsci Triangle. Maria Montessori Plaza. Primo Levi Square.

History is large and contains multitudes. There is no reason to cling to torturers, warlords, conquerors, and exploiters—and especially no reason to celebrate Confederate traitors who plunged the na-

tion into civil war, in the aftermath of which we are in many ways still living. Indeed, the posthumous reputation of the Confederacy proves the adage is wrong: It is not always the winners who write history. The "Lost Cause"—a fantasy of the antebellum South as all crinolines, magnolias, courtly soldiers, and happy slaves and of the war itself as a matter of "states' rights," never specifying which rights were at issue—has set the popular narrative ever since Reconstruction. It's great that NASCAR is banning the Stars and Bars, but why did it take so long? And why did it take the horrible killing of George Floyd and the marching of hundreds of thousands of protesters daily for weeks to achieve what is, after all, a symbolic victory?

Symbols matter. Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Mrs. Butterworth, and the black chef on the Cream of Wheat box are the remnants of a once mighty flood of ads, logos, and household items depicting black people as happy cooks, servants, mammies, and comical children. It is not possible to escape this history by slenderizing Aunt Jemi-

ma and giving her a modern hairstyle or by making Mrs. Butterworth's bottle more abstract. I'm glad the original spokesperson for Aunt Jemima, Nancy Green, who was born into slavery, spoke out against poverty and, according to legend, became a millionaire, but that's not a reason to keep the franchise going. It's 2020! Retiring these products is not "political correctness"; it is the removal of a profound racial insult from our grocery stores and kitchen tables. And if Eskimo Pies have to follow the Land O'Lakes Native American woman into oblivion, so be it.

What will it take to get rid of the widespread celebration of our worst moments and our worst people? It's easy enough to take down a statue or to change the name of a road. (Looking at you, Virginia, home of Stonewall Jackson Highway and Lee Highway.) But some names are so embedded in our history, our culture, and our maps that it's hard to imagine eradicating them, even if we wanted




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*There's no reason to cling to torturers and exploiters—and no reason to celebrate Confederates who plunged us into civil war.*

# From Library to Legacy

“I’ve been reading *The Nation* since I was in college. It helped me with my political education. At that time I didn’t have a dime for any donations.... I got my copy at the library. Now I’m much older, retired, and can help groups such as *The Nation*. I’ll keep supporting *The Nation* as long as I can, in the realization that it can educate others and younger members of society.”

—Pat Allen, Calif.



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*We could tell a new American story by lifting up the people who worked to make us better, not worse.*

to. There are dozens of places named after Columbus—Columbus, Ohio (and Indiana and Georgia and... ). Columbia University, Columbia County, the Columbia River. (To say nothing of Colombia, but fortunately that's not our problem.) There's not much anyone can do about Serra's sainthood; canonization is forever. (Still, Stanford University gets points for changing the name of Serra Mall, its main drag and postal address, to Jane Stanford Way, after the insufficiently acknowledged cofounder, with her husband, of the university.)

We do not lack for heroes, many of whom, being women and/or nonwhite, have never gotten their due. (More will soon be added, but as of right now, in all of New York City there are only five public statues of women.) Let's get rid of the bad men on horses and honor instead those who have been neglected, famous or not. We could start with Fort Bragg, Fort Benning, Fort Hood, and the other military bases named, bizarrely, after Confederate fighters

and rechristen them after people who fought to save the republic and end slavery. We could celebrate artists and writers and poets; surely Walt Whitman deserves something more inspiring than a rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike. We could tell a new American story by lifting up the people who worked to make us better, not worse—the radicals and freethinkers, progressive politicians, labor leaders, feminists, and fighters for racial equality and the liberty and justice for all to which our schoolchildren pledge. Germany and Austria have gotten rid of all (well, almost all) of their place names honoring Nazis and anti-Semites, and some municipalities are currently on a binge of naming things after women, whose role in those countries' histories has been startlingly overlooked.

But while we are toppling some statues and erecting others, let's not forget to do the deeper work of combating injustice. George Floyd didn't die because Minneapolis lacked the right monuments. ■

(continued from page 4)

gave in to the police, retreating from reform, both in rhetoric and reality. In the years since, he has repeatedly refused to condemn acts of excessive force by the NYPD. He

also refused to press for the firing of Garner's murderer and even fought legislation making it a crime for officers to put people in choke holds, as one did with Garner. As Darius Charney, who served as lead coun-

sel in the stop-and-frisk lawsuit, told *The Intercept*, "He has given all of his police commissioners pretty much carte blanche to do whatever it is they wanted to do." Those commissioners, it should be noted, included

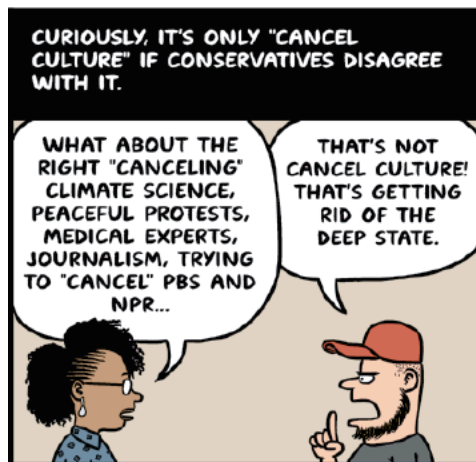
two others after Bratton, both white, both chosen over strong candidates of color, just as Bratton was.

The mayor's retreat on police reform is a wound that won't readily heal for many New Yorkers—a reality that seems to be dawning on de Blasio. As outrage erupted over his response to the Floyd protests and with many of the mayor's black supporters turning their backs, he has begun trying to recalibrate, pledging to reduce the NYPD's \$6 billion annual budget (though not by the \$1 billion the City Council has requested) and signing a bill passed by the City Council banning police choke holds. These are first steps, but they are only that—incomplete, long overdue, and unlikely to satisfy. As de Blasio is perhaps learning, it's a dangerous thing to campaign on the promise of progressive change and then fail to follow through. It punctures trust and, all too often, destroys hope, sapping people's faith in the political process. Every now and again, however, it does the reverse. It reminds people that movements, not politicians, are the engines of transformation—and that the change they seek will always come, first and foremost, from their own demands. As the people de Blasio once claimed to represent head back into the streets, he would do well to listen.

THE EDITORS

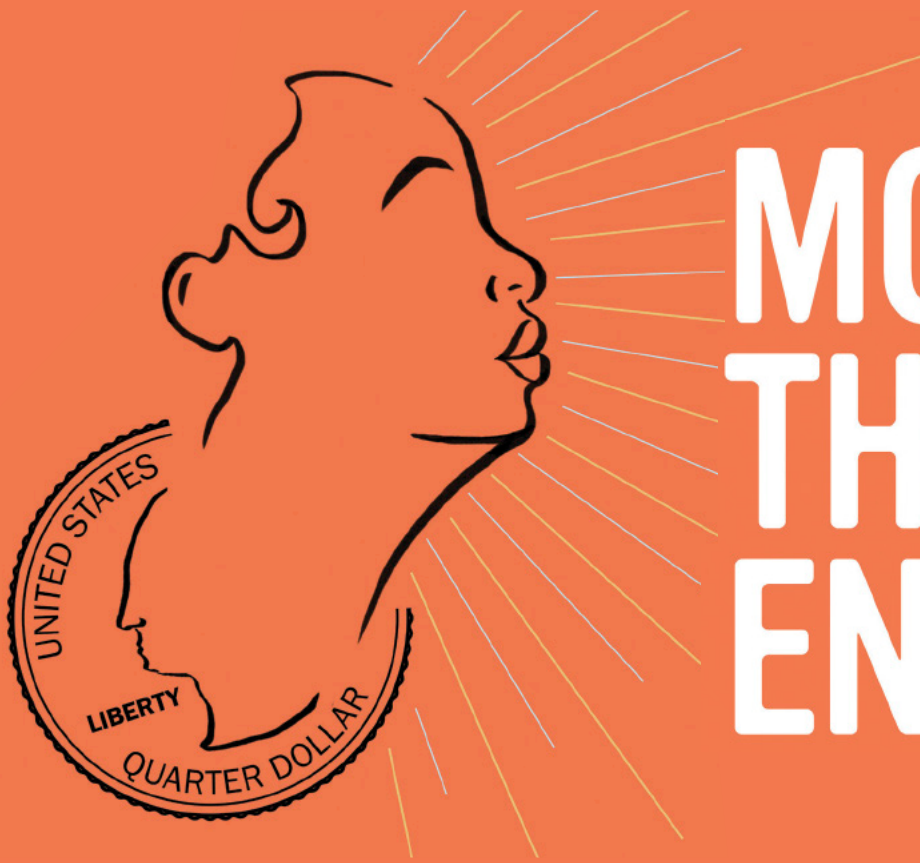
## COMIX NATION

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# MORE THAN ENOUGH

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## SPORTS

# Hall of Shame

**T**he commissioner of the National Football League, Roger Goodell, wants the public to think he's sincere about fighting racism in the NFL. He has now said the league was "wrong" to discourage political protest by its players, and the NFL announced that it will pledge \$250 million over 10 years to racial justice causes. Yet there is one thing that Goodell could do immediately to address the racism that has marred his tenure running the world's most profitable sports league: Demand a new name for the Washington, D.C., football team.

The team's owner, Dan Snyder, might not like it, and Goodell might be scared to confront the right-wing, Trump-funding cabal that owns many of the NFL's franchises. But it's past time for Goodell to tackle the most visible expression of racism in the league: the slur adorning the NFL team in the nation's capital.

The person who bestowed the name on the team was its original owner, George Preston Marshall, a proud white supremacist. Washington was the last team in the league to integrate, when it played the legendary Bobby Mitchell, who died April 5. In addition to changing the team name, it would be difficult to think of a better tribute to Mitchell than to erect a statue of him outside the team's old home, RFK Stadium, in the exact location where a memorial to Marshall was removed on June 19.

—Dave Zirin



# Elie Mystal



## The Lowest Possible Barr

*The president cannot be allowed to turn the attorney general into his personal benchman.*

**T**he damage Attorney General William Barr has done to the Department of Justice is incalculable. He has surpassed every institutional metric in his quest to become the worst attorney general in US history. He's likely responsible for shutting down the Robert Mueller investigation and is certainly responsible for misrepresenting its contents. He's helped Donald Trump implement a truly monarchical theory of executive power. He's ordered the teargassing of peaceful protesters so his boss could do a photo op with the Bible. And most recently, he tried to fire Geoffrey Berman, the head prosecutor for the Southern District of New York, via press release, possibly because Berman was looking into crimes committed by the Trump Organization or Trump's cronies.

Simply listing a few lawless highlights from Barr's tenure, however, undersells how thoroughly he has mangled the theory of impartial justice. The attorney general is supposed to be the top lawyer for the American people, but Barr has turned the entire Department of Justice into a weapon for Trump's reelection. It's Barr who has flirted with investigating the president's political rivals, Barr who has joined Trump's attempts to scare people away from mail-in voting. Barr has placed Trump above the rule of law—from within the country's legal department.

Unfortunately, nothing can be done about him so long as Trump is still in power. Yes, Barr can be impeached by the House of Representatives and removed from office if convicted by at least two-thirds of the Senate—but that will never happen. The Republican Party has so thoroughly committed itself to the lawlessness of the Trump regime that it does not have the moral strength to remove one of the president's chief henchmen mere months before the election.

Then again, the GOP's approach to injustice within the Justice Department is nothing new. This is the second time that Barr has been the US attorney general. The last time, he used his power to help Republican operatives secure pardons to escape accountability for the Iran-contra scandal.

In fact, he isn't all that unusual among corrupt Republican attorneys general. Remember George W. Bush appointee Alberto Gonzales? Many recall him as a pro-rendition guy who supported warrantless wiretaps and all manner of post-9/11

excesses in law enforcement. But people forget that he was suspected of doing what Barr is doing now: allegedly firing US attorneys who refused to open investigations into the president's political enemies.

Gonzales eventually resigned, but Republican presidents know they can always find somebody willing to do their bidding under the color of law. In the Saturday Night Massacre, Richard Nixon eventually fired his way to Robert Bork, who was willing to carry out the Watergate-related purges that better men like Elliot Richardson refused to do. Republicans have been politicizing the Department of Justice for decades. But every time the Democrats retake power, all they do is nominate decent people while leaving the structure in place for indecent people to do great harm when Republicans regain control.

That cycle must end. The Democrats must stop hoping that Republicans will act in good faith and start protecting the country from when they inevitably do not. And the only way to do that is to try to

make the Department of Justice truly impartial. The attorney general's position must be placed at a remove from the regular political appointment process. Congress should pass (and the new president should sign) a law transforming the term of the attorney general into a single, six-year appointment, which cannot be revoked by the president. This office must be given protection from the president, and the responsibility for removing a rogue AG must be laid squarely at the feet of Congress through the impeachment process. The president should not be able to fire his way to a compliant attorney general, the way Nixon got to Bork—and Trump got to Barr.

The act of creating an independent Justice Department must happen with the next Democratic administration, because a lot lies ahead for the next attorney general. It will be incumbent upon the new AG to take up what Barr has refused to investigate and to hold to account those wrongdoers who



*Bill Barr has surpassed every institutional metric in his quest to become the worst attorney general in US history.*

have thus far gotten away with it. This includes investigating Trump and his entire crime family. It also includes prosecuting Rudolph Giuliani for his efforts to blackmail Ukraine into interfering in the upcoming election. And it might include prosecuting Barr for corruption.

An investigation into a previous presidential administration and a previous president's criminal family is inherently political. It can be carried out only by a body that is viewed as politically independent. That's why Elizabeth Warren, when she was running for president, proposed an independent task force, separate from her administration, that would investigate Trump. It was a good idea, but Barr has exposed the need for an even more expansive solution.

If Barack Obama had established nonrenewable six-year terms for the attorney general during his first year in office, when he had 60 votes in the Senate, 2021 would

have been the end of Loretta Lynch's term as AG. Imagine how different everything would be if we had had an independent attorney general these past four years.

Or flip the script: Imagine how much less of a danger Barr would be if we had to put up with him for only a few more years under a Democratic president, until his term expired. Barr would be reduced to mewling about Burisma while the Trump family lawyered up for the federal prosecutions inevitably coming their way from an independent Justice Department in 2023.

Bill Barr has wrecked the Department of Justice. The solution isn't to return it to the way it was before. The solution is to remake it, better and stronger than it's ever been. Do Democrats have the will to do what is necessary? Or will they just wait for another Republican like Barr, Gonzales, or Bork to take over the department and finally destroy the rule of law? ■

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*Bill Barr has wrecked the Department of Justice. The solution isn't to return it to the way it was before. The solution is to remake it.*

SNAPSHOT / TASLIMA AKHTER

## Hanging by a Thread

A garment worker sits with her daughter in Ashulia, Bangladesh. As a result of the pandemic-related global economic downturn, over \$3.5 billion in clothing orders have been canceled in the country. More than a million workers have been fired or furloughed, and 500,000 more could lose their jobs in the next six months.

## Calvin Trillin Deadline Poet

### TEMPER, TEMPER

With SCOTUS rulings seen as Trump defeats, Trump answered with a burst of angry tweets. At West Point, he prepared to look like Caesar. Instead his ramp walk showed a fragile geezer. His rage at that will probably never stop. And then his Tulsa rally was a flop. By then the tell-all book released by Bolton Had stoked this anger—hot now, nearly molten. Red-faced with rage? That judgment can't be made, Since orange close to red's his normal shade.



# How to Make **Defund the Police** a Reality

For the past half-century, American cities have spent more on policing each year. All of a sudden, nationwide protests have put divestment on the table.



BY BRYCE COVERT

**O**N A SUNDAY IN EARLY JUNE, GRAND ARMY PLAZA, A LARGE SQUARE AT THE entrance to Brooklyn's Prospect Park, swarmed with people of all different races and ages. A family march of parents and their children flowed into groups of young people on bikes. Many held signs declaring "Black lives matter," but there were perhaps an equal number of other signs: "Defund the police."

It's a radical demand that just a few weeks ago was rarely heard on the streets of New York City or in many other cities, for that matter. But since George Floyd, a black resident of Minneapolis, was killed by a white police officer and Breonna Taylor, a black emergency room technician, was killed by police in Louisville, Ky., in her sleep and outrage over these and countless other instances of police brutality pushed tens of thousands of people to protest in cities and towns across the country, it has become a rallying cry of the movement.

It's not just a slogan. Out of the protest movement has come a surge of organizing to push city councils to shift money out of bloated police budgets and into starved social services—and activists are already seeing some concrete successes. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti walked back a proposed increase for the LAPD and has promised a \$150 million cut instead. Lawmakers in 15 other cities have made similar pledges. The Minneapolis City Council has even voted to disband the city's police department.

It's an unprecedented moment. Spending on the police by state and local governments jumped from about \$2 billion in 1960 to \$137 billion in 2018, unadjusted for inflation; the average share of city budgets spent on policing grew from 6.6 percent in 1977 to 7.8 percent in 2017. "We have had a persistent trend for the last half-century of spending ever more money on police and incarceration," said Kelly Lytle Hernandez, a history professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. "This is a truly historic shift." Organizers agree. "Something like 'defund the police' just two weeks ago... was a nonstarter," said Nicolas O'Rourke, the Pennsylvania organizing director for the Working Families Party. Now it's a chant heard nearly as often at protests as "No justice, no peace."

The ever-increasing amount of money spent on policing has borne little relationship to crime rates. The number of crimes rose from 1,887 per 100,000 Americans in 1960 to 5,950 in 1980. Then rates started to decline, falling to 2,580 per 100,000 by 2018. And yet spending has steadily increased throughout that span.

In New York City, spending on police went from \$7 million in 1981 to \$5.9 billion this year, not accounting for inflation. The NYPD accounts for 7.7 percent of the city's budget—more than what was allocated to the Housing Preservation and Development, Health and Mental Hygiene, Homeless Services, and Youth and Community Development departments combined. And yet crime in the city has been falling for the past two decades.

Constance Malcolm knows all too well about the outside power of the NYPD. A white officer chased her teenage son Ramarley Graham into their home and shot and killed him in their bathroom in 2012. "I've been fighting for eight years, and I didn't get any justice," she said. The officer, Richard Haste, was indicted on manslaughter charges by a grand jury, but a judge dismissed them; Haste stayed on the force five more years before he quit just after he was found guilty in a departmental disciplinary review. "I wouldn't call it justice," she added, "because somebody's life was taken and there's nothing that could replace it."

Malcolm works in a nursing home and said she hasn't been given enough protective equipment since the Covid-19 pandemic hit. She has tested positive for coronavirus antibodies, and a lot of her patients died. "Even before the coronavirus, black and brown communities were not getting what we needed," she said. "Many of our people don't even have access to good health care, affordable housing, good quality food, or a strong education."

Despite this, spending on the police continues to increase. "The NYPD keeps getting the highest budget, even though they kill our children and nothing happens," Malcolm said. "We're in a crisis. Police brutality is a crisis. The only way to deal with this and keep our community safe is to defund the police."

**T**HESE SPENDING IMBALANCES HAVE NOW BEEN thrown into stark relief. As a result of the economic crash, state and local budgets are being decimated by a drop in tax revenue at the same time that expenses are rising steeply to deal with the coronavirus crisis. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities projects a \$615 billion shortfall in state budgets over the next three years. Because nearly all city and state governments have to balance their operating budgets every year, they'll be forced to make deep cuts.

Keeping spending on the police intact or even increasing it will mean brutal reductions elsewhere. "When the economy is great and the tax revenues of the city are growing, you can sort of paper over that," said Leo Ferguson, a member of the New York-based Communities United for Police Reform. "But then something like Covid-19 hits, you have a crisis, and suddenly it all falls apart." In order to make up for a \$10 billion tax shortfall, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio released an executive budget in April that cut NYPD funding by less than 1 percent while hitting the Department of Education with a 3 percent reduction and eliminating a youth employment program, among other cuts.

The crisis has also increased the need for the very services on the chopping block. "No one is asking for more police," said Kamau Walton, a member of Critical Resistance, a national prison-abolition group. "People are really asking, 'What do we need to survive? What do

**"The bottom line is you can't overinvest in social services. You can overinvest in policing."**

—Anthonine Pierre, Brooklyn Movement Center

**The new rallying cry:** At protests in New York City, "Defund the police" is a chant heard as often as "No justice, no peace."



we need to make it through this dire moment?’ And the answer is definitely not more police.” Hobbled services barely able to respond to a pandemic stand in sharp contrast with the tools that police departments have to quell the protests. “I see all of the resources—military-grade weapons—being used in residential areas,” O’Rourke said. “They were shooting tear gas and rubber bullets and bean bags.”

The protest movement happened to coincide with the time of year when many cities are considering the next year’s budget. In New York, advocates have coalesced around the demand to cut a minimum of \$1 billion from the NYPD’s budget for the coming fiscal year—something the City Council promised to do a little over two weeks into the protests. Advocates want to see a police hiring freeze, which has been imposed on many other city agencies, and an end to using police in schools and youth programs. They also want to end the NYPD’s task forces for mental illness and homeless outreach and have social workers take their place. All of this may require a reduction in head count during a recession in which millions have lost their jobs. But, Ferguson said, “police should not be an employment program.” There are other areas to cut in the NYPD’s budget, he added, such as the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on things like bomb-seeking underwater drones and militarized armored vehicles.

Advocates would also like to see settlements for police brutality come out of police budgets, not general revenue. In New York, as in many other cities, the money for settling these cases is usually taken out of the city’s overall budget. Ensuring that settlements come out of the NYPD’s budget “gives them some incentive to address misconduct,” Ferguson said.

Organizing to address swollen police budgets has been happening in a number of other cities for years. For the past six years, some members of the Black Philly Radical Collective have been fighting to reduce police violence, including a call to defund the police. But this is the first time that all the members of the collective have made such a demand. “We know there are political moments when you have to strike,” said Megan Malachi, an organizer with Philly for REAL Justice, which is part of the collective.

The City Council, however, hasn’t been quick to take up the demand. “This is the kind of issue where even the black members of our political government here in Philadelphia are not responsive to the needs of their constituents,” Malachi said. Still, after a majority of council members said in early June they opposed Mayor Jim Kenney’s proposed \$14 million increase in the police budget, prompting him to drop it, they reached a deal to reduce police funding by \$33 million on June 17. Before the protests, if someone had claimed that the mayor would go against an increase in police funding, “no one would have believed you,” O’Rourke said.

Stop Police Terror Project DC, which fights police violence in the nation’s capital, has highlighted the amount of money the Metropolitan Police Department gets in the budget every year when it comes up for debate. Sean Blackmon, one of the project’s organizers, noted that in Washington, some violent crimes, such as homicide,

have been on the rise in recent years, bucking the national trend, despite increasing police budgets. For him, that’s still a reason to defund the police. “Why would a city government continue to invest in something that’s clearly not working?” he said.

At the same time, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser recently proposed cutting the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, which was created as part of a 2016 criminal justice reform that sought to deploy public health violence interrupters instead of police. “This is the same mayor who is getting all of this positive press because of the Black Lives Matter mural and renaming Black Lives Matter Plaza,” Blackmon said. “But her actual policies...have a tangible negative impact on black lives.” Meanwhile, the City Council passed an emergency police reform bill focused on limiting the use of force and increasing transparency without touching the budget question. It “feels kind of delinquent. Kind of far behind,” he said.

“That’s why we’re pushing so hard now for defunding the police, particularly as Bowser is clearly seeking to usurp and co-opt this moment,” he continued. “If she’s determined to claim to the world that black lives matter, we intend to make her prove it.”

The movement to defund the police is cropping up not just in major metropolises. It’s also taking root in smaller cities. Wildaliz Bermudez has been on the City Council of Hartford for over four and a half years. “Never

before have I seen this type of public outcry,” she said. She has received more than 100 e-mails calling to defund the police. She and a fellow Working Families Party member on the council, Joshua Michtom, proposed cutting \$9.6 million from the police department’s budget. That proposal failed, but the council did vote to reduce the department’s budget by \$1 million next year and put that money into things like after-school programs and another housing inspector.

In addition to less spending on policing, advocates want the police to stop dealing with things like mental health crises and school safety; instead, they want cities to fund services that would address these issues without criminalizing the people who are suffering. “The safest communities don’t have the most cops. They have the most resources,” O’Rourke said. Police officers are typically the first responders when someone has a mental health crisis, not public health or social workers. Jails like Rikers Island in New York and Cook County Jail in Illinois are now the country’s largest mental health facilities. Communities across the country have responded to the homelessness crisis by criminalizing homeless people, putting the police in charge of ticketing and clearing those without shelter rather than offering housing and services. And 38 states and Washington, D.C., authorize the placement of police officers in schools. “The bottom line is you can’t overinvest in social services,” said Anthonine Pierre, the deputy director of the Brooklyn Movement Center. “You can overinvest in policing.”



**Symbolic politics:** Activists criticized Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser for painting “Black lives matter” on a street in front of the White House after she resisted cutting the police budget.

**“The safest communities don’t have the most cops. They have the most resources.”**

—Nicolas O’Rourke, Working Families Party

**T**HE DEATHS OF FLOYD AND TAYLOR MAY PROVE TO BE a pivotal moment, but these transformations have been years in the making. “This work has been going on on the ground for quite some time,” Lytle Hernandez said. “It’s exploded on the streets under the term ‘defund the police,’ but this broader notion of rethinking resources to police [to] invest in the social safety net has been in play certainly for the last few years.”

Today’s protests come after seven years of organizing and movement building in the wake of the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and other black people at the hands of police and vigilantes. These deaths led to some reforms, such as departments banning certain use-of-force techniques like choke holds and instituting the use of body cameras. The Obama administration put at least 15 police departments under consent decrees and limited the transfer of military-grade equipment to local forces. In fact, Minneapolis was one of six cities the Obama Justice Department selected to pilot procedural reforms in 2015. And yet since 2015, police have killed about 1,000 people in the nation every year. “We’re not going to fix these problems by jailing a couple of killer cops or giving them body cameras or making them take implicit bias training,” Alex S. Vitale, the author of *The End of Policing*, told Zachary Siegel in an interview in this issue. (See page 5.)

So activists have pushed to go much further. Defunding the police was one of the six policy platforms put forward by the Movement for Black Lives in 2016, a year after it convened a massive gathering in Cleveland. “Black Lives Matter set the foundation and the groundwork,” Pierre said. Since then, “there has been ongoing forward movement.”

It’s no coincidence that these protests and the demands issuing from them are happening in the midst of a historic health crisis. “When you live in a pandemic for three months and lose jobs and lose family members and think about how society is organized, it becomes much easier to say, ‘Well, maybe we do need to get rid of the cops,’” Pierre said. “We got rid of going outside. So maybe we should get rid of the cops.”

Not to mention that black people have been disproportionately dying of Covid-19. Everyone has watched the federal government’s paralysis in the face of the crisis, and many feel that the \$1,200 stimulus checks and enhanced unemployment benefits don’t go far enough to cushion such an enormous blow. The protests are “happening in the context of the US government abandoning its people under the coronavirus,” Blackmon said. “It’s almost like a perfect storm that has now exploded and blossomed into a nationwide resistance movement.”

A number of those who are calling to defund the police are demanding not just that their budgets be reduced and redistributed but also that the money eventually be zeroed out and police eliminated. “Our call is specifically abolitionist,” Malachi said. “We’re aware that because of the popularity of the defund-the-police narrative...it could easily be co-opted by Democrats and liberals and made into reform rather than the radical call that it is.”



**Seeking justice:** Constance Malcolm has been fighting police violence since her son Ramarley Graham was killed by an NYPD officer in 2012.

**For every dollar that goes to the NYPD and the Correction Department:**

**29¢ Homeless Services**

**25¢ Department of Health**

**19¢ Housing Preservation and Development**

**12¢ Youth and Community Development**

**1¢ Workforce Investment**

Even so, many see changing city budgets and the roles the police play as part of that process. “It can be a step toward abolition,” Walton said, “if we make sure these processes are being controlled and led by the community.” As Vitale put it, abolition is “a process more than an outcome.... We need to challenge the scope and power of policing. We need to take their budgets away, take their toys away, take their authority away in as many dimensions as we can.”

“These have been the tensions and conversations all along,” Lytle Hernandez said. But “you can go back to any social movement and find these kinds of tensions between more moderate and radical wings of the movement.” For her, eradicating racial inequality requires abolition. “We have walked up to this precipice at least twice before,” she said, pointing to Emancipation and the civil rights movement. “We have to make a decision about are we going to really head toward racial justice or make a compromise that’s easier for the moment and maintain white supremacy? Each time before, we have chosen white supremacy.”

Whether more mayors and city councils will take heed is unclear. Mayor de Blasio, a Democrat who briefly ran for the party’s presidential nomination this year on his progressive bona fides, at first shot down the idea of reducing the NYPD’s budget before saying, 10 days into the protests, that he would cut that spending and direct it to youth and social services. But he hasn’t stated yet by how much. “Cut the budget, and let’s see where you stand,” Malcolm, Ramarley Graham’s mother, said of de Blasio. “Let’s see if black life really matters to him.”

Meanwhile, New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer has called for a \$1.1 billion reduction over four years rather than the immediate decrease that activists want to see and the City Council appears to be considering. In Congress, Democrats have put forward a landmark policing bill that is still focused on procedural reform. But even this is proof of the impact the activism is having. “This is something that I think we’d all agree felt pretty unthinkable just a few weeks ago,” Ferguson said. “It shows how much the ground is shifting.”

“This is the moment for us to lean in,” O’Rourke said. “I’m excited to see for the most part the people are leaning in with us.”

# Just Investment



As the call grows to “divest and invest,” we must not exchange the violence of the police for the violence of finance capitalism.

DESTIN JENKINS

HEALTH CARE

EDUCATION

TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING

MENTAL HEALTH





**S**INCE THE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD ON MAY 25 AND IN THE ABSENCE of a legitimate government response, laypeople armed with little more than cardboard signs have quickly become the arbiters of justice. The simple nature of their presentation—a combining of poster board and Sharpie—masks the incredibly sophisticated nature of their demand: “Divest and invest.”

With breathtaking speed, it seems, this radical cry has gained greater currency. Many who once argued fervently for police reform now declare the time has come to defund the police. Through campaigns like Philly We Rise, movement organizers have taken to demanding the reallocation of funds from local police departments to city services such as libraries and the arts. They have been joined by activists in Los Angeles calling for greater mental health services and public transportation and a diverse coalition in New York City urging greater investment in core social services and infrastructure. The recent explosion of terror by violent, riotous police officers has only deepened the conviction that there are surely better ways to spend taxpayer funds than on the weapons used against us for exercising our right to protest.

I want to focus here on the “invest” side of “divest and invest.” I want to explore what that word can mean, because “investment” hasn’t caught up to “divestment” in public discussions, leaving a whole side of the equation underexplored. Everyone knows that “divest” means less money going to police; what is less clear is what “invest” really means. Do those calling for investment mean simply moving money from one column in the budget to another, taking tax revenues used to fund one government agency and directing them to a different one? Do they envision a completely different financial process, like using public debt for schools instead of police stations and jails? Is it about more funding for basic services like education and health care? Or is it about funding the infrastructure that makes services possible? Or all of the above?

There is a difference between the delivery of public services, the facilities to which people turn for those services, and the submerged infrastructure on which those facilities rely. If what the advocates of “divest and invest” want is greater and transformed services, then shifting funds from one government agency to another makes sense.

But what will maintain the infrastructure in which we seek revitalized services and through which we travel in our communities—the pipes, roads, bridges, and subway tunnels? These are the foundations on which any public service depends, and covering the cost of building and maintaining them cannot be so easily met by rearranging budgets. Indeed, this kind of transformative investment depends on a kind of financial wizardry that most people haven’t been encouraged to think much about.

We need to be precise, not just about the aims or agencies but also about the mechanisms through which investment takes place. Only by doing so will black communities avoid exchanging police violence for the violence of finance capitalism, whose grip is already so tight and devastating.

*Destin Jenkins is the Neubauer family assistant professor of history at the University of Chicago.*

**Investment hasn't caught up to divestment in public discussions, leaving a whole side of the equation underexplored.**

**Paving the way:** Activists painted a message to the world on the streets of Washington, D.C., not far from the White House.

**T**HE “DIVEST AND INVEST” VISION OF SAFETY AND community is part of a long-overdue engagement with policing and municipal finance. For years, scholars and activists have decried the use of regressive fees and fines to plug local budget shortfalls. In Minneapolis, the Committee for Professional Policing pushed a local ballot initiative requiring police officers to carry liability insurance—a move intended to shift the costs of compensating victims of police brutality onto the police. And across the left and right, others have demanded an end to qualified immunity, a suspect legal doctrine that basically gives carte blanche to officers who use excessive force.

We owe these ideas—and this larger opportunity to remake policing in the United States—to the work, study, and organizing by groups like Critical Resistance and especially to the efforts of young black activists. In her foreword to the Agenda to Build Black Futures, Charlene Carruthers, then serving as national director of the Black Youth Project 100, made the link between reparations for past and present systemic violence and support for black “women who hold our households together, and...queer and [trans] folks.” In that report, Cedric Lawson, a founding member of BYP100, insisted it was not enough to defund the police “and reallocate residual funds to the people’s vision of public safety.” He said we must also divest from the prison-industrial complex and a system of “administrative fees for probationers and parolees.” Janaé Bonsu, an activist and scholar, stressed the importance of reallocating funds for schools and after-school programs.

The Agenda to Build Black Futures, released in 2016, was just one contribution to a larger vision that pushed the scope of divestment and investment further. The Movement for Black Lives demanded divestment from all “exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations.” The Vision for Black Lives, M4BL’s official policy platform, imagined equitable health care that would include “comprehensive health centers” and investing savings from the catastrophic War on Drugs in “restorative services [and] mental health services.”



**W**HEN ACTIVISTS, SCHOLARS, AND ORDINARY CITIZENS DEMAND divestment and investment, they're inserting themselves into matters of public finance, a technocratic sphere profoundly insulated from democratic input. There the needs of real people are abstracted, turned into bloodless numbers and bottom lines. With the call to "divest and invest," engaged citizens are bringing substance back to these abstractions, infusing a socially conscious position into the classical questions of public finance: when, where, and how funds are invested and who bears the cost.

Cities obtain public funds primarily through two channels: taxes and borrowing. (Though we might also note the earnings they reap from the sale of public properties as well as commercial enterprises, financial assets, special administrative charges, and of course, "plunder," which currently takes the form of civil asset forfeiture.) Taxation and borrowing are distinct but related processes. Ultimately, to quote one prominent 1950s textbook on public finance, funds "must come from the income and accumulated wealth of the people." Debt, in other words, is repaid through "the same inevitable transfer of funds as taxation"—though not always by the same segments of society.

The municipal bond market, which enables cities to fund infrastructure, is a politically constructed network that links government borrowers, sellers of financial information, and institutional and individual investors. During the 19th century, municipal bondholders included not only wealthy elites in the Northeast and across the Atlantic but also working people. Throughout the 20th century, however, the holding of municipal debt was more likely to be the preserve of wealthy individuals and institutional investors like commercial banks and insurance companies.

Today's municipal bond market is robust. "An average of nearly \$435 billion in new municipal securities were issued each year in the last decade," noted a recent report by the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board. And although the corporate securities market is more than twice as large (\$9.6 trillion), the \$3.9 trillion municipal bond market is nevertheless a major capital market through which state and local governments raise funds and investors collect interest income on the debt they hold.

And it has distinct advantages for cities. While resorting to taxation allows them to avoid the interest burden that comes with borrowing, borrowing permits a distribution of the costs over the life of major capital projects like the construction of bridges, streets, and sewage systems. Cities sometimes float bonds for specific purposes, such as affordable housing or transportation improvements. In other instances, they issue so-called various purpose bonds, which bunch multiple infrastructure projects into a single bond issue. These are typical bond issues, though as we will see, borrowing power is not always used for the critical infrastructure on which cities rely.

Taxation and borrowing unlock revenues that are then directed toward municipal expenditures for the protection of life and property, education, health, and sanitation, among other services. But these expenditures reflect decisions by some designated authority to redistribute income to certain activities and not others. If during the late 1940s expenditures for public safety were

"subject to close competition by the public schools and health and sanitation programs," to return to that 1950s textbook, this competition has since been decisively settled. Somehow, legislative and executive authorities across the country, backed by different constituencies and power blocs, have decided that the public should float huge police departments.

**P**OLICE VIOLENCE AND BLOATED POLICE BUDGETS ARE endemic to the United States, but perhaps no city represents this intersection better than Chicago. Well before the city's infamous police commander John Burge and his marauding Midnight Crew terrorized black Chicagoans through beatings, electric shocks, and suffocation during the 1970s and '80s, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) was routinely accused of torture. And it continued to torture and brutalize long after. Thus the execution of Rekia Boyd in 2012, the murder of Laquan McDonald in 2014, and the killing of Bettie Jones in 2015 did not occur at the hands of bad apples. Their deaths, like those of so many other black Chicagoans, were rooted in a callous systematic indifference to black life. And this system was propped up, in turn, by financial decisions.

Before the wars—on crime, drugs, and terrorism—the CPD was already "flush with cash, and possessed extraordinary power and autonomy," wrote historian Simon Balto in his book *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago From Red Summer to Black Power*. The 1950s proved to be the pivotal decade for the dramatic expansion of police personnel and for investment in new vehicles and crime control technologies. "By 1970," he wrote, "the CPD's budget was more than 900 percent larger than in 1945, approaching \$200 million per year." Since then, the numbers have only continued to climb—and climb. In 2018, Chicago appropriated more than \$1.57 billion for the police (some 18 percent of the city's overall budget of nearly \$8.9 billion, not including grant funds).

The disproportionate funds allocated to the CPD have come with important trade-offs. In the city's 2019 budget overview, 41 percent of the proposed expenditures from its corporate fund, which supports basic operations and services, were allotted for the police. Meanwhile, 2 percent of the expenditures were slotted for transportation and 4 percent for streets and sanitation.

Again, cities like Chicago borrow for the sake of infrastructure improvements. But with hefty sums allocated for policing and for servicing debt (\$632 million in 2018), it is worth asking: What improvements? It seems as if Chicagoans have been asking this very question for years. In June 1978, one *Chicago Tribune* journalist spoke to motorists about the city's pothole problem. "The stretch from 55th to 51st is as bumpy as [expletive deleted]," said one driver. "There are holes all over and the car is rattling all over." More than 40 years later, the city remains as pocked with potholes as ever.



**Starved for funds:** While Chicago has funneled money to the police department, other vital services like schools have faced bruising deficits.

**With the call to invest, engaged citizens are infusing a socially conscious position into the classical questions of public finance.**

Yet, while successive administrations have ignored some of its residents' most basic needs, somehow it became acceptable for Chicago to borrow money to compensate the victims of police brutality. The city said it has borrowed hefty sums "to pay for expenses incurred in connection with claims and judgments" against it. Indeed, the Action Center on Race and the Economy estimated that Chicago borrowed more than \$709 million to cover these costs from 2010 to 2017. And "most of the city's police related settlement and judgment costs," the group said—\$360 million from 2010 to 2016—were "covered by bond borrowing." These "police brutality bonds" will cost taxpayers millions more in interest payments to bondholders. Other cities have borrowed for police body cameras and to rebuild local jails, the debt-financed extensions of the carceral state.

Black Chicagoans have been conscripted into a nasty compact. As taxpayers, they fund a police department that makes their lives more dangerous. And as tax and fee payers, many of those harmed by police brutality effectively pay for their own reparations, with bond financiers taking the cream off the top in the form of underwriting fees.

**T**HE TEMPTATION TO LEVERAGE FINANCIAL MARKETS to deliver the kind of infrastructure that black communities so desperately need is understandable. This temptation is all the more alluring, given the prevailing low interest rates. And surely there will be some financiers who seek to co-opt the radical "divest and invest" demand by underwriting the revolution in spending priorities. But as tempting as it might be to invest in community needs through the bond market, there's a fly in that particular ointment: Doing so would continue to render black futures subject to the power of unelected bond-rating analysts who would weigh community demands against technocratic ratios.

New York City is often remembered as the poster child for bond market implosions. Before being subjected to "shock therapy," as Mayor Abraham Beame described it in 1975, the Big Apple was just one of a number of cities—including Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and Philadelphia—that had their general obligation bonds downgraded by Moody's from 1955 to 1970. Chicago maintained its strong credit profile during these years, but soon it, too, fell victim to a downgrade.

In September 1979, Standard & Poor's downgraded Chicago's bonds from AA to A-plus. As S&P's Robert Geier explained, the firm lowered the city's bond rating because of operating and cash deficits. What's more, the Windy City incurred and rolled over liabilities, drawing on future budgets to pay for existing hospital expenses. And though we have come to see privatization as a hallmark of neoliberalism, the analysts at S&P, at least in 1979, were dismayed by the sale of certain assets to finance city operations.

The *Chicago Tribune* said the S&P downgrade meant that the city would have to pay higher interest rates on the "bonds it sells." The downgrade could also compel city officials to delay much-needed infrastructure improvements. In February 1980, Edwin Yeo III, the chief financial adviser to Mayor Jane Byrne, said that wiping

out the deficit by means of austerity would ultimately "provide the basis for a higher bond rating in the future."

Decades later, the city's credit rating is once again less than stellar. By November 2019, Fitch rated Chicago debt BBB-minus, while S&P Global Ratings gave it a BBB-plus. For these rating analysts, the outlook for Chicago debt was stable, though Moody's rated Chicago bonds "one notch below investment grade." While some pointed to public sector costs and the impact of a declining population on the city's revenue base, Moody's cited "pension challenges" as the city's biggest problem. And this happened before Covid-19 obliterated projections of Chicago's economic future.

The general hostility toward deficits in this country amounts to an ideology; it's part of a system of beliefs deployed with vigor, especially when such deficits are linked to social spending. The ideological aversion to deficits, the outsize power of rating analysts, the ups and downs of letter grades, and the effect of these dynamics on the cost of borrowing suggests that investment, particularly in the context of revenue shortfalls, will invariably come with strings attached—strings that could strangle any attempt to build a more just society in the cradle.

Even if the current campaign to defund the police is successful, without also decoupling our cities from the private bond market, credit-rating analysts will soon punish our communities for budget deficits, making it more difficult to invest in the very facilities that will keep black communities safe. We need to avoid the private bond market and leverage completely new financial mechanisms in order to realize an alternative investment in community infrastructure.

**G**IVEN THESE DANGERS, HOW SHOULD WE FUND INFRASTRUCTURE? How can we reinvest? In addition to the now familiar progressive, redistributive visions—taxing the rich, doing away with tax abatements for huge corporations, converting private utility companies into a public power utility—we need to leverage federal financial power.

More than 50 years ago, Representative Wright Patman of Texas offered a plan worth revisiting. His Municipal Capital Market Expansion Act of 1968 was designed to do more than remedy the failings of rating agencies. He aimed to correct a system that "punishes the larger

(continued on page 33)



**Their lives mattered:** Bettie Jones, Laquan McDonald, and Rekia Boyd were all killed by Chicago police officers.

**On the people's dime:** Chicago police brandish batons at demonstrators protesting the murder of George Floyd.





# In Praise of Proximity

Solidarity and the stricken city.

JoAnn Wypijewski

*We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.*

—“Recuerdo,” Edna St. Vincent Millay

**I** WAS YOUNG AND IN LOVE IN NEW YORK WHEN I REMEMBER first reading those lines from an earlier period of rebellion. We bought fresh bread instead of apples and pears and gave away our money, even our subway fares, to kids shaky and a little bit menacing with a steak knife. Pleasure and danger were always close. We kissed on the ferry and frolicked in a broom closet at Macy’s and by abandoned rail tracks in winter and in any part of Central Park that offered just enough concealment and carried just enough risk of being found out. New York, the poet didn’t quite say, burst with possibilities for public sex.

That all waned decades before social distancing—with AIDS, with the domestication of the docks, the sanitizing of Times Square, the explosion of homelessness and cops and enthusiasm for moral policing. Flaming youth no doubt found a way; with any luck, they will again. And pairs in first flush could still drain the night, exuberantly, tenderly, till “the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.” What emboldened ardent souls, though—the lovers who just met, the lovers who were pledged, the lovers who might never know each other’s names—was more primal than romance. It was what had always drawn so many to cities, especially New York: the chance to be simultaneously anonymous and known, to be yourself, in your skin, in



**Our huddled masses:**  
New York City's  
Lower East Side, in  
the age before social  
distancing.

a crowd, in the streets, in proximity to the skin of others.

That's what made New York electric when kids like me wrapped ourselves around each other and downtown drag queens ruled the night, in the days before so much about the city was reduced to greed and ambition and bows to that mayor or this police chief for cleaning the place up. That's what somehow survived, too, with a weak pulse—the sensual idea, the prospect that in any crush of bodies something might still go *zing!*

Now proximity is killing us—or might. We who are nonessential turn away, cross the street, or walk in the bike lane when another body comes close. We pass judgment on sunbathers, picnickers: The louche have a new name; maybe we shame them on Instagram. We're cautious, and we ought to be, but we have been in training for distance for a long time, and it's showing.

We probably don't think too much about how central sex has been to creating distance in the political sense. I didn't think there was anything political about a romp in the park in the late 1970s, either. I was a white working-class girl with a white Army-brat boyfriend who'd inherited the freedoms for which others had paid. Sexual freedom seemed the least of these—but of course it would, for us, relatively protected, relatively confident of getting the benefit of the doubt. We didn't even fully know whom we owed. Bohemia had been a social and political fact when we were growing up. All the meetings and the marching and the riots had gone before; all the arguments about multiple oppressions had been had (though hardly settled) by people who were just a little bit older. Liberation rode on a song. It was easy to take things for granted when Marvin Gaye had been the soundtrack of your life. We would wise up soon enough, because in that moment, sex was being wielded with particular cunning as a political weapon not only against the liberation movements whose fights had made kids like us feel daringly alive but also against the ethic of solidarity, which bohemias had always tried, imperfectly, to advance against inhumanity.

Anyone who spent part of lockdown watching *Mrs. America*, the FX on Hulu series about the 1970s battle over the Equal Rights Amendment, would have gathered that the New Right's fight against the ERA wasn't waged primarily to stop loose "libbers" or abortion or godless homosexuals or even the amendment. In the figure of its chief strategist, Phyllis Schlafly, it was waged for political power. It used fear and lies, enabled religious fanatics, and exploited the real anxieties of women who felt the ground shifting under their families, their incomes, their identity, their lives. Like the contemporaneous fight against sex education led by the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society (which sold fear of depravity when overt racism and the Red Scare became outré), it sought to build a base for an agenda with different, less homely priorities. Kneecapping organized workers, redistributing wealth upward, dismantling the state's social program and fortifying its violence program—the prisons, the military budget, the new cold and hot wars—those were the priorities of the original "Make America Great" campaign, later renamed the Reagan Revolution, which, among other things, would look the other way as tens of thousands of gay men died of AIDS.

JoAnn Wypijewski is the author of *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About #Me Too*, just out from Verso.

**Stoking suspicion—of moral contagion, of one another—had been mainly a tactic, which became a fact as fear of sex, of strangers and child snatching, of crime and juvenile criminals, of touch and proximity, rippled through the culture.**

Stoking suspicion—of moral contagion, of one another—had been mainly a tactic, which became a fact as fear of sex, of strangers and child snatching, of crime and juvenile criminals, of touch and proximity, rippled through the culture, echoed by liberals out of opportunism, cowardice, or rage and inflated by a media jacked on scandal and alarm. Unlike the TV movie version of events, that politics of fear and retribution never retreated. It just took more baroque, bipartisan forms.

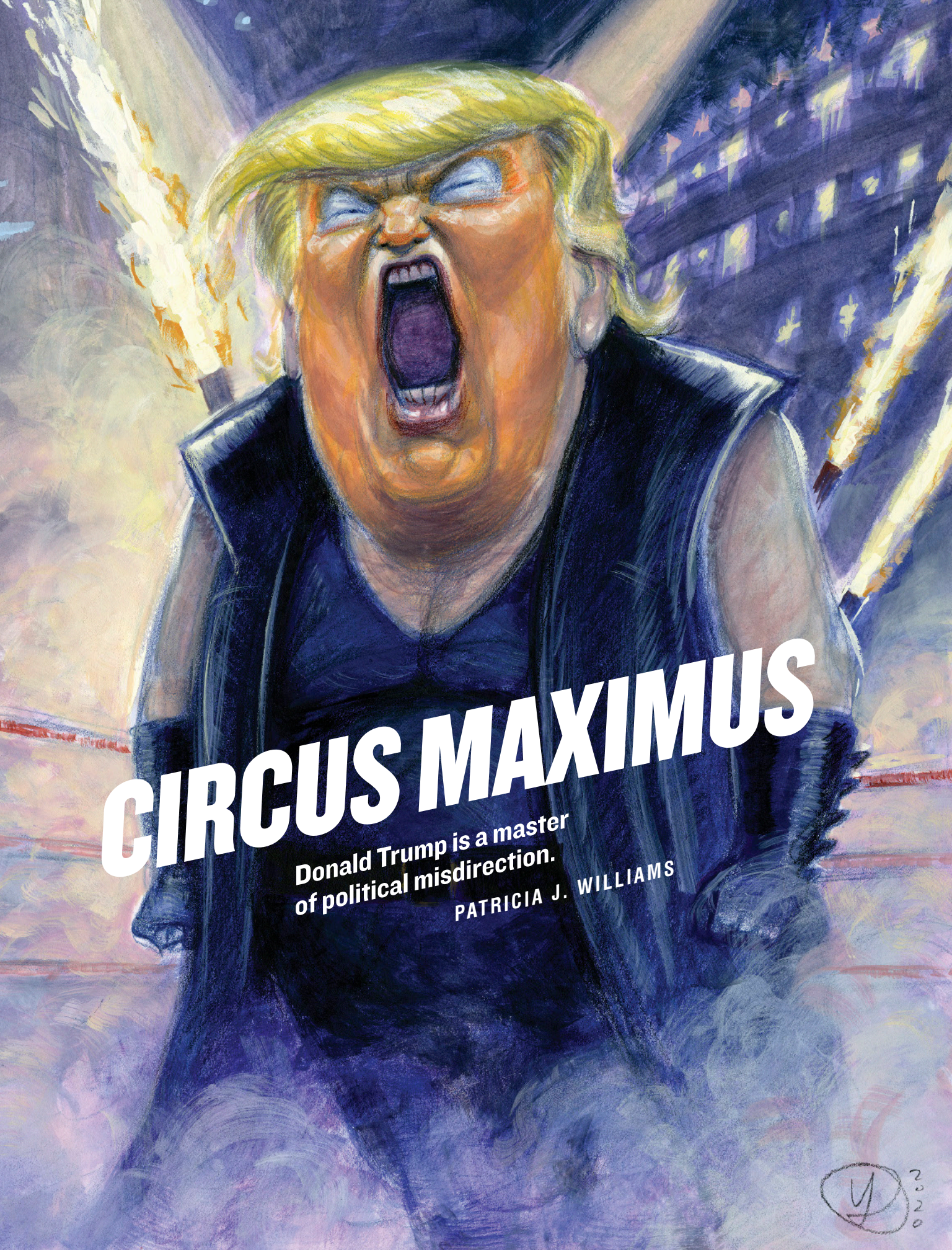
Many of us are legitimately afraid now and alone. Shocked by vulnerability on so many levels, people worry over large questions. What does freedom mean? What is public health, beyond the metrics of disease? Will I be loved, kissed? Will I die bereft? They withdraw. They lash out. Contagion is shocking and exploitable. A masked neighbor on my street avidly checks an app he says broadcasts the latest Covid-related crime. His is a learned response, and why not? We criminalize HIV; we monitor sex offense registries and banish whole populations from civic life; we lock up 6,000 ex-cons in mental institutions as "sexually dangerous" for fear of what they might do; we consign millions to pestilence in prisons. None of it has kept us safe.

Our thin hope is that what has been learned might be unlearned. So much about social life turns out to be about negotiating distance and proximity. The politics of fear points in one direction, solidarity in another. Both make demands first on thought. An injury to one is an injury to all, solidarity famously affirms. The slogan implies a humane reordering of

economic and international relations, but its primal source is a reverence for the human person in the most quotidian of circumstances. Reason plays a big part in that. What, after all, is more remarkable—that the subways, which New Yorkers may not experience again in the same way, were dirty, loud, and occasionally frequented by the random nasty groper or that every day millions of people pressed their bodies against one another, not sexual but strangely intimate, not fearless exactly but wordlessly acknowledging that the space each occupied depended on a certain generosity among all?

We groused. Of course we did. But if that proximity made us especially susceptible to the virus, its spirit value-signaled something else. Because anyone who ever considered the experience while emerging into the light from underground had to marvel at this unlegislated and unacknowledged generosity, this most common love, among most of us, most of the time. Defiant humanity, it said, is possible, if we want it.

*Coda: Every passing day threatens to make the one before seem irrelevant. A graph of daily Covid-19 deaths in the US resembles a fire: 1,379 dead on May 27; 478 on June 1; 1,039 on June 2; 448 on June 7; 926 on June 9; 345 on June 14. The fire is the thing, the spectacle of disposability that connects the health crisis, the economic crisis, the immigration catastrophe, and the protests in the streets in the name of all the George Floyds, all those extinguished more methodically, with less notice, and for so long. Whether or not one can join the protesters and without dismissing every legitimate concern about proximity and danger, they have struck a blow against political distance. The politics of fear is potent, but it may be losing its grip.* ■



# CIRCUS MAXIMUS

Donald Trump is a master  
of political misdirection.

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Y 2020

**W**HAT'S NOT TO LOVE ABOUT A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED THREE-RING CIRCUS? THE FLASH AND BANG OF the human cannon, the dancing bears, the ponies prancing in lockstep, the flying trapeze, the tiger tamed, the clown brought down in a pratfall. But circus magic depends upon the art of misdirection. The best acts amaze us not only because they are skilled gymnasts or animal whisperers but also because they have mastered the ability to focus attention—on what they are doing as well as away from it. Perfected distraction is the essence of magic: the sleight of hand, the visual feint, the shell game, the disappearing act, the great escape.

President Donald Trump is a master of political misdirection. For those who have never seen his performance as comic impresario for World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), back when he was engaged in a Battle of the Billionaires with Vince McMahon, now might be the time to do some catch-up viewing. A natural ringmaster, our president was fond of entering an arena flanked and followed by fawning courtiers. The evening he was nominated at the 2016 Republican National Convention as the party's presidential candidate, he made just such a magnificent entrance from behind a smoky scrim, illuminated by flashing lights amid a great wash of loud music. This over-the-top performativity is why many people who voted for him still insist that Trump isn't a racist or a misogynist, that he doesn't really mean what he says. In their estimation, he's only doing shtick; he's merely a great rodeo clown who seduces with humor and hyperbole. Even as recently as April, he was forgiven by many in his base for the "satire" of prescribing bleach and blasts of ultraviolet light, like a demented sword swallower's bid to cure Covid-19.

For nearly four years, Trump has dissolved the foundations of our government in the acid of such nonsense, with even the most bizarre, ignorant, heinous, nativist, incoherent, awful behavior greeted as miraculous transmutation. From caging children to classifying journalists as "enemies of the people," he has eroded the Constitution with nary a check and has been repeatedly forgiven because supposedly he's a businessman or he's a performer or he's "real." It's all OK as long as he's not really a politician.

It's all funny—hilarious, even—until it really, really isn't. When, on June 1, Trump strode across Lafayette Square from the White House to a symbolic house of God, the fictive circus suddenly got real. It was like one of those terrible Agatha Christie moments when the magician puts a woman—it's always a woman—into a box and pretends to saw her in half. Except the trick goes wrong! We are frozen for a moment. That can't be blood! We don't believe our eyes.

There was certainly lots of drama leading up to the moment. There was the president's weeklong snowballing fury, which climaxed with that photo of him holding the Bible aloft like a cat he had just strangled. There was the call with governors, during which he used some form of the word "dominate" 14 times. There was the threat, delivered from the Rose Garden, of sending in the military to discipline domestic demonstrators. There was an order to designate antifa as a terrorist organization—in the absence of any evidence it either is an actual organization or is engaged in terrorist activity. Finally, there was the summoning of a retinue of courtiers to cross the Rubicon

of Lafayette Square, including the US attorney general, the secretary of defense, and the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Together they formed a brave *fleche*, picking their way through the litter of tear gas canisters where peaceful protesters had been violently removed only moments before. A White House spokeswoman took the liberty of comparing the scene to Winston Churchill inspecting the rubble of London during World War II, but to me, Trump's angry march across the plaza amid a hellscape of pepper grenades and loud cries looked more like the stormy entrances made by the darkly wrathful WWE character and crowd-pleasing favorite the Undertaker.

*Patricia J. Williams is the university professor of law and humanities and the director of law, technology, and ethics initiatives at Northeastern University.*

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR JUHASZ

**Many supporters still insist that Trump isn't a racist or a misogynist, that he's merely a great rodeo clown who seduces with humor and hyperbole.**

**Back to the bunker:** Trump returns from his visit to St. John's Church on June 1.



Like any good gimmick, this misbegotten tableau came with an evocative caption: Operation Themis. I found a certain deceptive irony in that sheep's clothing of a name, so tailor-made for a wolf. Themis is said to have created the Delphic Oracle. Themis was the Greek goddess of divine order, customary norms, and the general awareness of right from wrong. Her will was revealed through omen and revelation, not man-made law. When Themis's commands were neglected or ignored, Nemesis was said to take over—Nemesis being the goddess of divine retribution, the avenger of crime. Carrying a scourge, a whip, a sword, and a measuring rod, she was called implacable. To me, therefore, Operation Nemesis seemed a much more fitting label for the events of June 1.

But whether in the name of Themis or Nemesis, the staging suggested mythic glory, this evocation of Moses parting the Red Sea, this smackdown team of muscled if

*(continued on page 32)*



## To Our Readers

Covid-19 has brought about a stark new reality that has exposed the gaps in our society. As underresourced hospitals struggle to keep up with the disease and underpaid essential workers continue to do their jobs with limited protection, millions more now find themselves unemployed, at rates not seen since the Great Depression.

Meanwhile, major daily newspapers are furloughing reporters and cutting costs to an extent that they are no longer able to cover the news, alternative weeklies in cities across the country are suspending publication, and community radio stations are stretched to the breaking point. Some magazines of long standing are struggling to survive. We're not prepared to let that happen to us.

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In the tradition of the progressive Jewish movement, Ms. Echeverria was an avid supporter of independent journalism and kept her bookshelves filled with *Nation* back copies side by side with *I.F. Stone's Weekly*. We are deeply grateful for her lifelong support of *The Nation*.

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maskless superheroes, with Princess Ivanka bringing up the rear like an ice swan, bearing a Bible in her boxy snow-white handbag. And just as with the Undertaker's entry into the ring, Donald Trump's procession was marked by Sturm und Drang and curtains of smoke through which the victorious lord materialized and "dominated."

The fact that the smoke was really tear gas or that there were flailing batons, sharp-hoofed horses, and gladiators in real battle gear with real guns pointed at real citizens or that this was the real president and the real secretary of defense commanding the real and immense power of the US military against a lawful and peaceful assembly or that this was a display of real authoritarianism in unconstitutional service to such a petty, tin-pot end... well, it all hardly seemed to matter. What lingered in the mind was that this was a brilliantly theatrical, visually plotted performance with so many mixed-up cinematic and comic book references, it was hard to keep track.

But the magic of misdirection does not only make us wonder how that hefty white rabbit materialized out of thin air. Performed skillfully enough, you just might end up believing that the magician himself is a renderer of miracles and that the word "abracadabra" can override the very laws of physics. Trump's march, cutting its way through crowds like a bulldozer, was the kind of performance that enchants its viewers into new realities. It visually telegraphed a powerful alternative universe and enacted a heretofore unimaginable blueprint of how state force might "dominate" a public space. It was behavior whose performativity operates far beyond itself. Mere oaths of office faded in its wake. The Posse Comitatus Act evaporated like a ghost. You, the people, used to have a working Constitution, but—oops!—you blinked, and it disappeared.

**D**ON'T WISH TO SPEND MUCH TIME DECONSTRUCTING what was going on in the president's mind. Better to examine the downstream effects of his pantomime as it was echoed and reenacted in the pushing aside of other peaceful protesters in other places in the days that followed. For all the genuinely moving moments of police kneeling and thoughtful engagement in the

**When Trump strode across Lafayette Square from the White House to a symbolic house of God, the fictive circus suddenly got real.**

**Out of darkness:**

Trump's entrance at the 2016 Republican National Convention was a stage-managed spectacle with smoke, flashing lights, and throbbing music.

complexity of dissent, there seemed to be a clear national uptick after June 1 in police throwing demonstrators to the ground, beating marchers, attacking journalists and photographers, spraying tear gas in onlookers' faces, and threatening protesters with moving vehicles.

Consider one particularly visible and vexed case: On June 4, 75-year-old Martin Gugino, a Catholic peace activist, was shoved by members of the Buffalo Police Department's Emergency Response Team. Gugino stumbled backward and fell, hard, onto the pavement, fracturing his skull. He lay there with blood flowing profusely in a pool around his head. Later, after help finally came, he was hospitalized (and remained so two weeks later, in serious condition). But remarkably, help was not immediately forthcoming. A spectator with a smartphone captured the episode; the video showed an entire squadron of police, including the officers who shoved him, walking past Gugino's supine form. Not one of them came to his aid. Instead they moved on like a school of fish or a pack of wild horses gliding around a big stump in the ground. It is a shocking video. The push itself was both brutal and careless, the response even more so.

Yet there was a notable moment in the video when one officer hesitated, seemed to waver. But just then, another officer put his hand on his shoulder and signaled him to keep moving. That brief turn toward the injured man was the tiniest shimmer of movement, lost as quickly as it came, as the herd moved on. I remark on that small hesitation because it occurred at the instant in this narrative when Themis might reasonably have been invoked. This was the moment of crisis when the internalized voices of our leaders, mentors, teachers, and friends should insert themselves for a nudge toward goodness. It is precisely the instant when one might wish for better angels rather than avenging scolds to intervene. This is the situation in which lessons in the basic skills of deescalation might assert their value as those inner advisory voices, that second nature. *That's enough. Take your knee off his neck. Don't step over an unconscious body in your role as a guardian of public safety.*

Indeed, in the video, the officers seemed transfixed by the groupthink of staying together, an orderliness that overrode kindness or common sense. It looked as though they were pursuing a mission unrelated to the fate of members of the public and had forgotten what they were there to do. Too busy to look down or look back, they couldn't stop to heal or to recognize actual vulnerable civilian circumstance as part of their charge.

This brusque triage of concern is the downstream application of a state of mind that treats public ground as a "battle space," as Secretary of Defense Mark Esper urged the governors during the group phone call of June 1. That logic of war was made even more apparent in short order: After the two officers who shoved Gugino were suspended and charged with second-degree assault, the entire Emergency Response Team—some 57 officers—resigned "in disgust" to protest the "mistreatment" of their brethren. As John Evans, the president of the local Police Benevolent Association, told *The Buffalo News*, "Our position is these officers were simply following orders from Deputy Police Commis-





sioner Joseph Gramaglia to clear the square.... It doesn't specify clear the square of men 50 and under, or 14 to 40. They were simply doing their job. I don't know how much contact was made. He did slip in my estimation. He fell backwards."

It is easy to pick up on the casual cruelty of those individuals who are just "following orders." What is subtler and more complex is the corollary, expressed by Roger Berkowitz in a *New York Times* reflection on Hannah Arendt's portrayal of Adolf Eichmann. Berkowitz wrote that the harder cases are those when people act "not as a robotic bureaucrat, but as part of a movement." They "commit themselves absolutely to the fictional truth of the movement.... It is this thoughtless commitment that permits idealists to imagine themselves as heroes and makes them willing to employ technological implements of violence in the name of saving the world."

**A**S THOUGH TO COMPLETE THE CIRCLE AND REINFORCE this ethic of good-soldierly dominance, Trump lost no time endorsing the Buffalo officers' mass resignation, tweeting a completely unsubstantiated theory that Gugino "could be an ANTIFA provocateur." (This is not an accusation to be taken lightly; in declaring those associated with antifa as terrorists, Trump potentially subjects them not only to oversight by police but also to much-harder-to-trace surveillance and interference by the FBI, CIA, and other spy agencies.) The president's tweet concluded, "I watched, he fell harder than was pushed. Was aiming scanner. Could be a set up?" Although the FBI and the Department of Justice have, to date, announced no arrests of protesters linked to antifa ideology or groups, Attorney General William Barr suggested on Fox News that the lack of cases "does not mean they haven't been involved in the violence." The eloquently compressed response from Gugino's attorney noted that the injured man "has been a longtime peaceful protester, human rights advocate and overall fan of the US Constitution." Even Republican Senator Susan Collins stated, "I think it would be best if the president did not comment on issues that are before the courts."

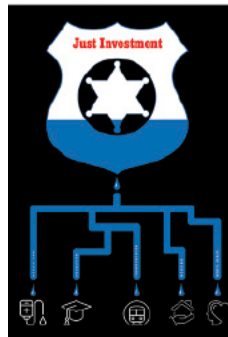
It is true that the two members of the Emergency Response Team charged with Gugino's assault will come before the courts—eventually. Meanwhile, we must wonder what will happen to our collective consciousness by then. Second-degree murder charges have been filed against Derek Chauvin for the killing of George Floyd—but what filters might settle over our perceptions to make that presently inexcusable death seem reasonable through the same lens that exonerated the officer who strangled Eric Garner?

We must treat this sleight of hand with the seriousness it deserves. It may be that this moment sufficiently reveals to all Americans the disparities that African Americans and other people of color have been experiencing for generations. But we have been here before, if not to the same degree, yet over and over, what seems to be seen becomes unseen, our attention redirected. Even when the Trumpian circus earns scorn and furious backlash, his basest theatrical stylings nevertheless be-

come viral moral templates to be reenacted elsewhere, familiarized as normative baselines are reset. Trump explicitly endorses an ethic that urges officers not to be "too nice" when making an arrest. He encourages an environment in which just stopping to acknowledge that you've mowed someone down is seen as weakness and restraint in governance is acting like a fool. The president praises extraordinary shows of force, seemingly driven by no higher morality than the pure vanity of wanting to appear invincible, the question of proportion a superfluity.

If we are ever to return merely to the flawed life we once had, let alone drag ourselves into the better world we hope to inhabit in the future, we must profoundly reappraise political appeals to magical thinking. There are no miracles. There are no gods among us. Once we had a Constitution. We all saw it. Now you don't? Then it's time we stop wringing our hands and intercept that Oz-like orange joker as he sidles for the door. We cannot let him abscond with something so precious hidden up his sleeve. ■

**You, the people, had a working Constitution, but—oops!—you blinked, and it disappeared.**



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city that goes heavily into debt in order to provide adequate public services for its citizens while supporting its poor residents."

Patman imagined a new federal corporation to aid all states, the District of Columbia, all US territorial possessions (including Puerto Rico), and "any Indian tribe." He effectively sought to lend the sterling credit standing of the federal government to contracting state and local borrowers. The proposed corporation would "guarantee the payment of principal and interest" on debt issued by state and

local governments borrowing "to finance one or more needed public facilities." It would also offer interest-rate-reduction grants and turn the federal government into a clearinghouse for municipal information, obviating the capricious opinions of credit analysts.

As we imagine alternative forms of investment, Patman's idea is one place to start. We must be creative as we look for ways to decouple infrastructure from the private market. But it is not enough to devise new mechanisms to enable investment in the built environment. During the 20th century the "deference to localism" that structured many federal social programs often "preserved a concentration of power in city and state governments," as historian Tom Sugrue wrote. This meant that federal funds often followed local, racist routes.

To guard against this, it is essential that local groups—especially the black activists to whom we owe this momentous opportunity to remake the meaning of safety in America—have a seat at the table in determining where investments are made. In the 1960s we called this maximum feasible participation, a contested term with an equally contested history. Today, as the very terms of governance are challenged by young black leaders "unencumbered by past failures and buoyed by their connection to the ruckus in the street," as scholar-activist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor recently put it, we might simply call it insurgent black politics.

As communities divest from the police and invest in local infrastructure through alternative means, we should lean on the efforts of activists and other engaged citizens who have already fused the energy of the streets to the painstaking work of examining municipal budgets. For real change to come at last, we must refuse to cede control over the budgeting process to technocrats with business degrees. ■

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# Letters

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giving more fodder to the misogynistic pack of male media mavens reveling in this opportunity to undermine Me Too and the legitimacy of women's experiences of sexual harassment and abuse.

LIN KAATZ CHARY  
GARY, IND.

Katha Pollitt writes that Reade is a strong supporter of Bernie Sanders, and it may be relevant that her story came out in the pro-Sanders media just as Biden was emerging as the presumptive Democratic nominee.

It is an insult to Amy Goodwin to dismiss *Democracy Now!* as "pro-Sanders media," when her journalistic standards are impeccable and she is for most progressive causes, some of which overlap with the Sanders campaign's, some of which don't. *The Nation*, too, endorsed Sanders, so is it fair to label this publication "pro-Sanders media" and dismiss the very column Pollitt writes? Of course not. Even in the time of Trump, some of us see things in more subtle shades than media belonging exclusively to one camp.

Pollitt throws in that it is "possibly relevant" that Reade lied or timed her allegations to help Sanders, when in fact the charges came out too late to make a difference and, not surprisingly, didn't help Sanders in the slightest.

I expect better from both Pollitt and *The Nation*.

MICHAEL COHEN  
LOS ANGELES

## A Terrible Precedent

Joan Walsh ["The Murder That Threatened to Divide the Two Harlems," June 1/8] touched on but did not examine how children are treated by the criminal justice system. She mentions that the two accused boys have been charged

with murder as adults but makes no comment about it. The context is crucial. There is no mention that two troubled 14-year-olds from well-known difficult circumstances (including one who was cared for by an uncle because he lost his parents) were indicted by a publicity-conscious, so-called reform DA who would rather cater to the monetary concerns and hysteria of Columbia University and some white residents than to act on what he knows well: that the Supreme Court has acknowledged that children who do terrible things are still children. How does the commission of a crime—albeit a terrible one that left a young woman dead—turn two troubled children into adults?

The impact of that legal choice is devastating: They will be tried in an adult criminal court rather than in family court, and if convicted, they can be given life sentences, whereas youths convicted even of crimes involving violence face shorter sentences, with the understanding that the brains of children are malleable and, given better circumstances, they can mature and change. Beyond the consequences to these youngsters, it is a terrible precedent that sets back the national struggle for justice for youths.

The failure of the community to speak out for justice and for treating children—even those who might have done something so terrible—as children and its failure to take into account the toll of their experiences will leave a deep wound within the neighborhood, our city, and the cause of children's justice.

JOEL SCHWARTZ  
STATEN ISLAND, N.Y.

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# Books & the Arts



## A DRIVING FORCE

The past and future of Latinx voters

by ED MORALES

**W**hen considering debates about political formulations as nebulous yet as desperately crucial as “the Latinx vote,” it can be vexing to consider those Latinx who vote Republican. In the age of Covid-19, Black Lives Matter protests, and radical right Trumpism, how could they exist? What common ground could Latinx voters possibly find with the Republican Party and its current fusion of fascistic nativism and deadly bottom-line billionaire capitalism? After all, are Latinx not, in the eyes of the Trump

faithful, the living embodiment of the dire threat that Samuel P. Huntington saw to “the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers”?

Viewed from New York City, the center of the Northeast left-liberal bubble, where Latinx politics has long been driven by Puerto Rican Democrats, it can be easy to forget that going back to the 1960s, a substantial number of Latinx voters nationwide have consistently voted for Republican presidential candidates. And while Hispanic Republican support peaked at 40 percent for George W. Bush in 2004, the sobering reality is that Trump’s Latinx support was somewhere between 20 and 30 percent in 2016. This hasn’t waned considerably, even after three years of incessant im-

migrant bashing: In a poll conducted by Latino Decisions and published in late April, in the middle of the coronavirus crisis, 23 percent of Latinx voters said they were either voting for Trump or leaning toward doing so.

Geraldo Cadava tries to shed light on this thorny subject in *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Identity, From Nixon to Trump*, which, along with Benjamin Francis-Fallon’s *The Rise of the Latino Vote: A History*, illustrates just how complicated this story is. Starting their narratives in the early 20th century, when most Latinx voters (like their African American counterparts) shifted away from the Republican Party during its rightward turn, both books discuss how the Democrats and Republicans

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*Ed Morales is the author of Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture and Fantasy Island: Colonialism, Exploitation, and the Betrayal of Puerto Rico.*

alike sought to organize disparate national and ethnic groups living in different regions into one “Latino” constituency by appealing to them through class interests—as workers/activists or as businessmen/property owners—as well as through their views (often stereotyped) on family unity and Christian morality. Situating the story of these voters in the context of a broader history of Latinx in the United States, both books offer important additions to this history’s growing canon, which is beginning to chip away at long-standing narratives by giving a fuller account of the ambiguous yet undeniable historical reality of Latinx as a political constituency.

At the heart of any argument about “Latino” or “Hispanic” politics, of course, is also a discussion about those labels themselves, especially since political strategists and advocates and marketing consultants have played such a big role in creating the notion of a monolithic Latinidad. By carefully examining archives from underutilized sources like the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, along with the archives of Hispanic Republicans like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Manuel Luján, Cadava and Francis-Fallon show that Latinx voters in both parties embraced the idea that Latinx should envision themselves as a national constituency in order to wield more power than individual groups could. Both books also show what was lost by creating one constituency out of many and offer new historical insight into the evolution of terms like “Hispanic” and “Latino,” which remain contested in local communities and the mass media.

**H**ispanic Republicans, Cadava argues, trace their origin to the shift in American politics in the New Deal era. When many African Americans transferred their allegiance from the Republicans to the Democrats, many US Latinx did so as well. But some grew disenchanted with the Democrats: Starting in the 1950s, small but noticeable numbers of Mexican Americans, frustrated by their perception that the Democrats were more concerned with African American votes, began to move back to the Republican Party. Groups like *Latinos con Eisenhower* and *Viva Nixon* (a group cochaired by *I Love Lucy* star Desi Arnaz) garnered support, mostly among the Mexican American-dominated Latinx populations in Texas, California, and the Southwest and offered a counterpoint to centrist groups like the

### The Hispanic Republican

*The Shaping of an American Identity,*

*From Nixon to Trump*

By Geraldo Cadava

Harper Collins. 448 pp. \$29.95

### The Rise of the Latino Vote

*A History*

By Benjamin Francis-Fallon

Harvard University Press. 504 pp. \$35

League of United Latin American Citizens and progressive workers’ groups like El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española.

Likewise, years before the Cuban Revolution, recent South and Central American immigrants—particularly those who identified with Spain and were opposed to anti-American nationalism in Latin America—embraced some of Cold War conservatism’s anti-communist politics. At the onset of the Cold War, John Flores, a public relations representative whom Cadava credits with being “the first Hispanic to articulate a national vision for Hispanic Republican mobilization,” founded *Latinos con Eisenhower*. Despite being slighted by the president, who dismissed his request to be considered for the position of deputy assistant secretary for inter-American affairs, Flores argued that Latinx could play a key role in fighting communism in Latin America. Thanks to their knowledge of the “language, customs, and traditions of Latin America” as well as his “relationships with “anti-Communists south of the border,” they could help the United States more efficiently stave off leftist populism there. As Cadava shows, this anti-communist politics, far from being the sole province of Miami Cubans, was prevalent among a much wider range of Latinx.

Hispanic Republicans, while still a minority of Latinx voters, also began to craft an identity for themselves around Republican principles—in particular, small-business entrepreneurialism, patriarchal family values, and the rejection of the welfare state in addition to anti-communism. Their movement intensified in the late 1950s and early ’60s around Eisenhower’s vice president, Richard Nixon, when he ran for president in 1960, and it reached an apex with his victory in 1968. This support was premised on a politics of social conservatism and anti-communism, but Nixon was also willing to appeal to Latinx voters as part of his strategy to make up for his lack of support among African Americans. Public relations campaigns that painted Nixon, a native of Whittier, Calif., as “once

a poor white man who worked alongside poor Mexicans in the orchards and fields” only further solidified this relationship. At the same time, some New York Puerto Ricans became supporters of the state’s liberal Republican governor, Nelson Rockefeller, and were brought into the party by his softer strain of conservatism. Others were attracted to even more extreme right positions and supported Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign in 1964. Cuban exiles in Miami, who felt betrayed by the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, were especially drawn to Goldwater.

The realization that Republicans needed Latinx voters because black ones had mostly abandoned the party shaped an evolving so-called inclusion policy after Nixon’s election in 1968. In a highlight of the book, Cadava examines Cuban American and Mexican American involvement in Watergate, which was not limited to the “plumbers” who raided the Democratic Party’s offices but also included the “Brown Mafia,” a group of Mexican American and Japanese American operatives who managed the patronage politics for the GOP in California and became involved in the tangled web of financial transactions associated with the Committee to Re-elect the President. The Brown Mafia was led by William Marumoto, a Japanese American raised in the LA barrio, and Benjamin “Boxcar” Fernández, who founded the Republican National Hispanic Assembly in 1974 in order to gain influence in the GOP as well as to encourage Hispanic participation in local party politics. Besides handing out federal contracts to supporters in pay-for-play schemes, these men tried unsuccessfully to bribe people like Nevada land-rights activist Luis Reies-Tijerina, the leader of *La Raza Unida*, a short-lived Mexican American third party, to get them to blunt their anti-Nixon stance.

Postwar Hispanic Republicanism never won over a majority of Latinx voters, and as Cadava shows, it eventually found a home in neoconservatism. But even as President Ronald Reagan slashed social spending and used the War on Drugs to massively incarcerate poor people of color, he still courted Latinx voters with offers of immigration reform. In the 1990s the anti-immigration extremism of figures like John Tanton, the founder of the Federation for American Immigration Reform; the nativist presidential campaign of Pat Buchanan; and a series of anti-immigration laws passed in California and Arizona began to erode this support.

But “compassionate conservatism” re-

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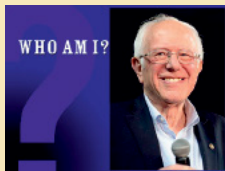
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turned with George W. Bush (whose brother Jeb Bush had married a Mexican national), who openly courted Latinx voters and won over 40 percent of them in 2004—a peak in the success of the inclusion strategy. In the 2008 election, however, this strategy could not be sustained by Arizona Senator John McCain (who, Cadava notes, declared “Build the danged fence!” in one of his campaign ads) as the Republican anti-immigration wing gained ascendancy, and Latinx voters showed just how vital they were to the Democratic coalition by helping to put Barack Obama in the White House for two terms.

Cadava’s book deftly makes clear that there is not one type of Hispanic Republican but rather many: Cuban American, Mexican American, Central and South American, and to a lesser extent Puerto Rican. He reminds us that each of these groups of Republican voters, while often a minority in their own communities, were drawn to conservative politics for different reasons—historical, cultural, political, or economic. Cadava also does a good job of telling the story of the many different Hispanic Republican activists on the ground, writing compellingly about Fernán-

dez and his forgotten presidential campaign; Linda Chavez, who worked in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and once campaigned to make English the official language of the United States; and two US treasurers, Romana Bañuelos and Katherine Ortega. (The former suffered the indignity of an Immigration and Naturalization Service raid on her tortilla business, and the latter was roundly criticized for her uninspiring speech at the 1984 Republican National Convention.)

Yet Cadava largely does not address the way questions of race within and outside the Latinx community were manifested in Hispanic Republican politics. While it’s true that Mexican American politicians had a history of seeking to define their communities as legally white, by the time Hispanic Republicans came on the scene, many Mexican Americans were shifting away from an assimilationist understanding of their identity toward a Chicanismo that stressed indigenous roots. The Cuban migration to South Florida and the subsequent rise of the Cuban Republican voter also had a strong racial dynamic to it, since many of the middle- and upper-class Cubans who fled Castro’s revolution had a relatively easy path to citizenship through the Cuban Adjustment Act and avoided the racialization of noncitizen status.

The labels “Hispanic” and “Latino,” while often used synonymously, have sometimes also been encoded with racial undertones that can at times explain the differences between Hispanic Republicans and Latino Democrats. In the context of politics, “Hispanic” is sometimes used as a way to signal Spanish (hence European) origins, while “Latino,” a somewhat more recent term, is often used to allude to a mixed Afro-Indio-Iberian identity and has represented a kind of Bolivarian melting pot of mixed-race Caribbean and South American migrants—although in the Southwest it has also been used as a label that avoided the indigenous identity of Mexican Americans, or Chicanos. (Recently two new terms have come into use as well: “Latinx,” a label that proposes a new inclusivity for gender-nonbinary folks, and the acronym “BIPOC,” for “black, Indigenous, and people of color.”)

Likewise, despite the fact that many US Latinx identify as people of color, the *mes-tizaje* ideologies that both of these terms promote have, in many countries in Central and South America as well as in the United States, supported a notion of inclusion that does not disrupt a culture of white supremacy. The gains made by people of color during

Latin America’s pink tide have been checked by a recent surge of right-wing racism in countries like Brazil, Guatemala, and Bolivia. In Brazil, which has historically claimed to be a racial democracy, a right-wing nationalist like Jair Bolsonaro has been able to take power and avow a racialized politics with a striking resemblance to Trump’s America, while in Guatemala a former blackface comedian, Jimmy Morales, took office, and in Bolivia, the coup against Evo Morales was carried out with the use of anti-Indigenous rhetoric.

By taking on the full spectrum of political history and examining the far larger majority of Latinx Democrats and left-wing activists, Francis-Fallon’s book helps fill in the other side of the history that Cadava explores, charting some of the tensions among Latinx voters who were loyal Democrats and found Republicanism antithetical to their ideals, as well as the GOP’s determination to convert some of these voters to its cause. *The Rise of the Latino Voter* takes us back to the jockeying for position between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans during the John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Jimmy Carter years. While Francis-Fallon weaves fascinating details about the careers of Democrats like San Antonio’s Henry Gonzalez, Los Angeles’s Eddie Roybal, and New York’s Herman Badillo into a broader story about the formation of a political constituency, he also considers the role of Latinx movements that worked outside electoral politics.

Providing insight into the way that attempts to organize Latinx nationwide resulted in these movements seeking to foreground class- and race-based oppression as well as reject American exceptionalism and imperialism, Francis-Fallon shows how Latinx voters helped change not only the Democratic and Republican parties but also the egalitarian and internationalist politics of the American left. He cites El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española in the 1930s, which was inspired by other multiracial Popular Front groups and “fus[ed] class and culture consciousness...[and] advocated for striking workers as it demanded an educational system that nurtured its members’ language and heritage.”

Francis-Fallon begins his story with the United States’ annexation of Mexican territories in 1848, which created an emerging sense of collective identity among Mexican Americans. He then tracks the formation of a “Hispano” identity with New Mexico’s statehood in 1912, the establishment of the League of United Latin American Citizens,

and the move by the majority of Latinx voters to the Democratic Party in the 1930s. Taking us into the post–World War II era, when Mexican Americans formed important political bases in Los Angeles and San Antonio, he charts the Viva Kennedy years, the civil rights movement, and the attempts to arrange a “shotgun wedding” between East Coast and West Coast groups in the late 1960s. The last few chapters discuss the limits of Latinx liberalism and the emergence of Hispanic conservatism, neatly intersecting with the subject of Cadava’s book.

The most compelling part of Francis-Fallon’s analysis comes when he documents the efforts by early Latinx Democrats to build multiracial constituencies by invoking the notion of a pan-Latinx identity, which helped bring together a variety of Spanish-speaking communities and connect them to other racial, ethnic, or social struggles. These efforts proved to be a potent political force in many cities, including New York and Chicago. But Francis-Fallon’s story of how Latinx voters and organizers helped shape a nationwide agenda is also telling for the present moment. Recounting the first Unidos Conference, held in New York in 1971, he shows how Badillo, a Puerto Rican congressman from New York, and Roybal, a Mexican American congressman from Los Angeles, helped lead a discussion on the creation of a national Latinx agenda that tried to significantly influence the Democratic Party.

Yet even in the midst of a unity conference, divisions were hard to transcend. While Badillo and Roybal were largely successful in their efforts, the fractures that appeared at the conference exposed prior divisions—ideological, cultural, and historical—that remain unresolved. For example, despite New Mexico Senator Joseph Montoya’s passionate plea for unity, Badillo was repudiated by Puerto Rican independence activists, who insisted the conference endorse their demand to decolonize Puerto Rico. “What seemed to have been most disquieting to the congressmen who had brought them together, was that many who remained until Sunday seemed genuinely poised to reject Democrats and Republicans alike,” Francis-Fallon writes.

Badillo and Roybal managed to smooth over most of these differences in the short term, especially those between West Coast Mexican Americans and East Coast Puerto Ricans, and in the years that followed they were able to develop a national Latinx platform that connected the injustice of Mexican immigration crackdowns, US co-

lonial economic policies in Puerto Rico, and the need for normalizing relations with Cuba. But the Democratic Party did not appear ready to take up this pan-Latinx program, and many Latinx Democrats found themselves frustrated with what they saw as Carter’s unresponsiveness on numerous national issues because of his “color-blind” refusal to address “special interests.” Yet Latinx Democrats continued to stick by the party, even as it increasingly took their votes for granted.

**T**he struggle to create a pan-Latinx identity and politics has posed challenges ever since. Latinx voters are regionally disconnected, with greatly varied class backgrounds and citizenship statuses. They are also racially dispersed: There are white, black, Asian, Indigenous, and multiracial Latinx. Yet it is also clear that Latinx voters play a vital role in contemporary electoral politics. One of the major driving forces behind Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’s early support in the Democratic primaries this year came from Latinx, with 50 percent voting for him in Nevada and California and 39 percent in Texas. Moreover, Joe Biden’s success in the upcoming general election will depend, in part, on ensuring that he has their votes.

During a moment when it’s clearer than ever that the extreme rightism of Trump must be defeated, Latinx voters have seemingly no choice but to support a centrist Democrat running on an agenda that has traditionally neglected their concerns. But even if this is the case, the lessons of the Unidos Convention remain: The best hope for Latinx is a more radical politics that seeks a broad multiracial and multicultural coalition aimed at reversing the growing economic and racial inequalities found in society today. Likewise, we need a politics that seeks to remake US foreign policy, which has been a key driver of Latin American crises and immigration to the United States in the first place. Meanwhile, there’s the problem highlighted in Cadava’s book—of your *tío* or *prima* who believes that the best hope to get through the coronavirus crisis is a revival of Trump’s “record-setting economy.” Maybe Hispanic Republicans can provide them with the important insight that while the Democrats have failed in innumerable ways, the Republicans have been even worse. It’s no accident that many of us have never heard of Benjamin “Boxcar” Fernández and Katherine Ortega. After all, their party did nearly everything it could to put them on the wrong side of history. ■

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# THE PLACE YOU CALL HOME

Maria Reva's mordant fiction from before and after the Soviet collapse

by JENNIFER WILSON

In “Novostroika,” the opening story of Maria Reva’s *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*, we meet Daniil, a resident of 1933 Ivansk Street, a building that may or may not exist. It is winter, and the heat in his family’s apartment isn’t working. “Grandfather Grishko’s telling everyone he hasn’t seen his own testicles in weeks,” his aunt yells, adding, “We’re tired of the cold, Daniil... and we’re tired of hearing about the testicles.” However, when Daniil goes to the town council hall to get the heat turned on, the clerk has no record of the building, no

address with that number. Daniil becomes flustered, asking her to check again. “Nineteen thirty-three Ivansk Street, Kirovka, Ukraine, USSR. Mother Earth.”

It might be tempting to read more into this, a post-Soviet short story about a place you call home no longer existing, but Reva insists that this actually happened with her family’s old apartment building in Ukraine. She said in an interview in *Fiction Writers Review*, “My dad told me that during that first winter the heating didn’t turn on, which was strange because everything was centralized and connected. He gave his address to the woman at the town council. She said that there was no such address, and since they didn’t have it in the records, our building didn’t exist.”

Much of *Good Citizens Need Not Fear* teeters on the edge like this. Reva is at once sober-minded about the cruelties of bureaucracy and refreshingly sardonic about how people learn to cope with them; the result is a droll humor and grotesque absurdism that have drawn comparisons (and deservedly so) with the work of Nikolai Gogol. She irreverently mines Marxism and the conditions that led to the Soviet Union’s collapse for good one-liners, invoking the kind of black but tender comedy common among people who lived in the USSR. In “Bone Music,” a woman who sells banned Western records by imprinting them on X-rays sends her young daughter to inform her coconspirator that she’s sick and cannot make it to their

*Jennifer Wilson is a contributing writer for The Nation. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, The New Republic, The New Yorker, and elsewhere.*

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM ROBINSON



“biweekly study session on dialectical materialism.” In “Miss USSR,” party leaders in Moscow are concerned that a beauty pageant in Kirovka might start a chain reaction of local, decentralized events. “Next thing we know,” an angry official says, “it’ll be Miss Estonia SSR. Miss Latvia SSR. Miss Georgia SSR.” In moments like these, Reva showcases a deftness with dark humor that both resists sentimentalism about the difficult aspects of Soviet life and rejects the idea that it was nothing but bad. Instead, she frees herself up to tell bigger (and often smaller) stories about her homeland—stories about agoraphobic black market profiteers, the practice of making swans out of old tires, and how to find privacy within yourself. In doing so, she establishes herself as one of the leading post-Soviet writers of her generation while breaking through the limitations of the term itself.

**M**ore than anything else, *Good Citizens Need Not Fear* is about how things are made—the labor that goes into them, the fragile foundations upon which they’re built, and the humanity that is required to sustain them. As readers, we become intimately familiar with where the sinkholes and exposed rebar can be found in Kirovka and whose bones are less sturdy than they appear. (The foreign tourists want to know: Because of Chernobyl?) We learn how much tinfoil you need for a can of pickles. Diagrams, charts, models, and infrastructure reports abound. That, too, feels like an inside joke, a play perhaps on the genre of construction novels popular in the Soviet Union, like *Cement* (1925) and *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1934). It is a subject Reva knows intimately. While pursuing her MFA at the University of Texas at Austin, she worked in construction. As she told the author Lara Prescott, a guest instructor in the program, in an e-mail introducing herself (as recounted by Prescott on the website *Electric Literature*), “I work with some nasty chemicals and lead paint...but get to wear a spacesuit (kind of).”

Likewise, in *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*, Reva trains your eye to look for loose screws and shaky support beams, inviting readers to think about how to build a sturdier foundation so that a better world, if we ever make one, won’t sink into the ground. And she proves to be an incredible builder of worlds, largely by recognizing that people, like screws, cannot simply be discarded because you don’t feel like

## Good Citizens Need Not Fear

Stories

By Maria Reva

Doubleday. 224 pp. \$25.95

finding out where they go. Her characters are an eclectic assemblage of personalities and types who, despite their mutual suspicions, are all equally dependent on one another, whether it’s for friendship, gossip, or cloves. Perhaps that is why, for a book about a place that is falling apart, Reva’s stories are so prodigiously well structured. She understands, as a facile young intelligence officer says in a moment of clarity, “A bolt cannot function without a nut and a nut cannot function without a bolt.”

The nine stories in the collection are linked by 1933 Ivansk Street, where the characters live, lurk, or simply wind up, often through fantastical means. As Reva tells us, the building was hastily assembled after construction workers realized they had enough spare parts to make not two but three towers; hence it fails to show up in official records. The people inside work at chemical plants, metallurgical factories, polyclinics—the sort of jobs that are often presented as banal and sources of pity in Western books and films but in the Soviet Union were recognized as essential.

Daniil works at the Kirovka Canning Combine, where he has just been ordered to find ways to economize the amount of metal used to can various food items and begins to evaluate the “squeezability” of different products. “Some foods posed more of a packing problem than others,” Reva writes. “Soups could be thickened and condensed milk condensed further, into a mortar-like substance. String beans proved the most difficult: Even when arranged like a honeycomb, they could reach only 91 percent packing efficiency. In the middle of every three string beans hid an unfillable space.”

For Daniil, the task becomes a way of thinking about his access to breathable space. Like “pressed meat liver paste” or “whale meat in natural juice of the mammal,” he feels squeezed in everywhere—in the factory, in the streets, and most important, in an apartment with 13 other family members. He had been living in a communal apartment (one of the multifamily buildings that were a common feature of Soviet life), and the personal unit provided by his job was quickly invaded by aunts, uncles, grandparents, and their pets, including a cage of hens. Reflecting on his lack of privacy, Daniil creates a chart similar to

what one would expect for his cans at work: “Minimum Dimensions of Space Necessary for Human Functioning, 85 processes: Sleeping (based on average Moscow male, head to toe) = 175cm...Evacuating bladder (volume) = 400ml...Breathing (torso expansion) = 1.5cm.” When we learn in a later story that Daniil’s cans are overpacked and have begun to explode, leaving their purchasers with shrapnel wounds, one may start to wonder whether Daniil, too, will eventually burst in frustration.

When I studied abroad in Moscow, our orientation involved a brief lecture on the particularities of Russian and post-Soviet culture. At one point, the program leader told us there was no word in Russian for “privacy” (an oft-mentioned though somewhat misleading cultural anecdote). Students suddenly looked wide-eyed, excited that these people were in fact going to be very different from us, despite the Starbucks and McDonald’s nearby. However, in *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*, Daniil jealously guards what little privacy he has and resents its constant invasion. At one point, he throws a space heater out a window to make room and perks up at the prospect of leaving the cramped apartment to retrieve it. Here too, Reva pushes back against stereotypes and pat narratives about the Russian soul or Soviet mentality. Daniil does not display some kind of primordial, Slavic, wholesale embrace of communalism; like any of his Western peers, he wants his space. But this never undercuts his belief in the broader principles that gave him and his family shelter in the first place. He never rails against public housing or decries the communist system. He is a “good citizen.” He just wants the heat turned on and for his grandfather to stop talking about his testicles.

**I**n “Novostroika” and in telling the story of the origin of 1933 Ivansk Street, Reva helps us understand what it means for anyone, in the Soviet Union or elsewhere, to fall through the cracks. It can be a source of anguish but also an escape. In “Little Rabbit” (a story that won a National Magazine Award), she explores the inner workings of an orphanage in Kirovka where the children are rated from one to three based on their perceived value as future citizens. “Threes have a minor defect,” she writes. “Twos are blind and/or deaf. Skin disorders and ambiguous genitalia fit the criteria, too. Ones simply lie there.” They’re arranged in a pattern, represented by Reva with a diagram in

which threes are given pride of place. “The director would deny any pattern to the distribution of the babies. If the healthier babies lie next to the great bright windows where they can chatter with the magpies, and next to the doors where the occasional Ministry inspector can see them best, it’s surely a coincidence,” she writes.

One of the children, a little girl named Zaya, becomes ill with pneumonia and is downgraded from a three to a one. As she lies in bed, she sees a slit in the vinyl floor. A strange glow starts to emanate from it, and she becomes transfixed. “What she has to do is crawl toward that crack. The need is bodily, instinctual. She has seen it in every moth and mosquito bewitched by a flame.” Zaya peels away the vinyl and, finding floorboards underneath, manages to dig her way through and escape, for a time. She is the closest thing we get to a main character in *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*; she appears and reappears across the collection. In a later story, she is adopted by Konstantyn Illych, the head of a cultural center, who tries to turn her into a beauty queen for the Miss USSR pageant—an endeavor that becomes a macabre version of *Pygmalion*. “What’s the one thing people don’t know about you?” he asks Zaya, quizzing her for the interview portion of the pageant. Confused, she responds, “You can’t take a squat [at the orphanage] without an audience. Everyone knows everything about everyone.” She runs away again here but returns in a later story, realizing, as the rest of her country will in time, that a way out is not the same as a way up.

As Part I of the collection, “Before the Fall,” comes to a close, the sense of collapse is underscored by Kirovka’s crumbling infrastructure. In “Bone Music” we meet Smena, the woman who sells forbidden music illicitly reproduced on X-rays. She is agoraphobic and depends on a trend hunter named Larissa and a polyclinic worker named Milena to help with her black market operation. The three women crowd into Smena’s kitchen to hear one of Larissa’s latest acquisitions, a Megadeth album. “Megadeth is a deliberate misspelling of the English word ‘megadeath,’ one million deaths by nuclear explosion,” she tells them (another Cold War fear turned into a punchline). Smena becomes increasingly anxious that their underground operation will be discovered, but this is accompanied by a more generalized dread about the world around them coming undone. She reads reports in the papers about the city’s

failing infrastructure that only confirm her sense of uneasiness: “A sinkhole trapped a commuter bus. A family of five plummeted to their deaths in an elevator malfunction. A gas leak gently poisoned preschoolers for weeks before being discovered. Pedestrians were advised to avoid underpasses.”

The stories in Part II, “After the Fall,” largely revisit the characters from Part I, their roles now reversed in mostly meaningless ways. Here too, Reva pushes back against the idea that this moment represents a glorious ushering in of wealth or freedom. All that felt fragile becomes even less sturdy. Everything continues to crumble, and not just concrete but also people. Bodies become crushed or compromised by the need to earn money. Konstantyn, who once made a political joke that got him in trouble with a KGB officer, now hires that officer to guard the ground floor of 1933 Ivansk Street, which has been converted into a tomb for a supposed saint. Konstantyn collects money from the pilgrims who travel there for a blessing; it is said that praying to the saint can alleviate tinnitus and cure alcoholism. One day while cleaning the tomb, the former KGB officer accidentally knocks over the body, causing the saint’s well-preserved white teeth (the main attraction and source of revenue) to spill across the floor. The teeth begin to haunt the officer, seeming to wink at him, leading him on a wild goose chase as he attempts to retrieve them. “I tried to imagine myself as a lover, following rose petals to a bed,” he says, “but couldn’t help feeling like a rodent, lured by crumbs to a trap.” He eventually trips and falls in his pursuit, knocking teeth out of his own mouth.

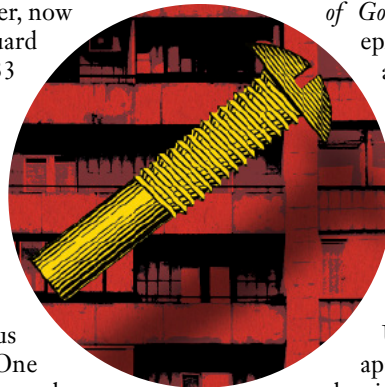
Much of the absurdity of the pre-fall stories is transformed in Part II into dark satires of capitalist consumption and the commodification of narratives that depict (in the Western imagination) Soviet life as miserable and physically degrading. In “Roach Brooch,” we meet Pyotr and Lila, new hawkers of “bone music,” which has been transformed from a clandestine practice into a way to create souvenirs for tourists. Pyotr has a tumor that he leaves untreated so they can have continued access to free X-rays from the polyclinic.

When they sell the records, Lila points to the tumor to entice customers. “As with any growth or deformity,” Reva explains, “the tourists always want to know: ‘A victim of...?’ The tourists don’t want to say the dirty word themselves, but are itching to hear it, pronounced authentically by this kerchiefed babushka.” Lila gives them what they want. “Chernobyl,” she says, though her husband never served there. Nonetheless, “at the word ‘Chernobyl,’ the tourists have their wallets out.” For their part, Larissa and Milena have moved on to the fur coat trade, working day and night to sew a coat out of ermines for a rich young girl so that Larissa can move to Canada.

There is nothing new about telling the story of the USSR and its fall through the country’s apartment buildings. Historian Yuri Slezkine has made something of a career of it. In 2017’s *The House of Government*, he offered an epic, 1,128-page history of a single building in Moscow that housed Soviet officials. Years earlier, he wrote a widely cited essay that discussed the Soviet Union and its amalgamation of distinct ethnic republics in similar terms: “If the USSR was a communal apartment, then every family that inhabited it was entitled to

a room of its own.” Fellow scholar Margaret Litvin has suggested that the “Soviet dormitory novel” might constitute not only a distinct subgenre but also a useful heuristic for understanding the lived experience of communist internationalism.

Indeed, much history is inscribed in the courtyards, doorways, and stairwells of the former Soviet Union, where public housing was inextricable from the entire national project. When I lived in Moscow, I once stayed in a *kbrushchevka*, a prefab five-story apartment building named after the thaw-era leader who oversaw their construction. The private apartments with communal yards were originally intended to usher in a new era of consumer goods and the kind of suburban comforts that people thought existed only in the West. What Maria Reva wants to say about the Soviet Union through the history of the apartment building at the center of *Good Citizens Need Not Fear* is less explicit, except that like 1933 Ivansk Street, it existed and then fell apart, but what has been built in its place is no sturdier. ■





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# POWDER KEG

The return of Run the Jewels

by MARCUS J. MOORE

**T**he previous Run the Jewels album *Run the Jewels 3* arrived one month after Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States. Atlanta's Killer Mike and Brooklyn's El-P echoed the horror and anger of many Americans shocked by the results of the 2016 election. The country felt raw, a powder keg of rage, anxiety, and fear brought on by Wall Street greed and the police killings of unarmed black people. Sensing an upheaval, Mike, an outspoken Trump detractor and Bernie Sanders surrogate, openly wondered when the revolution would arrive. On the song "2100" he rapped, "Nuclear's too near / And the holders of the Molotov / Say that revolution's right here, right now / And they ain't callin' off." Indeed, Trump's

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victory conjured the specter of full-scale revolt, the idea that this might be the breaking point. We all know the story of the last three years, though: Nothing happened.

*Run the Jewels 4* finds the country on fire once again, yet the mood is somehow more urgent than it was in 2016. The coronavirus pandemic has halted the economy and killed more than 120,000 people in the United States. Over 40 million people are unemployed, and mandated social distancing has forced many into long periods of isolation. Then in May, a white Minneapolis police officer named Derek Chauvin knelt on the neck of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, killing him and setting off mass demonstrations. Protesters also wanted justice for Breonna Taylor, who was gunned down in her apartment by the police in Louisville, Ky.; for Ahmaud Arbery, who was harassed and fatally shot by two white men in Georgia as he jogged; and for the many other black Americans who have

suffered at the hands of police brutality and violence. These uprisings felt different from protests in the past: In Minneapolis, rioters burned down the police department's Third Precinct station house, where Chauvin worked.

The uprisings also took place in Mike's hometown. In Atlanta, protesters vandalized the College Football Hall of Fame and Phipps Plaza, an upscale shopping center, among other landmarks. In years past, this seemingly would have pleased Mike. On "Close Your Eyes (and Count to Fuck)," from the stellar *Run the Jewels 2*, he urged fellow anarchists to kill the police, take over a prison, and waterboard the warden. Yet on the heels of the recent Atlanta incidents, Mike sounded a different note, passionate but measured. "I watched a white police officer assassinate a black man, and I know that tore your heart out," he declared in a tearful, widely circulated speech. "It is your duty not to burn your own house down for anger with an enemy. It is your duty to fortify your own house so that you may be a house of refuge in times of organization. And now is the time to plot, plan, strategize, organize, and mobilize. It is time to beat up prosecutors you don't like at the voting booth."

He has a point, but for those who have followed Mike and Run the Jewels, that advice seems to contradict the scorched-earth tenor of his previous rhymes. What *Run the Jewels 4* makes clear is that Mike and El are still gearing up for a fight and providing another soundtrack for rebellion—but with age, world-weariness, and introspection, they've begun to bare their souls to their listeners, too.

**O**n "Walking in the Snow," Mike breaks down what systemic racism feels like for black Americans, from the discrimination we face beginning in elementary school to the police brutality we endure as adults:

They promise education, but really they give you tests and scores.  
And they predicting prison population by who scoring the lowest.  
And usually the lowest scores the poorest, and they look like me.  
And every day on the evening news they feed you fear for free.  
And you so numb, you watch the cops choke out a man like me.  
Until my voice goes from a shriek to whisper, "I can't breathe."

Mike also wags his finger at the arm-

chair activists who rant about injustice on Twitter but don't take any other action: "Truly the travesty / You've been robbed of your empathy / Replaced it with apathy." Like the band's previous albums, *Run the Jewels 4* is turbulent, a rebel-rousing LP meant to scourge law enforcement, political leaders, and bootlicking yes-men. Though the vitriol of their older work remains, the new album feels more settled, even somewhat familiar. Producers El-P, Little Shalimar, and Wilder Zoby create dystopian electronic breakbeats for the rappers to stomp through, and for 39 minutes, they devastate everything in sight. Yet the déjà vu this album engenders is welcome at this moment. Whereas other mainstream rappers might create one song or one album dedicated to the unrest, Mike and El have carried that torch for six years. Once again, they're urging us to wake up and keep fighting the system.

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Mike and El explained how *Run the Jewels 4* was created after a much-needed break from the road, where the duo spent over a year and a half performing more than 100 shows in the United States and Europe. Reportedly, it was the

first time they'd stopped working since they met nearly a decade ago, when El made all the beats for Mike's breakthrough album, *R.A.P. Music*. El got married and took on a film scoring project, while Mike admitted that he was "mentally, spiritually, physically...fried."

That might explain the self-reflection we hear on *Run the Jewels 4*. Historically, the rappers' flows have been combative and outward-facing, but on *Run the Jewels 4*, especially on the concluding track, "A Few Words for the Firing Squad (Radiation)," they tend to look inward. El-P unpacks the anxiety he's been suffering through: "I should've focused mostly on the heart / 'Cause I've seen smarter people trample life like it's an art." Mike's verses also capture him in a moment of introspection and might explain why he was cautious in his speech to the Atlanta protesters. Here he delves into a talk he had with his wife and how, as an outspoken famous black man, he now has to temper his desire to incite rebellion: "Friends tell her he could be another Malcolm, he could be another Martin / She told her partner, 'I need a husband more than the world need another martyr.'" The lyrics show a side we hadn't heard from Mike and El. Four albums in,

they're a little older and wiser and have more to lose.

Elsewhere on their new album, however, it's business as usual. The song "JUST" dissects capitalism and police brutality and features a defiant Pharrell, who chides "all these slave masters posing on your dollar." Mike reduces Trump to a mere casino owner, and El scolds New York City police officers, calling them "murderous choke hold cops still earning a living." On "Pulling the Pin," which features soul music legend Mavis Staples and singer-songwriter Josh Homme, El sounds obstinate but somewhat jaded. He's still pushing for change, but it can feel futile with the current administration still taking up space. Then Mike spits a rhyme that has rattled in my head since I first heard it: "Fuck the political. The mission is spiritual." That says it all, really.

In times like these, when life can feel daunting and nothing prevails but anger, the line snapped me back to the true mission of the uprisings. This administration is, ultimately, finite; it's time for America to fully acknowledge the centuries of terror the black people who built this country have faced. There's never been a better time to destroy the system and the racists who maintain it. ■

**"FOR US TO BUILD POWER, WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO TELL OUR OWN STORIES."**

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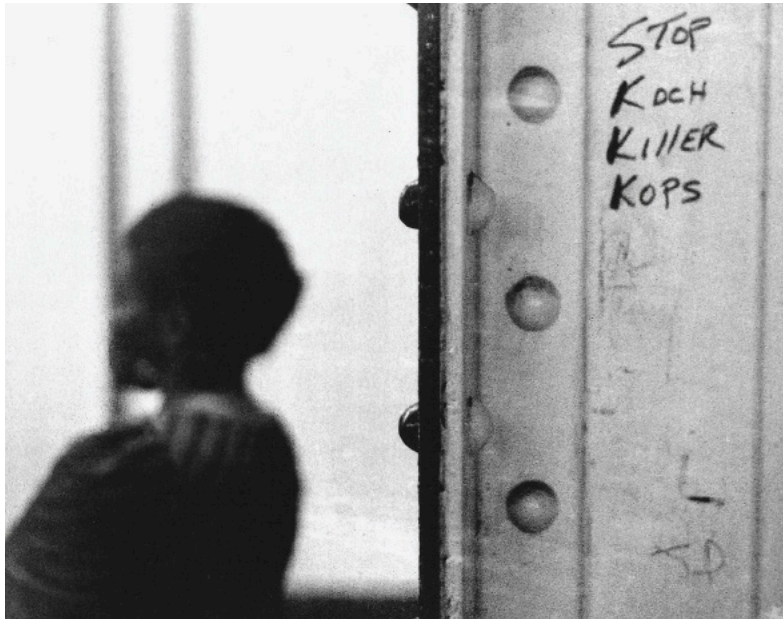
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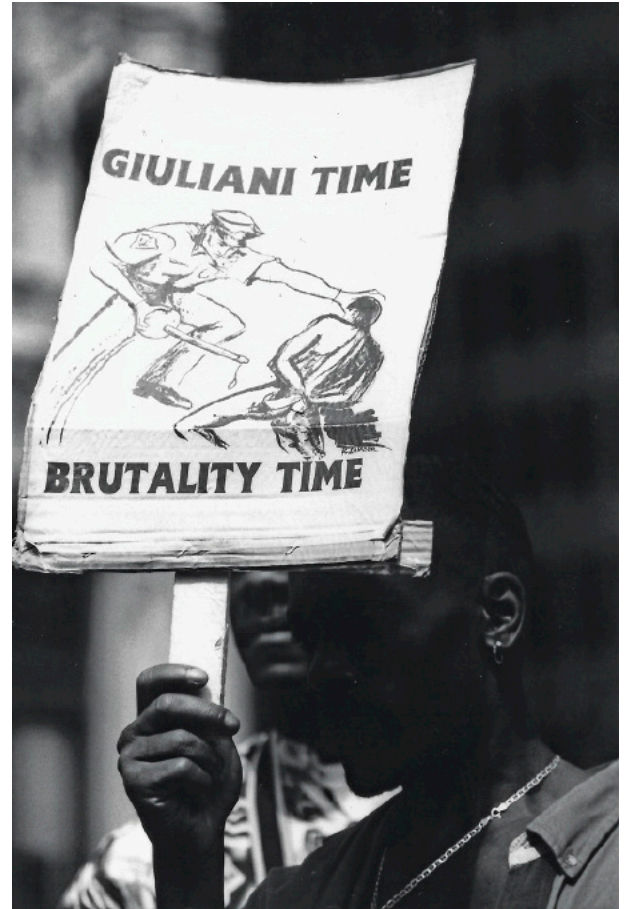
## PORTFOLIO

I started making photographs in the 1980s for my own purposes. When the crack and AIDS epidemics hit, the image of black people in America started to shift, and I wasn't happy with what I saw. I was overwhelmed by endless images of addiction and incarceration, and I felt I had a responsibility to provide a counter-narrative. I've been driven by that responsibility ever since—a desire to document black culture, my culture—to capture the love, the hope, and the promise we hold.

—Jamel Shabazz



Sign of the Time. Brooklyn, 1980.



Giuliani Time. New York City, 1997.



No Disrespect. State Supreme Court, New York City, 1997.

House of Pain. Rikers Island, East Elmhurst, New York City, 1985.

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