



# CUNY and the Prison-Industrial Complex



Ashley Agbasoga & Ian Trupin in Conversation with  
Christina Nadler, Melissa Marturano, and Sean M. Kennedy

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Volume 26  
Spring no. 3 2015

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**PUBLICATION INFO**

The *GC Advocate* is the student newspaper of the CUNY Graduate Center. Publication is subsidized by Student Activities Fees and the DSC. The *GC Advocate* is published six times a year, in September, October, November, February, March, and April. Copies are distributed near the end of the month.

**SUBMISSIONS**

The *GC Advocate* accepts contributions of articles, illustrations, photos and letters to the editor. Please send queries to the email address above. Articles selected for publication will be subjected to editorial revision. Writers who contribute articles of up to 2,000 words will be paid \$50 and those who submit longer articles requiring research will receive up to \$150. We also pay for photographs and artwork. Please email for details.

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# More Propaganda, Less Liberalism: Our Ongoing Struggle

WHEN I BEGAN MY tenure as Editor-in-Chief of the *Advocate*, I, along with then Managing Editor Cristina Pérez Díaz and Associate Editor Francisco Fortuño Bernier, drafted an open letter to the Graduate Center Community. In the letter we articulated our desire to maintain, and indeed strengthen, the political trajectory of the paper. In addition, we set out to diversify the paper “in a way congruent with the experiences of the most marginalized in New York City and the United States as a whole.” I trust that our readership has found that we (including veteran layout editor Mark Wilson and newly appointed Managing Editor Bhargav Rani) have lived up to these ambitious tasks, and that we have improved upon the foundations of our predecessors. Hopefully the incoming Editor-in-Chief will enhance this legacy.

Yes, I am vacating my position as Editor-in-Chief and this is my final issue in charge. I have been asked by friends and colleagues why I have decided to step down. Rest assured that my decision to leave has nothing to do with the vitriolic attacks initiated by the *New York Post* and sustained by other far-right wing news outlets as some have surmised. Neither does this decision come as a result of the workings of CUNY administrators (two of whom were gracious enough to implicitly side with the *Post*, which is not all that surprising), my decision is in fact purely based on my need to focus more deeply upon my own research. At once, my decision is both selfish as well as generous. A new Editor-in-Chief will take over my role come July and they will have the quite wonderful task of providing a political continuity for what I think the *Advocate* has become. But what exactly has the *Advocate* become? It has always been a voice for the Graduate Center community, specifically the student body, a space for critical inquiry and expression, but I think it has metamorphosed into something greater. It is now a space for increased political activity, sharp debate, and an outlet for those pushing against dominant discourses, both in the academic world and the world at large.

Since the new editorial committee took over in March 2014, there have been some subtle, but important changes in the *Advocate*. The most obvious change is the aesthetic appeal we have been trying to convey through reformatting the look of the paper, I hope that you have enjoyed the new look and trust the incoming editor to continually revamp and re-

examine the paper on this front. The most important feature we have set up is the *Edifying Debate* column, which since the beginning of our tenure has hosted polemical articles ranging from the role of CUNY hiring David Petraeus to the struggle in the Doctoral Students' Council to pass a resolution endorsing the academic boycott of Israeli educational intuitions, from the complicity of the police and the state against the activist efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement to the article selected for this issue, a direct and critical response to my previous editorial. These sorts of writings are what should sustain us, make us think, push against the boundaries of our beliefs, and most importantly, motivate us to want to change the status quo. Additionally, we have expanded to an internationalist purview by bringing together articles that are of importance to a wide range of audiences. The political and social insularity of the academy must be ruptured if, in fact, we are to transform the world, for what precisely is the point to the production of knowledge if not to foster change in our societies? I see the current manifestation of the *Advocate* as contributing to such a transformative project, both in New York City and more specifically at CUNY.

We, as a community of scholars, activists, and students, have a special responsibility at one of the largest public institutions in the United States—to break through the malaise that the increasingly neoliberal university, in conjunction with the capitalist state, foists upon us, upon our students, and upon our friends, colleagues, and families. We must continue to write, and write critically about the issues that motivate and affect us at CUNY and beyond. The *Advocate* has and will continue to provide the space for such transformative musings to come to life. It should also continue to be a space in which criticism is not only accepted but welcomed, even biting criticisms at that. This is our mandate as graduate students. To not only contribute to knowledge production, but also to reimagine the world, and change it for the better. The *Advocate* is one of many vessels we have at our disposal to agitate for such transformative processes, but it is an important one because it is ours, and it is imperative that we avail ourselves of the space (both physical and metaphorical) that it affords us in our processes of thinking, writing, and criticizing.



# *Never Submit. Contribute!*

The *GC Advocate* newspaper, the only newspaper dedicated to the needs and interests of the CUNY Graduate Center community, is looking for new writers for the upcoming academic year. We publish six issues per year and reach thousands of Graduate Center students, faculty, staff, and guests each month.

Currently we are seeking contributors for the following articles and columns:

- Investigative articles covering CUNY news and issues (assignments available on request)
- First Person essays on teaching at CUNY for our regular “Dispatches from the Front” column
- First person essays on life as a graduate student for our “Graduate Life” column
- Feature “magazine style” articles on the arts, politics, culture, NYC, etc.
- Provocative and insightful analyses of international, national, and local politics for our Political Analysis column
- Book reviews for our regular Book Review column and special Book issues
- Local Music Reviews and Art Reviews

To view recent articles and to get a sense of our style, please visit the *GC Advocate* website: <http://opencuny.org/gcadvocate>. Payments for articles range between \$75 and \$150 depending on the length and amount of research required. We also pay for photos and cartoons.

Interested writers should contact the Editor at [gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu).

I was at one point castigated by a DSC representative for “leading a coup of elite students in an effort to hijack the paper in an effort to push a certain agenda.” I never addressed the criticism here in the paper, though I did so during the DSC Plenary when the allegation was made. The editorial committee never, during either of its formations since the beginning of my tenure, attempted to coopt the paper for a specific political goal, and this can be seen from the variety of articles that we published from myriad political positions. The second clause in the accusation is, however, true. We, as a collective and as individuals, have political agendas, ideas, outlooks and so on. Consequently, we take positions collectively as well as individually when organizing issues of the *Advocate*, and it is indeed propaganda that we produce. I use propaganda in the actual sense of the word, not the contrived understanding of the word as an anathema. If propaganda is invoked to mean an effort to sway a reader’s position, then isn’t all writing propagandistic? Another DSC representative euphemistically mentioned to me that I was the “propagandist-in-chief.” I very much like this title, though the best propagandists in CUNY are the Board of Trustees and the sections of the administration that are acquiescent to, or outright in favor of, the increasingly neoliberal path our university is traversing. I hope that the incoming Editor-in-Chief will be as adept a propagandist as the aforementioned DSC representative thinks that I am. Without propaganda, the *Advocate* will not be able to function as a source of advocacy and agitation—the principal purpose, in my eyes at least, for this paper.

As with any sort of propagandistic endeavor, the attendant concern of politics and political orientation



are not far removed. I hope that through my editorials and from some of our newer contributors, our readership has been able to glean the project that I, alongside various other members of the editorial committee at different times, have been embarking on. If it hasn't been abundantly clear thus far, it is one of challenging the straight-laced liberalism of New York and of the Graduate Center specifically. This political project is a rejection of this current of liberalism that has influenced people in this building to such an extent that the recent (a sort of continuity too) police murders of Blacks in this country failed to be condemned. It is an outright denunciation of this liberalism which informs those DSC representatives who fail to see the linkages between the murdered college students in Ayotzinapa and the United States' historic role in the economic subjugation of Mexico. It is a call to arms against this same liberalism that has allowed for some to so vehemently and acerbically condemn pro-Palestinian BDS activists (my own criticisms of BDS as a tactic notwithstanding). Again, it is people imbued with this strain of liberalism who have told us (both the *Advocate* and the broader CUNY community) that we are "too political," that politics should be shunned in the academy, it is better to focus on (innocuous) "internal issues." It is the same liberalism that criticized our publication of the racist letters we received (I imagine the critics thought I was White, but I may be mistaken) yet was eerily silent on, or at times opposed to, the right to self-defense against the violence of police forces in this country. It is this liberalism that I, the editorial committee, and a significant number of our contributors over this past volume, have tried to combat and critique as being fundamentally frail as a political position. I hope that the next editor continues to push up against the status quo in this building as the last three editors have done to varying

degrees.

Our political aspirations go beyond the scope of "CUNY specific" issues, and the subsequent editor should continue this tradition. This, for instance, is reflected in the current issue by the statement on page 7 from the CUNY Internationalist Clubs on the historic decision for organized labor, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union specifically, to collectively engage in the struggle for Black liberation. Our international(ist) optic is further demonstrated in earlier issues from the current volume. I ask that our readership and contributors continue to engage the *Advocate* from a non-provincial, non-insular perspective, and that the next editor build upon the work we have done this year, as we have built off of those before us.

I have learned a great deal during my stint as Editor-in-Chief, and it is with a heavy heart that I resign from this position. I will, no doubt, miss the work that goes into producing this paper for you (and by you). So thank you for your camaraderie, for your suggestions, your criticisms, for your praise and support. Thank you for writing critically, for bringing the world to CUNY and in some cases CUNY to the rest of the world. Thank you for acknowledging the new trajectory of the *Advocate* and helping it to thrive, to advance. I wish the next Editor-in-Chief the utmost success for the forthcoming volume, and I thank the readership for reading, responding, and consuming what we have worked hard to produce. Continue to criticize, to debate, to write, to think, to push, to transform, to radicalize, continue to be revolutionary, it is all part and parcel in the process of bringing into fruition something greater than ourselves—something superior to the current sociopolitical reality which we inhabit.

Comradely, Gordon R. Barnes Jr. 


## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Inflammatory?

MS. HASS'S RECENT OPINION piece was inflammatory and presented as fact instead of opinion/fiction. I was disappointed to see that the Graduate Center, a purportedly esteemed educational institute, published such vitriol.

— Mika Liss

Mika,  
AMIRA HASS' PIECE WAS not vitriolic by our standards, it was polemical for sure, which are the sort of articles that

often make the cover. Moreover, her criticisms of the Israeli state and elections are not baseless. Her article is not presented as fact, the first person point of view from which it is written is sufficient to divulge that it is an opinion piece (as most substantial pieces of writing, regardless of the point of view, tend to be). We make no apologies for publishing Hass' piece and were happy to do so. We are only sorry that you cannot see the valid point(s) she makes. Thank you for your feedback. — Gordon Barnes 

# One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

## **Regressive Application of FERPA at CUNY**

THE DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL unanimously passed a motion on 24 April to set up a committee to probe into the workings of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) at the Graduate Center.

FERPA is a 1974 federal law that pertains to the regulation of access to student records in all educational universities that receive funding from the US Department of Education, stipulating to whom and under what circumstances the confidential information can be made available.

Under the law, the school is allowed to provide access to these records to school officials with "legitimate educational interest" in the student. While these include faculty and administrative staff directly engaged with admissions or other concerns of a student's graduate study, the ambiguity of the legal language is being unduly employed to exclude student representatives from having a say in these processes. In the interest of transparency and as a measure of democratic representation, all committees in the Graduate Center are required to have student representatives who are involved in all their proceedings. As part of these committees, the student representatives are provided access to certain relevant student records, like transcripts and writing samples in the admissions process, while withholding other confidential information that have no bearing on the process, like parents' income details or medical records. However, there has been a concerted move at the Graduate Center to exclude student representatives altogether from certain commit-


tees through a regressive interpretation of the law to assert that they are not authorized access to this information as they lack "legitimate educational interest." The implications of such a move are felt most immediately in disciplinary committees, and in judicial matters related to the students, where the representatives are excluded on the unwarranted assumption that they would be prejudiced in favor of the student. As Dominique Nisperos remarked in the plenary, "It is completely unclear on what basis it is assumed that the faculty are in a better position to be unbiased and approach the matter with a greater ethical responsibility than the students." The committee shall work in collaboration with the DSC lawyers to address these legal loopholes.

## **Approval of OpenCUNY's Proposed Terms of Participation**

THE DSC, AT ITS plenary meeting on 24 April, unanimously approved the new Terms of Participation document for OpenCUNY.

This new document shall replace the current terms that have been in place since 2011, and is meant to reflect OpenCUNY's guiding policy to "empower participants and let them retain rights to the content they post on OpenCUNY." The coordinators of this open-source, participatory digital media platform, Maggie Galvan, Laurie Hurson, and Christina Nadler, have been working closely with DSC funded lawyers to chalk out an up-to-date framework of engagement for all participants, not users, that would affirm the democratic character of its virtual space. The new Terms of Participation shall be in effect beginning May 2015.

## **Addenda**

- The CUNY School of Professional Studies, currently operating within the GC, will be allowed to seek an independent registration as an institution of Higher Education with the New York State Department of Education, with an independent degree authority for its academic programs as well as an independent accreditation status with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
- The Board of Trustees has approved a program in Spanish leading to a B.A. at John Jay College. Forty-one percent of the students at John Jay are from heritages in which Spanish is the dominant language. Students will be offered specialization in either Spanish literatures and cultures or in translation and interpretation.
- Gregory Pardlo, a doctoral student in English at the Graduate Center, has won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his work, *Digest*.
- Another doctoral student in English at the Graduate Center, Joshua Mehigan, has been named a 2015 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry.
- This May Day, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) shall participate in the annual march in New York City with other labor union members and immigration activists, in solidarity with and celebration of the many labor movements of the country, past and present, and to mobilize support for their current struggles, including the fight for a fair contract at CUNY. Members will meet at the corner of 62nd Street and Park Avenue, starting at 5 PM. 





# Unions to Mobilize on May Day Against Racist Police Killings

**ILWU dock workers to shut port of Oakland and march on City Hall  
South Carolina labor federation calls for workers' solidarity across U.S.**

## cuny internationalist clubs

*As anti-racist activists at the City University of New York, we consider it of great importance to bring to Advocate readers' attention the following announcement by the Internationalist Group of breaking news in the nationwide struggle against racist police violence.*

Police murders of unarmed black and brown people continue without letup across the United States. Despite the national uproar this fall over the grand jury verdicts letting off the cops who choked Eric Garner to death in Staten Island, New York and shot 17-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the forces of racist "law and order" are still on a deadly rampage. On April 4 in North Charleston, South Carolina, Walter Scott, a black worker, was shot eight times in the back by a police officer in a traffic stop. The cold-blooded murder was caught in a bystander's cellphone video that has been seen by millions.

Working people across the country are outraged. Now key unions have decided they've had enough, **the time has come to act**. In an April 16 statement, the South Carolina AFL-CIO announced it would "reach out to workers around

the country to join with us on May 1st in actions to protest the continuing unjustified killings." The labor federation added, "We want to commend ILWU Local 10 for your courageous actions of solidarity." The reason? **On May 1 the West Coast longshore local will hold a stop-work meeting, shutting down the Port of Oakland and marching on City Hall to demand "Stop Police Killings of Black and Brown People."**

This could be huge, which is why the bosses, bureaucrats and Democrats may try to block it—and why class-conscious workers and all opponents of racism should take it up and spread it. There have been numerous protests against police killings in recent months, but this is the first union appeal specifically for bringing out the power of *working-class action*. Organized labor together with millions of African American, Latino, poor and working people and all defenders of democratic rights are the social force that can bring the wheels of society to a stop in protest against the police murder machine. But we must use that power.

We urge workers across the country to **mobilize on May 1 against racist police terror!** With **rallies, marches and strike**



**action**, unions and labor supporters should bring our collective strength to bear, ***demanding these killings must stop!***

Police in the U.S. killed 1,100 people last year. So far in 2015, from January 1 to April 19, at least 350 civilians have been killed by cops. And that's just based on published accounts. Young and not so young black men are particularly at risk: in 2012, once a day a black man was killed by cops or vigilantes. Often under-reported, black women have also been in the crosshairs of police terror. Immigrants, too, are prime targets, including Mexican workers like Antonio Zambrano Montes, killed in February by cops in Pasco, Washington. With or without papers, workers must rely on their own strength and demand ***full citizenship rights for all immigrants!***

Union workers and their families have felt the scourge of racist police terror. In New York City, Eric Garner's sister, mother and aunt were all transit workers, members of Transport Workers (TWU) Local 100. In South Carolina, the brother of Walter Scott, a fork-lift operator, and two other family members belong to International Longshoremen's Association Local 1422. Anti-union terror is rampant in this Lowcountry redoubt of the Old South. Recently the International Association of Machinists (IAM) called off a vote on union representation at the Boeing aircraft plant in North Charleston after organizers were threatened at gunpoint.

And the police kill with impunity: even after massive protests, despite calls for special prosecutors and federal investigations, nothing has stopped—or even slowed—the wanton police violence. When a bystander records the cold-blooded murder on a cellphone, as Ramsey Orta did on Staten Island, it is the witness who is jailed, while the killer cops go free. It's not a matter of a few “bad cops,” it's a whole system of racist repression. The system is capitalism, and since the days of chattel slavery it has been based on the brutal exploitation, oppression and repression of black people.

Wanton police murder goes hand in hand with military repression of demonstrators. The U.S.' endless “war on terror” abroad is directly linked to the unending police killing spree that is terrorizing African American, Latino and immigrant populations “at home.” Taking action on the burning question of state repression can and must also spur labor to use its muscle to ***unionize low-wage workers***. On April 15, over 60,000 marched in union-sponsored protests demanding a \$15/hour minimum wage. But even that minimal increase won't be won by looking to Obama's Democratic Party of imperialist war, racist repression and poverty pay.

Last summer following the choke-hold killing of Eric Garner we said that the TWU should strike to shut down the mass transit system which is vital to the world center of finance capital. After the police murder of Michael Brown we wrote, “The fight to put a stop to racist cop terror must

mobilize the force that has the power to bring the capitalist system to a grinding halt: the millions-strong multiracial working class.” Calling for “Labor/Black/Immigrant Mobilization Now!” we urged: “Mobilize Across U.S. Against Racist Police Terror in Missouri” (*The Internationalist*, August 2014).

In the face of mass outrage, some unions did protest then. In New York City, the United Federation of Teachers, 1199 hospital workers and 32BJ janitors of SEIU, nurses, PSC university faculty and staff joined a “March for Justice” on Staten Island. Calling to “Mobilize NYC Unions' Power Against Racist Police Terror!” and denouncing the Democratic and Republican parties of war and repression, the Internationalist Group, CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Class Struggle Education Workers organized a contingent.

Many unions have issued statements against trigger-happy police, but declarations will not stop this deadly plague. It is high time for labor ***action***. The South Carolina AFL-CIO appeal and ILWU Local 10 action in Oakland, California point towards what needs to be done. In Portland, Oregon, Painters Local 10 and IATSE Local 28 have passed resolutions of solidarity with immigrant workers facing police repression in Pasco, Washington, and have voted to march against police killings on May 1. Class Struggle Workers Portland and the Internationalist Group urge other unions and all workers to take up this struggle.

San Francisco/Oakland dock workers of ILWU Local 10 have shown the world what labor solidarity ***action*** means. Time and again they have put into practice the union's slogan, “An Injury to One Is an Injury to All.” They shut down the port to demand freedom for class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. They boycotted ships to protest South African apartheid and Zionist Israel's wars. On May Day 2008 they spearheaded the shutdown of all Pacific Coast ports to stop the U.S. war on Iraq and Afghanistan, the first strike by U.S. workers against a U.S. imperialist war. Today they're targeting racist police terror. Their action speaks for us all!

***The May 1 action by ILWU port workers should be taken up by Bay Area labor and unions across the country.*** The Internationalist Group calls upon workers everywhere to unite with the African American, Latino and immigrant population in a massive show of our strength. We have the power, the working-class power, to send the bosses and their hired guns packing. Now is the time to use it! ***Turn May Day 2015 into a clarion call for working-class action against racist police terror.*** Join together to stop the killer cops! Turn the watchword into reality: ***Asian, Latin, Black and White—Workers of the World, Unite!*** ☸

For more information or to get involved in these efforts, including marching with us on May Day, write: [cunyinternationalists@gmail.com](mailto:cunyinternationalists@gmail.com)



# Digital Humanities Resources

## A personal journey

jennifer tang

MY MOM STARTED WORKING at a bank in 1970 and over her career, computers were introduced and she had to learn this new technology in order to keep her job. Moving all her work to computers was a fundamental shift, and she is not a particularly adventurous or technology savvy woman. She didn't bother to learn to drive until she was thirty-seven because it looked complicated, and trusted my dad would drive her when and where she needed to go. Seeing the necessity of acquiring these new skills for her to remain employed, my mom worked conscientiously to learn how to use computers, and especially at mastering the specific software she needed for her job. By 2005, she had become adept enough that she was sent by her office to test the new software that was being built for her department (getting an all-expenses paid, month-long stay in a nice hotel and being flown across the country each way was a nice perk), developing the training program that she would then lead when she returned to the national headquarters.

New technology is constantly being developed and integrated into our work. Taking a cue from my mother, I want to continuously explore and learn new technology that can aid my work, keep me relevant, and make sure I have the skills to adapt to the constantly evolving landscape.

As an environmental psychologist, I am trained in working in an interdisciplinary approach. My research draws from social psychology, human development, geography, political science, urban studies, and is informed by sociology and anthropology. In trying to learn and research how technology plays a role in my area of research, I have been exposed to new perspectives on my topic, pushing me to not only learn new skills but new methods for critical analysis and intervention. Furthermore, it has connected me with other scholars that I may not have known about, extending my thinking and opening up new channels for collaboration.

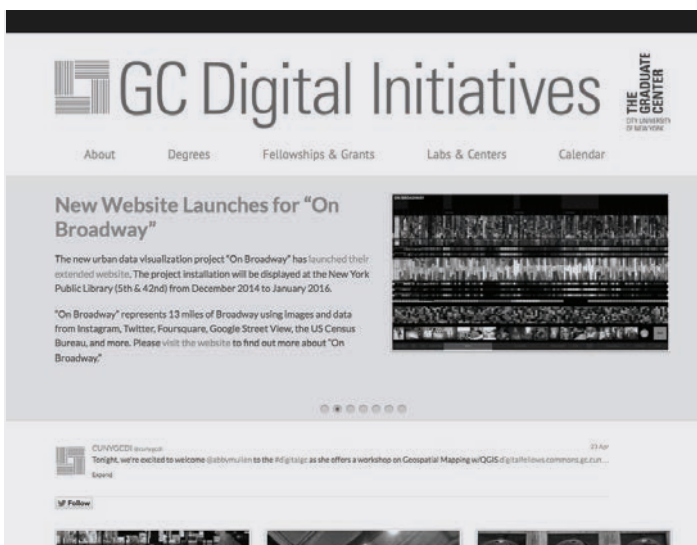
Luckily, the Graduate Center, CUNY, and New York City provides a robust and fertile physical and digital environment for technological newbies like myself to wade into and learn from. The thing is, there are now so many different groups, offices, labs, workshops that it started to become a little overwhelming as I tried to figure out what I needed, and where I could go for help. Below, I try to describe in my own plain words some of the various groups, platforms, and resources I've learned about. It's kind of a glossary of names

and phrases you might have seen around, but aren't sure what they refer to. This is by no means an exhaustive list, just what I have discovered and found useful, especially in connection to my particular interests. I wrote it as a memo to my earlier self. Please take this as an invitation to support people like me, and share any other groups, projects, or training opportunities that you think might be helpful to other students interested in figuring out how technology fits into their research and pedagogical training at the Graduate Center.

### Groups/Centers/Communities

GC DIGITAL INITIATIVES (GCDI), supported by the Provost's Office, is kind of like the hub for all the institutionally supported digital and techie things. It not only lists all the labs that the Graduate Center supports (I give short summaries below of some of them), but it also lists the different data centers and repositories affiliated with the CUNY system that you can access. The GCDI administers the Digital, Social Media, and Videography Fellowships that train and support faculty and students at the Graduate Center to implement digital projects, and the Digital Innovation Grant for a digital project of your own design. Under the calendars tab, you'll find a pretty comprehensive calendar of all the workshops that are offered and available to you.

Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) is a hub for scholars across many institutions, but has a big GC presence by virtue that its chief administrator, Cathy Davidson, moved to the GC last fall.



HASTAC is a hub for scholars, researchers, and teachers who are actively integrating technology into their work. On their website, you can surf topics, connect with people with similar interests, find fellowships, and calls for proposals. Of course, they also collate events such as conferences, symposia, and workshops happening outside the Graduate Center.

New Media Lab brings faculty and students together to create projects that use and analyze the use of digital technologies. I think of the NML as an incubator space where scholars in different phases of their training bandy ideas, problems, and tools around. Their general meetings are open to everyone, and focus on presenting and workshopping the projects of the NML members.

The GC Digital Scholarship Lab is the space for producing public-facing, open-source software for academics. Their most famous and inaugural product is Commons in a Box. After building and piloting the CUNY Commons, they made the infrastructure available to other academic institutions. They have and are now developing other new technological tools for scholars to collaboratively analyze and present digital research.

The Digital Humanities Initiative is a group of faculty and students who are applying digital technology in their work, specifically in the humanities. The CUNY DHI keep a blog that announces their public events, and host a discussion forum on the commons, but most interestingly, they also collaborate on a resource wiki. The CUNY Digital Humanities Resource Guide, like some of the groups above, also lists trainings, conferences, and funding opportunities, but also goes further to list other related blogs, journals, and a whole host of tools for data management, citation, and writing.

## Website Platforms

INTERESTED IN MAKING A website for your class, student group, conference, or just for yourself? There are two main places to build it from, both basically use a Wordpress architecture.

OpenCUNY is an online medium built by students for students. It has a deep commitment to participatory governance, which means that a board of elected students decide on how the initiative is run. Any student who makes an account on OpenCUNY is a participant, not a user, who owns their own data. The three graduate students who coordinate OpenCUNY are extremely approachable, willing to meet with you in physical space or virtually, making it much less intimidating if you are new to building and maintaining websites.

CUNY Academic Commons is a social network platform for people and groups to collaboratively create documents, host discussion forums, as well as create websites using a

WordPress platform. The Commons is the digital home of many CUNY groups, as well offices, initiatives and committees. Two groups of note are the Internet Research Team and the WordPress Help Forum where members can throw out any questions you might have or problems for troubleshooting.

## Classes for Credit

THE INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND Pedagogy Certificate is a sequence of courses that combine the theoretical and historical with the practical skills of integrating technology and pedagogy. It includes two core courses, followed by a selection of workshops, capped off by an independent study that puts all of this together. The certificate can be completed in two years totaling nine credits that go towards your degree. The workshops are designed for people who are in the ITP certificate program, but are open to everyone (that's why they are listed below). The group also runs the Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy. The Digital Praxis Seminar is its two course sequence designed to initiate doctoral students into the philosophy and methods of integrating digital tools into their training. The seminar also includes some standalone workshops where additional spots that are available become opened up to those not enrolled in the seminar.

## Workshops

JUST LOOKING TO LEARN a specific tech skill, without having to take a whole course (especially if you are level III)? Luckily, lots of groups offer workshops! The GC Digital Initiatives probably manages the most visually simple, yet comprehensive calendar of workshops at the GC, including those run by the Digital Fellows. The GCDI calendar also catalogues those offered by the Interactive Technology and Pedagogy (ITP) Certificate Program and the Digital Praxis Program (check the GCDI event calendar). I definitely cannot fail to mention all the great workshops offered by the GC Library, with a special shout-out to the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Practicum offered at the Newman Library at Baruch College.

JustPublics365 has hosted a series of workshops geared towards bringing academics and journalists with an interest of communicating work with a social justice mission to a broad audience, but these seem to have stopped after fall 2014. The Office of Career Planning occasionally hosts some, but not many, as it is not the focus of their mission. Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) lists a diverse set of events, including workshops and webinars beyond the GC. In New York though, the NYC Digital Humanities site collects listings of events, including workshops offered in the city. ☺



# Beyond Advocacy

## Creating a CUNY-wide student union

**amanda ocasio**

MUHAMMAD ARSHAD SOUNDED INCREDIBLY ambitious when he was elected chair of the University Student Senate back in 2013. In a November 2013 post to CUNY Newswire, Arshad expressed an interest in “increasing student representation by providing grassroots advocacy training within the USS to help protect and further empower student advocacy in CUNY.” He also said he wanted to make sure that CUNY is “accessible and affordable.”

Two years have passed, and some students are still waiting to see the USS make any moves to achieve Arshad’s goals. There are many students who don’t even know who Arshad is, and many who don’t even know about the Senate that is supposed to be representing them. “I have no clue who Muhammad Arshad is,” says Kim Morales, a student activist at LaGuardia Community College. “Now, I’m not saying I am an indicator of who is relevant or not,” she continues, “However, I know my campus well enough to know that if you walk in the E-atrium and ask the students who hang out there who Arshad is, they won’t have any idea who he is.” “The students don’t even know that that senate exists,” says Amir Khafagy, a student activist with Peoples Power Movement at Queens College, “The student senate has not used their pulpit. If they were really interested in student issues, they could make it known.”

Morales and Khafagy are now working as part of a three-person group working towards changing the conversation on student organizing at CUNY. The group hopes to establish a CUNY-wide student Union that will better serve the interests of CUNY’s predominantly working class student population. They see themselves as being different from the USS in a number of ways, but the biggest distinction that they draw is that they do not consider their project to be a “political” one. “The Union isn’t made up of mini-politicians,” says Morales. “This a student-run Union by real students who have no interest other than making CUNY a free and really accessible institution. We don’t get free trips anywhere or have excuses to wear nice suits to go to Albany.” Khafagy elaborates on the idea, noting that it has always been grassroots organizing (and not “playing politics”) that has been most effective each time a tuition hike has hit, and he is right. It is grassroots activism that has gotten the conversation started, and kept it going. For example, last year, Peoples Power Movement cells at City College and LaGuardia

Community College joined forces to prepare and deliver a petition to Governor Cuomo. The group at LaGuardia then kept the conversation alive on their campus with events which educated the student body about CUNY’s rich activist heritage, and the fact that an education at CUNY used to be free.

The Union does not share the Senate’s interest in advocacy. “Advocacy is a dirty word,” says Morales. “An advocate is someone who speaks on people’s behalf. If you’re speaking for somebody else how does that person ever come to realize that they can stand up for themselves? How does doing all the talking ever really let the people’s voice be heard?” Instead, the Union wants to help students realize their power, and take action for themselves to better their condition. The Union hopes to hold book drives and possibly offer a book sharing program to help ease the financial burden caused by expensive textbooks that only seem to be getting more expensive with each passing year. They want to hold “consciousness-raising sessions” to help students realize their power, and the fact that they can no longer just fight for access to CUNY. Now students need to fight for complete control of CUNY.

The preliminary blueprint for the Union has structures which operate both on the individual campuses, and system-wide. At the campus level, Union cells will focus on issues which are specific to their campus. For example, students at City College have been fighting for the Morales-Shakur Center. “We wouldn’t expect Queens College to go all the way to City College to work on that issue,” says Khafagy. The individual campus cells would also work to have a say in faculty appointments on their particular campus. The rationale behind all of the action at the campus level is that only once students have learned how to tackle campus issues, and have seen what is possible, they’ll be prepared to tackle larger challenges. “We might have to tackle campus specific issues first before people are ready for a fight for a free CUNY,” says Morales.

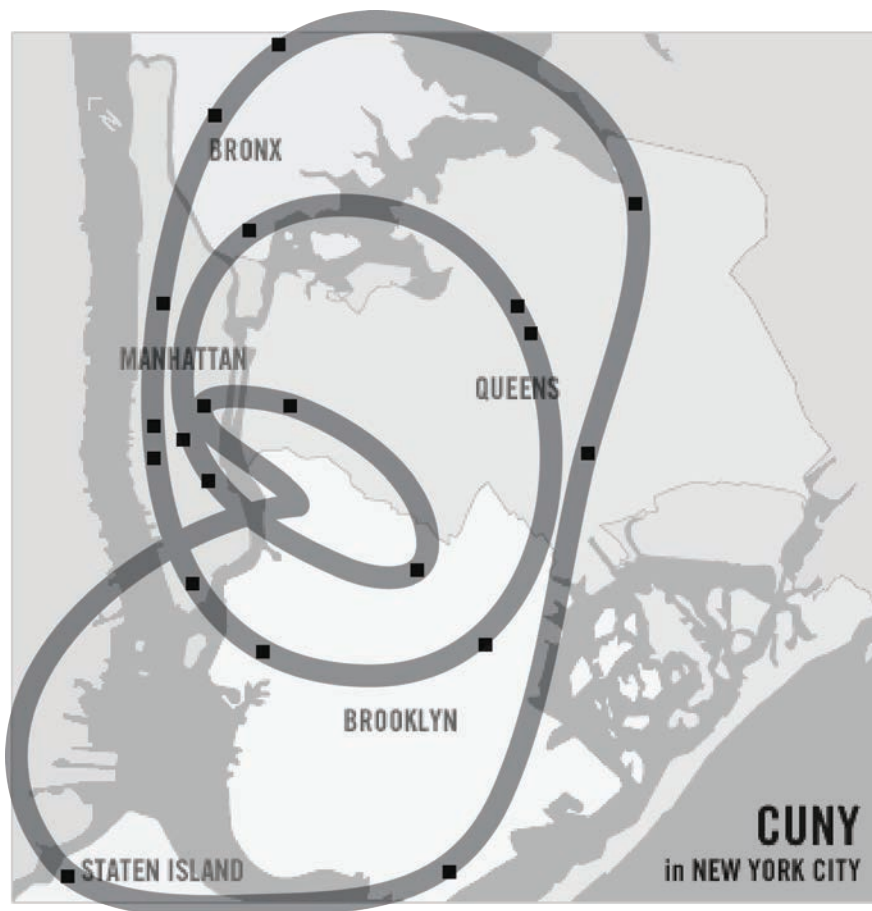
Each campus cell would then elect two representatives to represent their campus in a larger assembly which would decide on larger actions such as boycotts or strikes. Though there are no plans for a boycott in the works right now, neither Morales nor Khafagy are opposed to the idea. “Our goal is a community-controlled public university,” says Morales, “If a strike leads us there, it leads us there. I’m for anything

that works.” Khafagy says that at some point in the future, the Union might also consider a boycott of student tuition payments. “We’re trying to create a people’s university system where we take the money out of the system,” he says.

Everyone in the CUNY community would need to be on board, especially if there were ever to be a boycott of student tuition payments. In order to make this happen, Morales and Khafagy plan to “educate, agitate, and organize” at all levels—not just

amongst the students. If ever there were to be a boycott of tuition payments, faculty would have to work without being paid. That said, the Union hopes to start a conversation where faculty and students realize that their futures are intertwined. “The Union wants our teachers, especially the adjuncts, to maintain a livable wage and not have to be hassled by administrative nonsense that gets in the way of actual teaching,” says Morales, “We want our teachers to be guaranteed work.”

To bridge the gap between the two year schools, the lower tier four year schools, and the higher ranked four year schools, the Union plans to organize the entire Union around more general goals that any college student in New York could get behind. Free childcare, access to programs like childcare and employment help are universal needs that any student can support, and not just at CUNY. They do, however, intend to focus their early efforts on the lower-tier four year schools and the two year schools where you typically find the students who are struggling the most, both financially and academically. They also want to reach out to students of color. According to a January 2015 article in *The Atlantic*, “What It Takes to Get into New York City’s Best Public Colleges,” CUNY began to cater more to the middle class, and became less racially diverse in 2008. It was then that CUNY’s “bargain tuition rates” began attracting more middle class families, and CUNY’s focus shifted. Now, the



Union wants to shift it back. “How can we expect to affect real change if we don’t attend to the needs of the people who need it most?” asks Morales.

In an ideal world, the Union hopes to see the two-tier system of education (two-year versus four-year) erased. In the meantime, the Union intends to treat students at the two-year schools the same way they would treat those at the four-year schools—giving all students equal say.

In February, students held an-

other one of many pickets outside of David Petraeus’ class. “The students of CUNY say: ROTC go away! The workers of CUNY shout: We want Petraeus Out!” was but one of many slogans students chanted that day. Many students feel that Petraeus is a war criminal who has no business teaching an ethics class (and this author doesn’t disagree). But while a lot of students and student groups (such as the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee) see Petraeus’ faculty appointment as a problem, the Union is arguing that his faculty appointment is just one symptom of a larger problem. First, according to that same article in *The Atlantic* mentioned earlier, the Macaulay Honors College “has slowly become the whitest of all the CUNY campuses.” “Don’t protest the fact that he’s teaching at Macaulay,” says Khafagy, “Protest that there is a Macaulay Honors college.” Second, if one were to look at the Board of Trustees, one would see that it consists mostly of lawyers and bankers. Both Morales and Khafagy argue that Petraeus’ faculty appointment reflects the interests of the Board of Trustees, and not the interests of the larger CUNY community. “This is who they feel should be the leaders and the inspiration for its students,” says Khafagy, “It’s a reflection of the entire mindset of the CUNY administration—of where they fall politically.” Morales elaborates, arguing that, “If we had a community controlled CUNY, someone like Petraeus would never be allowed to set foot in a lecture hall.” ☐



# Prisoners for Profit

## CUNY Prison Divest and the carceral state

**christina nadler, melissa marturano,  
and sean m. kennedy**

THROUGH A FREEDOM OF Information Law (FOIL) request, CUNY Prison Divest, a new cross-campus coalition of student-organizers working towards divestment from private prisons, was able to confirm that CUNY's endowment has substantial investments in private-prison companies. These investments include the Geo Group, Inc. (with endowment holdings of \$8,400 USD), Corrections Corporation of America (CCA; \$13,300 USD), and G4S (\$248,900 USD). CUNY is also invested in at least one major prison contractor, Aramark (\$4,600 USD), and Wall Street firms that have at least one million private-prison shares apiece, including Wells Fargo (\$743,800 USD) and Morgan Stanley (\$157,500 USD). Though CUNY's revenue comes primarily through state and city funding as well as tuition, CUNY's endowment plays an increasingly important role as university fundraising from private donors increases as public funding decreases.

Ashley Agbasoga, a Brooklyn College senior and one of the main organizers of CUNY Prison Divest, and Ian Trupin, a full-time organizer with the Responsible Endowments Coalition and a fellow core organizer of CUNY Prison Divest, gave an interview to Christina Nadler (sociology), Melissa Marturano (classics), and Sean M. Kennedy (English), all Graduate Center doctoral students, regarding this pressing issue.

We (Christina, Melissa, and Sean) hope this interview can raise awareness in the GC community about CUNY's investments in private prisons, mobilize our community to protest these investments with CUNY Prison Divest, and enable us to think more critically about the need for the abolition of all prisons. As Ashley discusses in her responses to our questions, prisons and the prison system (known as the prison-industrial complex because of its extensive links to state and private capital) tear apart, terrorize, and incapacitate communities that are composed predominantly of poor people of color. Prisons do not make us safe. They are horrific manifestations of both state and capitalist violence.

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**Christina Nadler [CN]:** What's wrong with private prisons? Why do you want CUNY to divest from them? And how does this link up to other divestment efforts, such as from fossil fuels or from the Israeli occupation of Palestine?

**Ian Trupin [IT]:** The leading private-prison companies are GEO Group and CCA, which collectively hold contracts for about three-fourths of the private-prison beds in this country. Their combined revenues were over \$3 billion USD in 2012. There are other private-prison companies, like MTC and G4S, but these haven't been targeted as frequently because MTC stock is not traded publicly on the stock market, and G4S is a gigantic global corporation (the second largest after Walmart) and private prisons and detention centers are a relatively small part of their business.

**Ashley Agbasoga [AA]:** Prison as a concept is horribly wrong. But when you're literally profiting off of the lives of others, it's disgusting. People in both state and private prisons are usually put in there for injustices and unfair policies—for instance, most people incarcerated are in for non-violent crimes and they [are facing] extremely long sentences. You can find out more about the many abuses people face in private prisons, such as the denial of medical care and physical assault, in an online article from ACLU called "Warehoused and Forgotten." And the first reading that got me into this is Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. That sparked my interest in the prison-industrial complex as a whole and the policies around it. Keep an open mind for critiques, but there is a lot of writing out there on this subject. As for why we want CUNY to divest, I don't want money [from] public education going towards imprisoning my own communities. I identify as Black and I know how prisons affect our communities firsthand—[they've] affected my own family, and I have seen what it can do to my friends and neighbors here in Brooklyn. I wouldn't want my school to fund these institutions that destroy my community. In terms of working with other groups, I personally work with Students for Justice for Palestine, and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. A lot of CUNY Prison Divest core members are also in other movements, such as Students for a Democratic Society, and Students for Justice for Palestine, and other Palestinian-rights organizations.

**IT:** G4S is also a BDS target, and climate change is becoming a leading factor contributing to the displacement of people, which generates income for prison companies who lock up climate refugees in detention centers. The Israeli occupation of Palestine functions as a laboratory for private companies like G4S to develop new systems of control, including carceral and surveillance technologies that are then

marketed for profit around the world.

**Sean M. Kennedy [SMK]:** Can you give us a snapshot of the status of the movement against private prisons in the United States generally and at CUNY specifically? And how is CUNY part of the national movement?

**AA:** The private-prison movement is relatively new. There have been several abolitionist groups that want the abolition of all prisons, private or public, [but] private prisons didn't get a lot of attention until recently. CUNY Prison Divest started with the help of Ian. I met him at a Columbia Prison Divest event, and we thought it'd be a great idea to bring this to CUNY. I went to Columbia my first year of undergrad, and a lot of the founders of Columbia Prison Divest I was personally friends with. I thought, *Wouldn't it be a good idea to see if CUNY is investing? I bet they are.* So we started a coalition group. We reached out to other groups that participate in social-justice movements. Now we're growing strong. We got our Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request back, we're planning teach-ins on our campuses. We definitely have to approach it differently than at Columbia because Columbia's more of a nuclear campus as opposed to CUNY, which is massive with schools all over the five boroughs. So we're still in the planning stages of how to effectively make this work. We're going to make a solid plan before we go out there.

**IT:** CUNY Prison Divest is connected with the National Prison Divestment Campaign, which was convened in 2011 to specifically use divestment as a means to destroy private prisons' ability to lobby for laws and contracts that are contributing to driving up mass incarceration. The national

campaign was convened by Enlace, an organization made up of low-wage worker centers in the United States and Mexico, and over the four years of its existence has included over 150 organizations, including grassroots groups, unions, [and] media campaigning and advocacy groups. CUNY Prison Divest members have taken part in regional and national prison divestment convenings and other events.

**Melissa Marturano [MM]:** Private-prison companies particularly receive a lot of attention because of their role in immigration-detention centers along the US-Mexico border. These companies are exploiting the US' ever-increasing militarized and draconian immigration laws and the federal government's shift from deportation to indefinite detention—they see immigrant detention as a “growth industry” and lobby aggressively to ensure that immigration laws become harsher and harsher.

**AA:** Absolutely. These private-prison companies have facilities that detain undocumented immigrants and immigrants waiting on their asylum applications. The conditions in these prisons are obviously inhumane, and should especially not be happening to families. Women and children being detained in the South-west face unbearable conditions. It's definitely a profitable market, and in a capitalist society, we have entities like private prisons that profit off people's lives. Instead of deportations—which is also wrong—they're making money by keeping people in the system, which is terrifying.

**MM:** I just read in *Colorlines* about a hunger and work strike by women at the private Karnes Immigrant Detention Center run by the GEO Group. The women there have little





access to clean water unless they buy a bottle of water, which costs three dollars a bottle—more than they make from a day of work. I'm curious as to how much attention this is going to get, especially since these are women striking. This is something Victoria Law writes about—too often people only pay attention to the resistance of men behind bars, but as we imprison and detain more and more women in this country, is that going to shift?

**AA:** I hope there's a shift soon! I'm already seeing dialogue around looking at the imprisonment of women in our country and how it affects communities *en masse*; however, there's clearly not enough out there that shifts the conversation to how women are directly and indirectly affected by mass incarceration. CUNY Prison Divest has connections to CUNY Dreamers and Families for Freedom, other immigrant rights groups and they keep us posted about things going on within immigrant communities in New York. In the future, we would like to start addressing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers in New York.

**MM:** One of the main criticisms against private prisons—the same for neoliberal, corporate entities like charter schools—is their lack of any real transparency or oversight, which allows for egregious abuses. But egregious abuses happen all the time in state- and federal-run facilities as well. The state can, too, hide in the shadows and can cover its abuse with legal sanction. Is CUNY Prison Divest going to research whether CUNY has any financial or institutional ties to state-run prisons, which are the majority of prisons in the United States? Or is the idea to target private prisons first, then public ones, as part of the broad prison-abolition movement?

**AA:** As a group, CUNY Prison Divest is definitely interested in examining how our school system is involved in state-run prisons. Prisons at all levels, whether they are public or private, contribute to the mass incarceration that targets large numbers in Black and Brown communities. Tackling all prisons could definitely prove to be an arduous task. I, however, believe that it is imperative to tackle all prisons, as they all contribute to the devastating mass incarceration in our country. To be quite honest, private or public prisons all eventually have the same goal—to incarcerate. Private prisons obviously do it for a profit, but there is plenty of money in publicly operated prisons as well. Currently, we as CUNY Prison Divest are only tackling private prisons since we have a direct investment that has been proven through the FOIL request, but hope to eventually have our school system divest from all forms of prisons.

**MM:** Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a CUNY professor, recently wrote in the *Social Justice Journal* about four issues she saw in the movement against mass incarceration and for prison abolition, one of them being what she believes is an undue

emphasis on private prisons and divestment from them at universities. If only “about 5 percent of the people locked up are doing time in private prisons,” according to Gilmore, then public prisons and jails, which hold the other 95% of incarcerated people, should receive more attention. What is CUNY Prison Divest's response to this critique? This is something I personally grapple with all the time as an activist—is our energy in the wrong place? Is there a wrong place to focus in the face of obvious injustice?

**AA:** This is something I grapple with too. Sometimes, I do think that it may be a waste of time to go after private prisons when they make up such a small percentage of the prisons in America. However, private prisons are growing at an astronomical rate, much faster than public prisons. Their tactics and their partnerships with the state [are troubling]. Private prisons should not be profiting off communities and bodies. Because they are growing at such an alarming rate, that explains to me why so many people focus on them. How much are they charging the state to run these prisons? And sometimes, the conditions are much, much worse in private prisons than they are in state-run prisons. Eventually, CUNY Prison Divest wants to make sure CUNY is not involved in any prisons.

**IT:** I think that Professor Gilmore's point of view doesn't reflect an accurate analysis of the goals and strategy of the private-prison divestment campaign, which is focused on using divestment from private prisons to attack the lobbying influence of private companies, which has an effect well beyond the number of people currently locked up in private prisons. Ironically, given her critique, the prison divestment campaign's stated goal is entirely about the state and the political process that is feeding mass incarceration. If anything, I believe a weakness is that divestment only focuses on the politics, and in itself will not set anyone free. However, divestment is one strategy with a proven track record in the fight against South African apartheid, tobacco companies, and now fossil fuels and Israeli apartheid. In each of these fights, divestment was and continues to be extremely effective in polarizing and activating society around these issues through our institutions like universities, unions, religious centers, and city governments. Also, this critique ignores immigration detention. Detention centers and prisons are similar and play similar roles. The drug war and the war on immigrants are branches from the same tree. And fifty percent of detention centers are privately run. The figures Gilmore cites are arrived at by ignoring immigrants in detention.

**MM:** For me, just from an immigration-rights standpoint, private prisons need be stamped out immediately. As the United States detains more and more people at the US-Mexico border, more and more of these facilities will be opened up, which should be troubling for anyone—al-

though, of course, all detention and deportation should be stamped out.

**CN:** As we start to look at the scope of these companies and these further connections, we could also broaden that scope to think about the other companies that make money from private prisons. Will CUNY Prison Divest also target the 36 companies, like Wells Fargo, that invest in private prisons?

**AA:** We've been in discussion about this but we haven't made a final decision. There are a lot of opposing viewpoints on what to do. Initially, before we filed the FOIL request, we knew that the CUNY Board of Trustees and other people who are important players in the CUNY system had ties to banks that are tied to private prisons—we knew that right off the bat. But we also agreed that it would be much harder to go after these large banks rather than these private prisons. When the FOIL request came back and we got the percentages of CUNY's investments, starting with the private-prison groups instead of the larger entities made the most sense. However, we will not fail to mention that they have a large role in this system as well.

**MM:** So, for CUNY Prison Divest, it's a question of energy at this point—what can you do immediately and what you can do over the longer term?

**SMK:** Yeah, it sounds like a strategy of escalation, which is always a good strategy.

**CN:** As I understand it, the national movement's strategy focuses on endowments, but does the endowment strategy make as much sense for a public university like CUNY, which has a much smaller endowment (\$300 million USD) than private universities typically do? Is there discussion in this movement about varied forms of investment in private prisons, beyond endowments?

**AA:** That's a really good question. Columbia's endowment is \$9.23 billion USD. It's a ridiculous amount of money.

**CN:** Especially when you compare it to CUNY's endowment.

**AA:** But the frank answer to this question is I don't care if CUNY's endowment was five dollars. If one dollar is going towards the imprisonment of people, especially if it's people

who look like me, I don't want it in their endowment. No matter how "small" the endowment is there are much better things to invest in than private prisons. We take our model from Columbia because they are the closest to us and [have] the largest [campaign] in the Northeast; however, we always talk and debate about the way CUNY is very different. Our set-up is very different, from our endowment to the way things work at the board of trustees, to even just us being a public university. Also, the demographics of CUNY are different than Columbia's and so, private-prison and security systems will affect us much more as CUNY students. Even graduating with a CUNY degree as a person of color is different than [graduating with] a Columbia degree. And

of course there are a lot things at play, if you have a Columbia ID you are going to be treated differently. Personally, I've gotten out of getting a ticket because I showed my old Columbia ID. CUNY is made up of working class people of color—though that's changing rapidly—and a lot of the students come from communities that are affected directly by police violence. We definitely have to look at those differences.

**IT:** I think this is a great question. Two campaigns that emerged this spring, at Middlebury College and Brown University, are demanding both prison divestment and abolition of the box on admissions

forms that ask applicants if they've ever been convicted of a crime. I think these demands go well together as they can both become powerful ways to challenge our institution's complicity in mass incarceration. I have much less certainty about looking at prison labor, however. While I think it's really important to educate people about the existence of slave labor in prisons, I've also heard that prison-labor programs in some instances are the only place people inside can get anything close to skills training, or even an activity to pass the time. This is not to say that prison-labor conditions aren't slavery, or that they aren't abusive or even sometimes dangerous for people inside. But I would encourage folks not to boycott prison products unless people on the inside specifically call upon us to do so in solidarity, which I haven't heard of yet.

**SMK:** In addition to endowment investments, a lot of universities have board members who are connected to private prisons. Do you know if any CUNY board members or administrators are linked to private prisons?

If we invest in prisons, that means we're betting that prisons will continue to be profitable in the foreseeable future. For prisons to continue to be profitable, that means that racialized mass incarceration, the drug war, and the war on immigrants will have to continue.



**AA:** We're currently in a research phase in determining [if any] board members are involved directly with private prisons. We have a little bit of research on which trustees are involved in certain banks, such as Wells Fargo.

**CN:** Recently, divestment from fossil fuels was discussed by the CUNY board of trustees subcommittee on investments and it received a lot of negative feedback from the board because, as members of the board claimed, it would be too great a loss of money and, thus, they felt it would harm students. How do you hope to combat this mentality from the administration in your efforts to divest from private prisons?

**AA:** We know this is possibly going to be an argument against us. In terms of this, if I had to stand in front of the board of trustees, I would ask, "Can you think of anything else that will affect the CUNY population in terms of the cost of life more than private prisons and fossil fuels? I'm pretty sure you can't." However, these investments are profitable and, so, I think we also have to think of where the CUNY system puts its money. For example, inordinately high investments go into Macaulay Honors College, which really isn't meant to better the general CUNY student body but rather makes CUNY look like NYU or Columbia. We see that time and again within the CUNY system. So I would let them know that there are other things we can invest in.

**IT:** Ultimately, what matters is that people get free, and divestment just happens to be an effective political tool to mobilize university communities in this direction. Also, divestment can take on added impact if the funds that are divested are reinvested in cooperatives or other businesses that hire formerly incarcerated people, or are redirected towards scholarships and programs for communities that are targeted by ICE, the police, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

**CN:** And I think what you said before ties into this—prisons, private or state, are real issues for the majority of CUNY students who are largely working class students of color. So if you think of it that way, what will harm students more, possibly making less money in the endowment, or the private-prison and immigration-detention industry?

**MM:** The administration can justify not divesting by saying it harms students but, to me, that's just a line they say in order to not think about it critically.

**SMK:** And endowment gains aren't going to students—it's just a mystifying discourse. More money could in fact benefit us, but it doesn't.

**IT:** If we invest in prisons, that means we're betting that prisons will continue to be profitable in the foreseeable future. For prisons to continue to be profitable, that means that racialized mass incarceration, the drug war, and the war on immigrants will have to continue. So a bet on private

prisons is a bet against the communities and even the very lives of many in the CUNY community, which is majority people of color and working class. So, board of trustees, are you going to keep on betting that the captivity of our people will remain profitable?

**CN:** Looking at the list of companies CUNY's invested in, I was wondering if CUNY divested from private prisons, would they move that money into industrialized slaughter houses, or into Smith & Wesson and the other problematic companies CUNY's invested in? Though now that we ask this question, perhaps we shouldn't even engage with this line of questioning because it's beside the point?

**SMK:** Yeah, because this is just a discursive tactic by the administration meant to mystify the issue. Answering this question isn't the point. The point is that we're proposing an ethical refusal. It's not up to us to know where to put the money, we just know we don't want the money invested in this. This is the same question around Palestine. People always ask, "Why Palestine?" The answer—people are asking us to do this. Opponents always want to pivot to the question of why not boycott everything? Why not divest from everything? The point is, this is where the mobilization is, in these particular campaigns. Prison abolition is a linchpin for broad social transformation.

**AA:** We need to start somewhere. A huge force in Brown and Black communities is the power of the police and how institutionalized racism tears apart our communities [which prisons feed off of]. If we present facts about the private-prison industry, how deeply it's connected to politicians, and how the politicians we elect benefit from incarcerating communities of color, that's somewhere to start rather than just demanding the overthrow of capitalism, because people will ask, "Why?" For instance, many politicians, like Jerry Brown in California, receive campaign donations from private-prison corporations, and, thus, they create a partnership with these groups. Going against private prisons and the entire prison-industrial complex will open up questions about capitalism. This could spark something. For a lot of people, private prisons help them to ask those questions.

**CN:** For people who are reading this interview and becoming aware (or more aware) of this campaign, how can they get involved in CUNY Prison Divest?

**AA:** The first thing that pops into my head other than come to the meetings is read more, like the ACLU article I mentioned, "Warehoused and Forgotten," and ask questions. Go home and read about private prisons and come out to our meetings, they're usually at 7pm on Wednesdays. They're hosted in different parts of the city. There's a Facebook group, and we're working on building a website. We also have a listserv. We'd love to see new faces and have people come in and join the fight. 🌐



POLITICAL ANALYSIS

# A Tragedy of Strife

## Yemen after the Arab Spring

**denise rivera**

WHEN ONE THINKS OF the season of spring, many images come to mind. The winter frost is melting, the sun is shining. The flowers are blooming and waterfalls are teeming with life. It is a renewed state of mind, another opportunity to embrace and be grateful for the chance to enjoy the beauty that nature has to offer. It makes sense why it was called the “Arab Spring.” Countries sought to get rid of the harsh, bitter winter of authoritarian rule, where speaking up for oneself was a dead idea. They longed for the fresh spring of democracy and the pursuit of freedom. Yemen was one of these countries that longed for its people to grasp power into their hands. Yemenis were very optimistic with the political ferment, and their hopes soared when long-time President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to step down from office in November 2011. Elections were held, and although Vice President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi was the only candidate

on the ballot, Yemenis remained confident that he would reform Yemen into a better country. However, on 22 January 2015, Hadi resigned from his office, and disguised himself to escape house arrest a month later. The spring vision that Yemenis dreamt of was never fulfilled.

The Republic of Yemen came into existence in 1990. As a new and young country, Yemen dealt with the threat of a possible secession and entered into a civil war that lasted until 1994. This secession movement was led by southern Yemen, and was revived again in 2009 as Yemeni government troops fought against the Houthis, a Zaydi Shi’a minority population. Houthis felt underrepresented and invisible in Yemen’s political affairs, and sought to provide guidelines in a newly reformed constitution as President Hadi stepped into office. They also wanted government corruption to end and placed a lot of pressure on President Hadi to complete the job that he originally set out to do—bringing democracy





to Yemen. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Frustrated with the Hadi's efforts, Houthi rebels began to take matters into their own hands. They currently have control over northern Yemen, recently stormed into the presidential palace, and are seeking to expand their grasp to take over southern Yemen. So far, they have control of the Taiz, the third most populated urban area located in southern Yemen.

Despite the sectarian conflict appearing to be the mainstream reason for the Yemeni civil conflict, it is not the only major force contributing to it. Oil production and petroleum refineries are some of the means that Yemen depends on for their economy to survive. However, these resources are declining immensely. This caused Yemen to seek economic prospects elsewhere, namely in natural gas. This venture was initially successful, but due to the unstable security situation that Yemen is currently in, liquid gas production has been shut down. Yemen also faces many other obstacles, such as water shortages, high unemployment, lack of food (which leads to high food prices), and a high population growth rate. The Yemeni civil conflict has stopped Yemenis from gaining access to water, fuel, electricity, and medical supplies. Why is the water shortage raising red flags in Yemen? The answer is not pretty—it has reached to a most deleterious situation where it could be the first country in the world to run out of water. Furthermore, Yemen has yet to address a proper way of handling its refugee population (mostly Somalian).

The Yemeni conflict has definitely sparked some responses from the international community. On 14 April 2015, all members of the United Nations Security Council voted to pass a resolution that would ban sales of armaments and weapons to Houthi rebels. The United Nations is also seeking to replace Jamal Benomar, the UN peace envoy to Yemen. He received a lot of criticism from the Gulf states for failing to negotiate successful peace talks between Yemeni government troops and Houthi rebels. Nobody is certain as to why he resigned, but if he could not succeed in ameliorating opposing sides within Yemen, how can the UN be certain that another UN peace envoy will? For now, the UN is deliberating on how to provide Yemenis a safe access to humanitarian aid. The Arab states are definitely not putting blinders towards the civil unrest that is growing in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia was the first to act against the Houthi rebels, and refused to collaborate with a group that was being financially endorsed by and making an alliance with Iran. With the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) and even the United States, Saudi Arabia commenced military action by using airstrikes to target Houthi rebels in March. The United States closed its embassy in Yemen in early February. Many Americans were actually left behind. As a

result of being stranded, many Yemeni-Americans had been creative in finding alternative ways in leaving the country. Furthermore, a coalition called the Stuck in Yemen Legal Action Group has been created to sue the US government for failing to safely evacuate all Americans in Yemen.

Although the US concerns over Americans left behind in Yemen do not appear to be a top priority, there is another thing about Yemen that keeps the United States very concerned—Al-Qaeda. Once again, Al-Qaeda has proven itself to be a powerful nonstate actor in participating in civil conflicts and influencing international affairs even as the West still seeks to find ways to eradicate global terrorism. With Western forces attempting to purge Afghanistan and Pakistan of Al-Qaeda military bases, Yemen was the perfect place to remain safe from prying eyes (a bittersweet irony). Very recently, Al-Qaeda claimed that a cleric named Ibrahim al-Rubais (a powerful member of the organization and wanted by the West) was killed by a drone strike in Yemen. Taking advantage of Yemen's political chaos, Al-Qaeda successfully took control of the Riyan Airport in southern Yemen, along with an oil terminal. Houthi rebels are adamant in claiming that they have no wish to ally themselves with Al-Qaeda. Former Yemeni President Saleh has openly supported the Houthi rebels, but his position with regard to Al-Qaeda has yet to be made public. Many have predicted that this move may have presented the opportunity for Saleh to regain power, but that is yet to be seen.

Since this conflict has broken out, there have been no peaceful protests or marches. Yemenis are now fighting for their lives as they are forced to pick a side between Yemeni government troops or Houthi rebels. They are forced to suffer from starvation and thirst since they cannot afford to buy food or find access to clean drinking water. They are forced to make the choice to possibly leave behind their home and seek refuge in a safer neighboring country. They are forced to succumb to the acts of terror perpetrated by Al-Qaeda as it seeks to take advantage of Yemen's civil conflict to pursue its own interests. The unstable political situation in Yemen paved the way for sectarian and regional conflicts. With another Sunni and Shi'a conflict brooding, the international community does not want to be held liable to repeat the same mistake that the United States committed as it sought to "democratize" Iraq. Despite the temptation to call for a humanitarian intervention, the United Nations is either insecure or exhausted (perhaps both) in deciding how to address the current situation. The Arab Spring mentality and the efforts that Yemenis made four years ago now appear to have been just an illusion. The pursuit of the fresh spring of democracy has now turned into a harsh plague of repression, and many are predicting that more violence and mayhem is in store for Yemen's future. Ⓐ

# Incapacitated by Capitalism

## Jamaica, Obama, and the IMF

**rhone fraser**

OBAMA'S RECENT VISIT TO Jamaica was very instructive. It signaled the danger of US imperialism that ultimately encourages the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean to be under the control of US and European banking institutions. Several key points in Obama's speech on 9 April 2015 to the students at the University of West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica, show this. He fielded several questions from Jamaican students that exposed his agenda of containment against Latin American and Caribbean nations.

In response to a student's question about Cuba, Obama said that in terms of his 17 December announcement of "normalizing relations," the "changes we are making will be good for the Cuban people." The Cuban government has been one of the hardest working in terms of providing healthcare and education to all its citizens, regardless of race or class. The US government has worked hard to help private prison owners make more profit from the school to prison pipeline, and to proclaim democracy while being the number one seller of guns in the world. These guns support dictatorships that repress the "democracy" that Obama told these students that the US "believes" in. This policy towards Cuba refuses the import of life-saving cancer vaccines and diabetes medications that are desperately needed at an affordable cost for those in the United States. This is the "good for the Cuban people" that Obama is talking about. Increased profit margins for privately owned pharmaceutical companies. This "good" is increased profit margin for Wall Street bankers who gained their wealth from the slave trade, Jim Crow, and crippling austerity programs that have hit Jamaica the hardest, according to a report by Jake Johnston at the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

According to this report, over the past twenty years, average annual GDP growth in Jamaica has been just 0.4 percent, while per capita GDP has actually averaged negative 0.3 percent "growth." This is the worst performance in the Western Hemisphere during the past two decades, and is a failure by any international or historical comparison. Investments by public bodies in Jamaica decreased from 4.2 percent of GDP in 2009-10 to an estimated 2.7 percent of GDP in 2014-15. This is the "good" that International Monetary Fund policies have brought Jamaica. In response to a question about Chinese investment, Obama replied, "your government should be transparent...there should be an accounting of how the

money flows." This is an interesting response from a leader who voted in 2008 to use tax payer money to bail out banks because "they were too big to fail." He does not believe in transparency because he's never expected transparency from the banking class he serves. In negotiations with General Motors during the recession, his administration encouraged them to raid their employees' pension funds in order to avoid bankruptcy. Obama believes in an accounting of how money flows, but with complete allegiance to its private owners and not to the workers. His decision in January 2013 to sign off on making Bush's tax cuts for the top two percent of income earners permanent was telling. He showed the Jamaican youth that he is a company yes man.

In response to a final question from Davie-Ann Tucker, he said "the current government has been wise to abide by the IMF policies and I think that has been the right thing to do." IMF policies have discouraged sustainable development within Jamaica, forced the population to depend on European manufactured goods and services, including powdered milk of all commodities, and encouraged foreign development that benefits foreign capitalists to the detriment of the Jamaican working class. According to Johnston's report, after averaging about 4 percent of GDP over the five years prior to the IMF agreement, government capital expenditure reached a low of 1.6 percent of GDP in the fiscal year 2014-15. He was essentially speaking to the sector that the IMF encourages, which is the tourist sector. However, this slavish relationship to the IMF is the result of colonial mentalities of neocolonial leaders in Jamaica. When Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller visited the United States last month, she praised the Congressional Black Caucus for lobbying IMF chair Christine Lagarde to lend Jamaica more money. This was a complete slap in the face to the legacy of Marcus Garvey (1883-1940). Ironically, Simpson-Miller was reported to have asked Obama to issue a (posthumous) presidential pardon of Garvey after the US imprisoned him in 1923 and deported him in 1925. Garvey's Black nationalist beliefs discouraged colonial dependence, and he harshly critiqued the neocolonial leaders of his time, like Haile Selassie for example, for their servile deference to US and European economic interests.

Simpson-Miller sees no relief to Jamaica's poverty other than appealing to the IMF for loans, and in doing so betrays Garvey's legacy. In Marcus Garvey's 1913 article in the *Afri-*





*can Orient Times and Review* titled “The British West Indies in the Mirror of Civilization—History Making by Colonial Negroes,” he critiques colonial control that denied, and continues to deny, Jamaica economic self-determination—“for the last twenty years, Jamaica has enjoyed a semi-representative government with little power of control, the balance of power resting in the hands of *red-tapists*, who [pull] the strings of colonial conservatism from Downing Street with a reckless disregard for the interests of the people.” Garvey would be none too thrilled about getting a pardon from the “good deed” of a “red-tapist” who sees the IMF as Jamaica’s salvation. The IMF policies that shrink Jamaica’s public sector and its capital expenditures completely disregard the interests of the people.

Simpson-Miller must comprehend the clear explanation Smith College students gave last year for refusing IMF managing director Christine Lagarde as their commencement speaker—“we...do not want to be represented by someone whose work directly contributes to many of the systems that we are taught to fight against...The IMF has been a primary culprit in the failed developmental policies implanted in some of the world’s poorest countries. This has led directly to the strengthening of imperialist and patriarchal systems that oppress and abuse women worldwide.” Simpson-Miller should also ask how she is continuing to support imperial-

ist and patriarchal systems that oppress and abuse Jamaican women and women worldwide. These patriarchal systems in Jamaica remain as long as Jamaica remains economically dependent on US and European banking institutions.

Marlon James’ third novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, gives some insight about why Jamaica did not follow the path of Cuba in forging a complete revolution, breaking from the US and European colonial order. It had everything to do with propaganda, guns, and targeted assassinations. Something the Obama administration openly practices with a reported “kill list.” The Green Bay and Tivoli Gardens massacres are examples of how the Jamaican government treats citizens’ lives as expendable in their slavish quest to follow the colonial order.

While Obama’s words sounded good, a critical look at his actual policies shows clear contradictions that exposes the reality that the Obama administration is less interested in democracy than it is in continued Wall Street and IMF strangulation of the Jamaican economy through continued dependence on foreign goods. Obama can make convincing arguments about “democracy,” but with enough money and guns, his administration continues the Reagan doctrine of working very hard to undermine governments with even the slightest inclination towards socialism and subjugating all others. ☹

# The Seeds of a Revolution

## The Anatomy of the Baltimore revolt

**gordon barnes**

IN OCTOBER 1865, IN Morant Bay, Jamaica, a man was arrested for “trespassing” on a long abandoned plantation. Some days later, a group of predial laborers drafted a petition to the Colonial Governor, John Eyre. They requested that the British colonial government protect their colleague from an unjust judicial system that would see him suffer corporal punishment for the most miniscule of infractions. Furthermore, they pressed the issue that they, as a class, were “ill-treated” by the plantocracy, and demanded protection from Eyre in the wake of widespread legal and police injustice. Eyre, responding through a proxy, promptly told them to go through “proper channels” to air their grievance and to get back to work in the cane fields.

At the trial of the man in question, the laborers (many the descendants of former slaves) demanded his release. When the judge and court officials refused, the indignant laborers threw stones and “rioted,” but were eventually beaten back by the police. The following day, Baron von Ketelhodt, Custos for the parish, signed an arrest warrant for some twenty-odd persons for “rioting and disturbing the peace.” When the police came to Stoney Gut, the village in which the majority of them resided, they were beaten back with stones, cutlasses, and pikes. Some days after, von Ketelhodt, attempting to placate the growing anger of the laboring classes, read the Riot Act in public at the Morant Bay courthouse. The people that had assembled to hear the Custos address them, including some of the original petitioners, refused to listen to him, and overpowered the militia presence in the town. They burned the courthouse and killed von Ketelhodt, cutting off his fingers as trophies.

Eyre had already sent a detachment of one hundred troops prior to von Ketelhodt’s death, and by the time they arrived, sixteen “gentlemen” had been killed and at least eighteen others injured. The planter provided detailed and horrific accounts of the violence perpetrated prior to the arrival of the first batch of Eyre’s forces (much of which can be accessed in popular as well as academic renderings of the

episode), who would send hundreds more over the following weeks. The Morant Bay Rebellion had commenced. By the end, some two to three thousand laborers had risen up in arms against the planter and colonial bureaucratic elite. They were eventually defeated, but their political activism provided an impetus for a waning of planter power. Despite the language deployed by planters and other elite groups to categorize the violence as a riot and an unthinking orgy of violence, there were political goals central to those laborers involved. This much is evinced through the fragmentary archival records in both Jamaica and Britain. What’s more is that the colonial militias, in conjunction with other forces, not only suppressed the revolt but crushed all resistance, including much more passive manifestations of subaltern resistance to ruling class dominance. So much so that Eyre was tried in Britain for abuse of power (he got off, of course). The language and tone of the former slavocracy in the mid-nineteenth century British Empire around the specter of violence is eerily similar to that employed by the ruling layers in the contemporary United States.

Let us fast forward a century and a half and travel approximately two thousand kilometers to the north. Enter Baltimore. On 19 April, Freddie Gray, a twenty-five year old man in Baltimore, Maryland, succumbed to his spinal injuries—apparently eighty percent of his vertebrae in his neck had been severed—seemingly sustained after his interaction with police officers in that city. Gray was apprehended by the Baltimore Police Department on 12 April for allegedly having a switchblade and running, after having made eye contact with a bike cop (none of which are illegal in Maryland). Gray is yet another person, another name, another soul, added to the seemingly perpetual list of young Afro-American men slain by the police in this country. Protests were called immediately in the wake of Gray’s death, and Baltimore was plunged into what the mainstream media has dubbed as a “crisis.” For sure, the “crisis” in Baltimore and indeed the “crisis” around the United States at this particular juncture in history is not the problem of protest. The “crisis”



is the problem of police brutality and wanton state violence perpetrated upon the most oppressed layers in society. And when the protests turned violent, somewhat mildly on Sunday, 26 April, and much more pronounced the following day—Gray’s funeral incidentally—the media, the elite, and large swaths of people in this country (from varying political positions) screamed “Riot!”

Let’s be clear. What happened and is happening in Baltimore, what happened and is happening in Ferguson, really, what is a relatively recent set of phenomena across the United States are not riots, they are in fact revolts. This semantic distinction is actually rather important. A riot is a disturbance of the peace whereas a revolt is the prelude to rebellion. Therefore, a riot is understood in terms of the dominant discourses (in this country) around class, race, and the role of the police in society. A riot is something akin to what happened in Philadelphia in 2008 after the baseball team there won the World Series, when Paris was in turmoil after PSG won Ligue 1, and that odd occurrence at the Pumpkin Festival in New Hampshire, or the amorphous “flash mobs” that crop up from time to time across US cities—though of course this last example can be seen as a sort of liminal position between riot and revolt.

A revolt on the other hand, is a challenge to these dominant discourses. We may even surmise, as is a common term of phrase amongst young, urban, Black people in the US, that “there [are] levels to this shit.” Beyond revolt is rebellion, a more direct and concentrated effort to push against dominant mores and ideologies. At the pinnacle, social revolution, resides the absolute destruction and obliteration of the status quo. So, Baltimore is currently on stage two if we want to be schematic.

Freddie Gray’s death—which in some circles can be construed as murder—is not the motivating factor for the Baltimore revolt. If that sentence upsets you, then you may need to reexamine the dynamics of the society we all inhabit. Gray’s death was merely catalyst for this heroic resistance against the capitalist state we now see in Baltimore, it was far from the cause. That said, his family’s appeals, likely at the behest of lawyers and lawmakers, for “calm” should fall on deaf ears. There is to be no calm when the working class of this country, and particularly Black workers, are routinely oppressed, brutalized, and killed by the police. The appeal for “non-violence” makes no sense when the overwhelming majority of violence is asymmetrical, flowing from representatives of the state to those that are marginalized or do not conform. There is a place for non-violent protest, but there is an equally justifiable place for violent resistance to the disgusting society we all live in, one that seemingly naturalizes its existence through consuming the bodies and souls of its most ostracized strata.

Before moving on, I want to acknowledge that I do see the Baltimore revolt as being a violent episode. Many on the Left claim that property destruction like what recently transpired in Ferguson, Missouri, and is occurring now in Baltimore, is not violent, that violence occurs interpersonally. I disagree with this distinction for a myriad of reasons, but namely because it hedges on the question of supporting violence in a sort of quasi-pacifistic leftism. If you are familiar with my thinking and writing, then you will be abundantly aware that I endorse and support violence and think that most folks on the Left, particularly those who identify with radical and revolutionary strands, should as well. The only question is what type of violence. Many of the people—talking heads on television and laypersons alike—who employ the rhetoric of “riot,” “thugs,” “chaos,” and so on, do in fact support violence. They endorse the violence of the state and its auxiliaries. So, as we progress, keep in mind that it is okay to support certain types of violence, and moreover, it is necessary if revolt is to move beyond an incipient stage.

The Baltimore revolt is seemingly being led by youth, which is encouraging as it is usually this demographic that is commonly thought of as politically apathetic. How wondrous it is to be proved wrong in instances such as this! The heaviest clashes between police and protestors began after the schools let out, and primitive combat ensued as members of the embattled Baltimore community hurled projectiles at riot police. “Where are the parents?” seems to be the question that the unthinking and uncritical dupes in mainstream media continually pose. Many who question the role of the parents of these “riotous thugs,” or in my conception, youths in the throes of revolt, aren’t seeing the bigger picture. Their parents are the ones who are caught up in the entangling snare of the courts and prisons. Their parents are the ones working the overnight shift to make ends meet, working two or three jobs so that maybe, just maybe, rent will be paid on time. The parents of these youths are the ones inflicted with debilitating drug addiction, wrought by capitalism’s ever overbearing social ramifications. These are the children of parents who understand what their progeny are doing and why it must be done.

Fox News as well as CNN—more so the former—continually asked residents in West Baltimore, where the revolt was at its most intense, if they were not concerned, saddened, or desirous of a return to calm. Most answered in the affirmative, but not within the context that these news outlets perceived. Yes, older people in the community were upset both at the so-called “riot” and at the suspicious death of Gray. But they understood why the revolt transpired, as they cited case after case, incident after incident, of wanton police brutality and the near daily miscarriage of justice in Baltimore. Some even branched out to larger polities in

Maryland and the United States. The parents that are present are upset, but not at the youth, they are upset with the social system that has offered no other option for their kin but to engage in such violent resistance.

Initially, the blame for the situation “getting out of hand” was laid at the feet of Stephanie Rawlings, the Democratic mayor of Baltimore. The criticisms of her have largely been constructed with subtle racism and sexism. Like certain criticisms of Barack Obama, we on the Left must shed light on such racist-misogynistic thinking whilst simultaneously condemning the individuals who are the object of such criticism. Because at its core, the Baltimore revolt, while routed through the politics of race, is undeniably a question of class, and class oppression. Additionally, it is also important to recognize and exploit the fissures that exist between the varying camps of the bourgeoisie and their allies if we are to be successful in challenging the ruling order in any substantial manner.

It is clear that certain elements in the establishment harbor a massive amount of resentment towards Rawlings. Her statements were taken by some to be an endorsement to riot, to loot, and to burn. This critique was in the light of Baltimore police seemingly “standing down” to the protesters, allowing them to “blow off steam.” What a bunch of felonious lies. The Baltimore Police Chief, Anthony Batts, admitted as much when he acknowledged that the cops were outnumbered and outmaneuvered in the streets. This is an important point, as it imbues a sense of confidence in the oppressed, that they can effectively challenge the forces of the elite, albeit for a temporary period. For when revolt mutates into rebellion and then rebellion into revolutionary projects, expect the police, military (which was deployed in Baltimore in the aftermath of the revolt), and right-wing nationalists—or “patriots” as they often refer to themselves—to shoot and kill any person challenging the naturalized order, even if they are school children.

Thankfully, the aforementioned scenario has not come to fruition in this country for some time, but it likely will as the quotidian contradictions of this wretched social system play out over time. For now, the biggest concern, as it always tends to be under liberal capitalist democracy, is that of property. I have said in the past regarding Ferguson that the destruction of property owned by petty-proprietors in such a revolt is lamentable, but not to the point of condemnation. Just as we must stand with the slave when she razes the master’s house to the ground, and stand alongside the peasant as he resists the landed aristocracy, and express solidarity with the workers as they go on strike in “essential industries,” we must align ourselves with those who have lost the most, with those who have been subject to the most egregious social and economic externalities that capitalism engenders.

With the primacy of property as the central feature of the Baltimore revolt, much media attention has been focused on a single CVS store that was looted and subsequently set aflame (of course the damage was much more substantial). It is worth noting that much of the mainstream commentary around the destruction of this CVS has been framed in such a way as to make it appear that the franchise owner would have the same class interests as those in revolt. This is yet another spurious formulation by those that purport to convey truth, balance, and acumen in the news. A quick search on the Internet will tell you that to purchase a CVS franchise you need at least \$2 million USD, if not into the tens of millions. There should be no solace felt or offered to a capitalist who loses out on what is likely one of many properties. Furthermore, the city, state, and federal government will likely assist in recouping the losses, whilst simultaneously aiming to further oppress those who have been heroic enough to rise in revolt.

Other property damage occurred as well, stolen cars were crashed and burned, stores looted, a few dwellings caught fire, and a construction sight was ablaze. These are unfortunate necessities, the (not so) unforeseen consequences of a socio-economic system for which the death knell was rung long ago. If we think of C.L.R. James’ defense of the slave violence in Saint Domingue, we will recall that any manifestation of violence on the part of the oppressed pales in comparison to the daily, systemic, and crushing violence enacted by, and on behalf of, the elite. These are the ramifications for centuries long terrorist activities which bigwigs in the United States love to admonish, yet practice regularly “at home” and across the globe.

The last point of contention I wish to touch upon is the issue of “outside agitators.” This term gained currency during the struggles in Ferguson, and it has been confounding to news outlets and politicians alike that “people in their own communities” would act in such a way. The only explanation has been, “well there are thugs, and then there are protesters.” Some of the establishment troglodytes have gone so far as to equate any protester with “thug.” It helps if said protester is a young Black man too. So there are two issues I wish to briefly parse here, first the issue of “outside agitators” and secondly, the issue of the “thug.”

In the context of Ferguson, there were people from “outside,” but thank-fucking-god we have freedom of movement in this country, an ability that allows us to go other places and help in organizing and solidarizing with comrades. In terms of the Baltimore revolt, the only “outside agitators” have been additional police forces brought in from as far as forty miles away, this in addition to a 5,000 troop National Guard contingent. As for the “thugs,” as has been a some-





what common call in New York, “thugs wear flag pins!” In all seriousness though, the word “thug” comes from the legacy of the Thuggee murder cult in India. Lasting from the mid-fourteenth century until the British systematically exterminated them in the 1800s, the cult was a Hindu-Muslim mystic group that practiced duping unsuspecting travelers and killing them with a garrote or other ligature devices. With this information, the closest evidence to any thug-gery we have seen in recent months was Daniel Pantaleo’s stranglehold murder of Eric Garner.

So, what do we have in Baltimore? I contend it is a legitimate manifestation of grievances and claim-making upon the state by the downtrodden and those most commonly referenced as the dregs of our society—and remember, legality is not something that concerns us at the point in time when revolt is a reality. The legitimacy of the Baltimore revolt supersedes any legal fiction presented to quash it, mitigate it, or strip it of its relevance in either the struggle for Black liberation or the struggle against capitalism—and of course these struggles, alongside many others, are inextricably

linked.

Baltimore is the embryonic formulation of Morant Bay, of Haiti, of Petrograd. It is the kernel from which social transformation may spring forth. We can say that the so-called American Revolution solved the political issue of sovereignty, the Civil War, or more aptly, the Second American Revolution, solved the issue of chattel slavery and its embeddedness to rising industrial capitalism. The struggles in Baltimore, Ferguson, Oakland, and the country moreover have the potential to set up the stage for a Third American Revolution—one in which the oppression of women, of homosexuals, of Blacks, of Latinos, of immigrants, and of transgendered peoples are tackled beyond the lukewarm, piecemeal reformism of liberal politics.

Baltimore is Morant Bay, and Baltimore is the unforeseeable future. There only needs to be a mass political organization capable of leading and directing such frustrations evidenced in the revolt (and in other revolts to come) towards the project of challenging, defeating, and ultimately conquering state power. Ⓐ

# Fighting for Feminism

Well... Sort Of

jennifer polish

LAST MONTH'S ADVOCATE EDITORIAL, "A New Feminism," by Gordon Barnes, offers some excellent critiques of second-wave, White-dominated feminism as "a tool for reinforcing dominant ideologies and mores." When critiquing Women's History Month in the United States, the "equal rights" brand of feminism espoused by far too many, or the lack of critique of the military-industrial complex in films like 2012's *Invisible War*, Barnes is absolutely spot-on—the liberal (as opposed to radical/intersectional) feminism espoused by (too often) White women like Emma Watson are generally hailed as progressive, but in fact shape anti-emancipatory attitudes. Indulging in a brand of feminism that, as Barnes writes, "cements the place of imperialist ventures" is indeed just that—at best, a cognitive dissonance-inducing indulgence, and at worst (and usually), a privilege.

I will deploy the words that Barnes implied but did not explicitly use—the Whiteness of liberal feminism is overwhelming, and it is literally lethal for communities of color at home and abroad. Need I go further than, at the risk of enraging those who would #bottomforhillary, Hillary Clinton's foreign policies and her "tough on crime" stance with Bill Clinton that fed mass incarceration?

Throughout his editorial, Barnes is critiquing this lethal, liberal feminism. However, only using the word "feminism," as he does, to describe this liberalism gives me pause. I would not be nearly as quick as Barnes to define liberal (read: White, middle class, citizenship-based, et cetera) feminism as just... feminism. While popular culture defines feminism as liberal feminism, to be sure—such is the privilege of dominant identities that they can remain unmentioned and invisible—for us to do so in our critiques of liberal feminism is to inadvertently reify the erasure of woman of color feminism that liberal feminism is already doing so well. Liberal feminists do not need our help, and I know it is not Barnes' goal to help them.

To that end, it is important to avoid dismissing all feminism as anti-emancipation when we really mean that liberal feminism is anti-emancipation. I, too, aesthetically enjoy "liberation" as a rhetorical tool, but I worry that often, people read calls for "something greater than feminist 'equality'" out of context and hijack these statements for the purpose of arguing that women have 'come far enough. Because look, there's a woman CEO!'

Yes, liberal feminism is about supporting anti-immigrant "nation-building," Islamophobic and racist wars to "protect" women in Afghanistan, and community-destroying "war on drugs" policies, all in the name of "(White) womanhood." Just as Barnes argues, these neoliberal goals are not about liberation. Liberal feminism cannot be about liberation for anyone because it is based in a fundamental essentialism which ignores the myriad ways that women are not, and never have been nor will be, a monolith.

Race, class, ability, migrant status, region, sexuality, gender, body type—and on and on—all separate women from each other and give us dramatically different experiences. For example, issues of justice that women with dis/abilities encounter are usually overlooked by groups of women without those particular dis/abilities. Remember here, of course, that dis/abilities affect people differently based on dis/ability type, as well as the person's race, class, migrant status...the ever important but also ever frustrating identity/privilege list again! Barnes is right to highlight the ways that liberal feminism actively distances itself from all of these active intersections, eliding differences amongst women by issuing bland claims for "equality" that—in such a misogynist society—we often feel as though we have no choice but to applaud, because at least someone is saying...something. But that "something" is not about liberation.

Weaving a definition of feminism that refuses to elide the massively important activisms, writings, and lives of radical woman of color feminists, however, does have the potential to create a definition of feminism that can be about the liberation that Barnes gestures toward.

This liberation cannot be achieved, however, if issues





of transgender liberation are discussed in ways that harm transgender individuals and communities. Barnes clearly has excellent intentions when he integrates the concerns of transphobic and misogynist violence aimed at trans women into his critique of feminism, but he does so in a way that inadvertently conflates sex and gender.

When discussing former Navy SEAL Kristin Beck, Barnes is absolutely right to criticize the CNN documentary *Lady Valor* for uncritically featuring “Beck coldly discuss[ing] killing Afghanis and Iraqis.” This glorification of US imperialist violence is, unfortunately, something that is familiar to mainstream LGBT audiences (especially those who fought for the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell).

However, in the midst of this exigent critique, Barnes parenthetically notes that Kristin Beck was “previously known as Christopher.” Beck’s assigned name is simply not relevant, and the voyeuristic, invasive question of “what did your name used to be?” that out trans people have to contend with daily—which Barnes unfortunately answers here without being asked—does not belong in a liberationist discourse.

Relatedly, Barnes inadvertently upholds the essentialist notion that trans identity is affirmed or denied by medical

transition. Using the phrase “sexual/gender transition” to describe Beck’s coming out as a woman instead of “gender transition” is unsettling in its simultaneous differentiation and equation of sex and gender. This vaguely positions sex as a ‘biological reality’ as opposed to the social constructedness of gender. This is especially amiss in light of the fact that earlier in the piece, Barnes states that, “gender parity is a different problem” than “social parity between the sexes.”

Ironically, in other contexts, trans and woman of color feminisms often unite in their anti-essentialist strivings toward the liberation that Barnes is trying to advocate for. Trans feminisms often further the feminist task of revealing gender as a socially constructed product of power relations in this society—trans feminisms often extend this to essentialist notions of “sex,” revealing that “biological sex,” too, is a product of societal power relations. Woman of color feminisms, similarly, are anti-essentialist in their insistence that White womanhood does not define all women. These feminisms converge in that they both trouble the very grounds upon which any universalist ideal of “womanhood” plants its proverbial feet—perhaps this refusal to universalize experiences is where a liberationist politics can begin to take shape. ☺

# Breaking Down Bratton

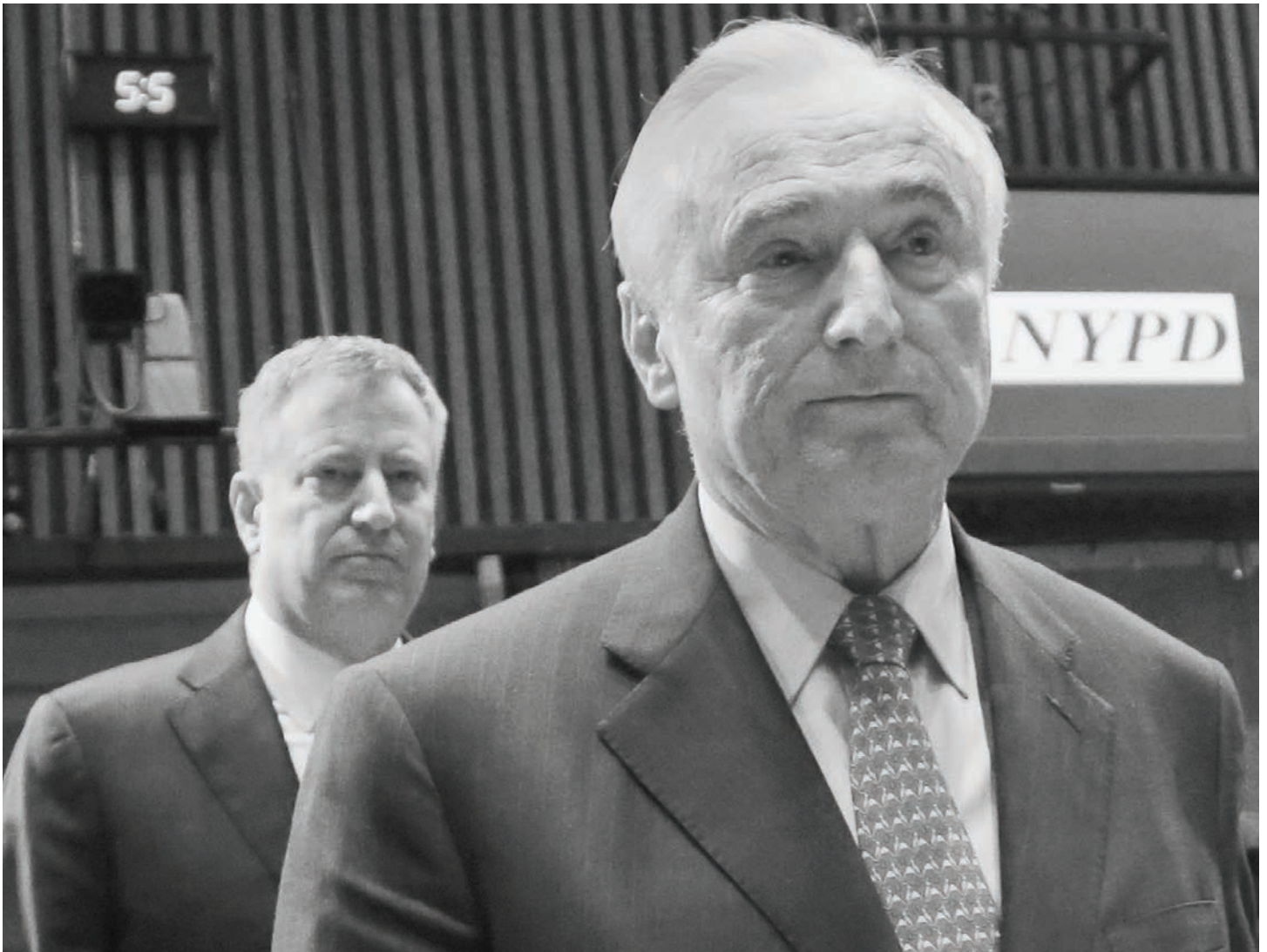
## The liberal advocacy of authoritarian policing

**ashoka jegroo**

**D**ESPITE ITS TOLERANT AND liberal reputation, New York City has almost always had a dark, bigoted, chauvinistic underbelly. Racists, homophobes, and crypto-fascists of all kinds covertly roam our city lending support to its most authoritarian gang—the New York City Police Department.

The leader of this gang, William “Bill” Bratton, was recently named as the most powerful person in NYC by the *New York Observer*. Up from being placed as the seventh

most powerful person in NYC last year, Bratton’s rise to power since becoming commissioner is truly a remarkable event to behold. Rather than his usual base of centrist and right-wing authoritarians and bigots making him into the most powerful man in the city, it was so-called progressives who paved the way for Bratton’s blue coup. Of course, this has all been to the detriment of those fighting to end the NYPD’s long-standing war against poor people, communities of color, and other marginalized groups. But it is precisely these fighters, the people the *New York Post* refers to as





“cop-bashers,” that will pave the way for the Bratton regime’s eventual decline.

## **Top Cop Becomes Top Cat**

BEFORE BILL DE BLASIO became mayor, Bratton had already worked in the NYC, Los Angeles, and Boston police departments. Unsurprisingly, Bratton had helped a fellow authoritarian, former mayor Rudy Giuliani, implement the now-infamous Broken Windows theory of policing.

In typical totalitarian fashion, Bratton’s idea of Broken Windows theory championed the hyper-policing of “quality of life” crimes as a good way to prevent larger, more violent crimes from happening. What it really did was set up an oppressive police regime where people of color could be harassed or locked up for almost anything. This regime remained in place after Bratton left New York and welcomed him back upon his return. Local media outlets fawned on Bratton everywhere he went, praising him as a practical reformer who knew how to improve community relations with police.

By the time Mayor de Blasio was considering him for NYPD Commissioner, Bratton had become a minor celebrity. De Blasio, on the other hand, needed to convince New York authoritarians that he had some “law-and-order” street-cred. Hiring Bratton, widely regarded as a “cop’s cop,” helped de Blasio retain the loyalty of the NYPD rank-and-file as well as helped de Blasio convince his critics that he was tough on crime.

The recent outburst of anti-police protests in New York threatened to topple Bratton and Broken Windows’ totalitarian rule until two police officers were shot in Brooklyn. From that point, the mayor and other progressive politicians did everything they could to woo the police into not hating them. They began serving the police rather than the other way around.

De Blasio, facing widespread insubordination from police, began to heavily depend on Bratton to get back into the good graces of the NYPD. De Blasio stopped criticizing police and stepped up his criticism of #BlackLivesMatter protests. He also made sure to provide the NYPD with new gear as a gesture of gratitude. Nowadays, de Blasio is quick to condemn protesters for allegedly punching armed, aggressive cops during protests on 14 April but has not said one word of condemnation of police assaulting protesters filming an arrest.

Progressive politicians in the New York City Council also allowed Bratton to step into the position he is now in. People like Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Jumaane Williams, after initially supporting the #BlackLivesMatter protests, went on to distance themselves from the protests. Now, these speakers are the main people pushing for 1,000 more cops to

do better “community policing.”

Rather than preventing the rise of authoritarianism and racist policing, it has been the liberals who have allowed the head of the NYPD to become the most powerful person in the city and to maintain an oppressive and illiberal model of policing. When fascism finally comes to NYC, it will be supported by Democrats and will be concerned with “quality of life.”

## **Breaking Broken Windows**

IT IS ULTIMATELY UP to fascism’s usual enemies such as anti-racists, leftists, radicals, and anti-police activists to create a path for Bratton’s decline. Do not be fooled by the City Council’s recent proposal to decriminalize various “quality of life” crimes and de Blasio’s hesitancy to approve the hiring 1000 new cops. This is only a pseudo-opposition which serves to conceal a real, underlying unity. The opposition to expanding police power exhibited by these alleged progressives is only political theater.

De Blasio has counteracted the Council’s proposal to decriminalize many “quality of life” crimes by offering his full support of Bratton and Broken Windows policing. “I want to emphasize my vision of quality-of-life policing and my vision related to ‘broken windows’ strategy is the same as (Police) Commissioner Bratton’s,” de Blasio said recently.

The City Council, led by Speaker Mark-Viverito, are more than willing to give Bratton the 1000 cops that de Blasio seems so hesitant about. According to the *New York Post*, Bratton even told the mayor himself that even if he doesn’t approve of the 1000 new cops, the City Council would. Ultimately, ending Bratton and Broken Windows’ totalitarian regime depends on grassroots movements picking up steam once again and challenging police power very openly and publicly. Bratton and Broken Windows must be ground between the millstones of liberal political theatrics and the real demands of the people.

Bratton and the police need to be forced to accept the abolition of Broken Windows as the only way to maintain the peace. Activists and radicals need to mobilize people this spring and summer in order to make it clear that people will no longer accept the false promises of liberal politicians and the perpetual harassment and violence of the police. The upcoming marches against the 1000 new cops, #BlackLivesMatter protests, and marches to disarm the NYPD have the potential to accomplish these duties.

If they get people to come out in large numbers and if they get people to make life difficult for Bratton, the police, and their liberal supporters, we may finally see Bratton’s regime come to an end. Otherwise, be prepared for more of Bratton’s trademark liberal-friendly, racist, authoritarian policing. 🇺🇸

# Pushing Back Against the Landlords

## Low-income residents and the struggle for legal counsel

**paul mcbreen**

HOMELESSNESS IN NEW YORK City is overwhelmingly caused by evictions, and on any given night, there are 58,000 people in homeless shelters, 30,000 of them being children. There were over 25,000 evictions last year, and over half of them were tenants in rent-stabilized housing. Many tenants walk away from litigation feeling intimidated and overwhelmed by the process when, all along, many of the evictions are preventable. The system is stacked in favor of landlords despite New York being known as a “tenant friendly city.” Ninety percent of landlords are represented by attorneys, while ninety percent of tenants are not. These statistics were provided recently by Mark Levine, a New York City Council member. He was joined by Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President, council members Vanessa Gibson and Helen Rosenthal, and Letitia James, the NYC Public Advocate, at a housing meeting on 21 April, at Goddard Riverside Center. James added, “Greed over need: it’s just not right!”

Finally, a turning point is near. In June, the New York City Council will vote on an amendment to the city’s administrative code (Title 27) which aims to provide legal counsel for low income tenants who are subject to eviction, ejectment, or foreclosure proceedings. This amendment (called Int. 214 for short) will create a new political position—a Civil Justice Coordinator who “shall be responsible for establishing and implementing a program for the provision of legal services for eligible individuals with respect to covered proceedings.” Over forty council members are on board,





but more are needed to send a unified message—this is long overdue and overwhelmingly supported by the council. This action is not an electoral matter, but simply an amendment to the administrative code, requiring a majority of city council members to support it. The CUNY Graduate Center community can help by contacting city council representatives with a message—support Int. 214, the Right to Counsel (providing attorneys/legal representation for low-income residents).

• • •

I AM A GRADUATE of the CUNY Graduate Center (Classics, 2012) and also a tenant in rent-stabilized housing. In my current building, I have witnessed the sad phenomenon of a landlord's power over a tenant—immigrants afraid of going to court who simply leave when threatened, less-educated or under-confident people who take paltry buyouts from rent-stabilized units not knowledgeable of their rights to stay, many units lost to rent-stabilization and now market rate rentals, and frivolous legal proceedings designed to harass rent-stabilized tenants (I have experienced the last one myself).

I live in a building that is currently undergoing a vast renovation project and the results have been disheartening. The Parc Lincoln Hotel was built in 1929 on 75<sup>th</sup> Street, near Amsterdam. It is officially designated at a Class B Hotel, SRO. SRO stands for Single Resident Occupancy. This type

of extremely modest housing was once very common in the city, especially on the Upper West Side, providing reasonably-priced housing to generations of workers, students, and artists. Now, a handful of SROs remain, largely rented to government agencies for transitional housing programs for former convicted persons and persons out of rehabilitation of various sorts. An owner of such a building, especially on the Upper West Side, cannot help but be motivated by the heady lure of real estate prices in Manhattan. Why keep low-paying grunts like me in tiny units when the units can be vacated, combined, and renovated into sporty one-bedrooms with



a great view? I live on the eleventh floor and have an excellent view of the San Remo towers, located on Central Park West. Each floor of the building, at full occupancy, once housed over twenty residents. My floor is now occupied by five tenants, the rent-stabilized holdouts. Most of the rooms are now construction sites, billowing with dust and debris.

Mark Levine assured the assembled group that New York will make an investment by passing this important amendment, which will offset the \$38,000 USD yearly cost of providing a homeless family with shelter. He added that homeless people make use of emergency rooms at hospitals for routine care, and transportation must be provided for children in homeless shelters so that they may attend school. Hopefully, forty million dollars can be secured to provide attorneys and paralegals to represent low and middle-income tenants in housing court.

I know how important rent-stabilization is. I could not afford my student loan payments, credit payments, and market-rate rent simultaneously without rent-stabilization. This blessing has kept me in my home, however modest, of nearly eighteen years. The space is approximately twelve by fourteen feet, with no bathroom in the unit itself. The bathroom was the archaic “water closet” located on the hallway and shared by several tenants. Each floor had a “water closet” available to tenants with no bathroom in their living units. Now, only my floor, out of sixteen total, has a shared bathroom, and only because I have refused to leave my tiny living space. The plan to connect my room with the adjoining room is obvious, it was once connected and will easily be reconnected after I leave, creating a one-bedroom to be rented for over two grand a month.

Is New York no longer a place for people like me, a graduate trying earnestly to pay off my student loan? I take advantage of my low rent by trying to pay extra each month, so that I don't have to perpetually payback the principal and the interest on my student loan. My students at Hostos Community College often present me with their housing court papers, asking to be excused for missing multiple classes. Two students admitted to me that they were officially homeless. I wonder how many others suffer in shame, never willing to admit to their teachers that they are on the brink of eviction and utter desperation.

City Council members who have not yet lent their names to this amendment must be encouraged to do so. Graduate Center faculty and students who teach can use this opportunity to engage students in something that truly affects the majority of New Yorkers by encouraging them to contact their representatives to see that Int. 214 passes. ☺

For more information, people can visit the Right to Counsel at <http://www.righttocounselnyc.org>.

# Worker Cooperatives

## An alternative for youth

**alexander kolokotronis**

**W**ORKER COOPERATIVES ARE RISING, and youth are increasingly becoming a part of their success. In the United States youth involvement in cooperativism is taking on two forms—multi-chapter college-campus groups with strong connections to the broader cooperative movement, and youth themselves starting non-university based cooperatives.

### **Campus Student Groups—SODA and Aynah**

WITH THE FORMER, ONE can immediately identify two groups—Student Organization for Democratic Alternatives (SODA) at CUNY, and Aynah in the Midwest. SODA currently has two official chapters at Queens College and Hunter College. Aynah has three chapters—Earlham College, Luther College, and St. Olaf College. While the two groups differ in a number of ways, they're similar in their heavy connection to off-campus cooperative movements and activities.

Registered as a non-profit in 2012, Aynah has connected students to cooperatives in the global South. This has included raising funds for a community center in La Ribera, Costa Rica, and connecting to a textile worker cooperative in Cruz del Sur, Argentina. Aynah has also fostered connections with agricultural cooperatives in Ethiopia, and has been integral to the success of multiple cooperatives there, helping to raise funds and awareness.

Aynah is also connected to cooperatives in the United States. Recently, Aynah took a spring break trip to Greensboro, North Carolina, to explore the cooperative movement there. In the process, the trip aimed at building national solidarity as well.

Founded in April 2014, SODA is a founding member of the NYC Worker Cooperative Coalition, and the sole student group in the coalition. In June 2014, the NYC Worker Cooperative Coalition successfully pushed for the historic \$1.2 million USD Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative. Allocated by the City Council, New York City set precedent for municipal investment in cooperative development.

SODA is also the student affiliate of the NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives—the business association of worker cooperatives in the New York metropolitan area. Currently, SODA is in the midst of a campaign to bring participatory budgeting to Queens College. Thus far, the campaign has been met with success, as Queens College's dominant student political party has since pledged to allocate ten percent of the student government budget through participatory budgeting. Beyond its educational function and on-campus political activism, SODA also strives to connect students to job opportunities in worker cooperative development as well as in worker-ownership.

### **KALUK Marketing Services—Brooklyn, New York**

THE BRIGHTEST SPOT OF youth involvement in worker cooperatives might be the very fact that youth themselves are starting cooperatives. With its acronym deriving from the first name of each of its founding worker-owners, KALUK Guerilla Marketing Services is a guerrilla marketing worker cooperative. As noted on KALUK's website, guerrilla marketing consists of things “such as targeted promotions in public places, street giveaways of products, public relations stunts, flash-mob presentations, or any unconventional marketing intended to get results and create a memorable experience.”

Based in Red Hook, Brooklyn, KALUK's development has included the help of Center for Family and Good Shepherd Services. Founded with five members, KALUK has since expanded into double-digit membership. Two of the founding members, Aida Pedroza and Luis Fernandez, are twenty years old and currently study at CUNY.

In an interview with *Fast Company*, Fernandez spoke of KALUK community outlook, “We all pretty much come from Red Hook so our main priority is to help the community here.” Pedroza also states, “People should know that you don't have to wait until your thirties to think about a career or feel like you have to be older to be successful. We're freshman in college right now and we're already starting—no, making—our dream jobs.”



## **Finca Mirasol Cooperative—Northfield, Minnesota**

IN NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA—A TOWN with a population of twenty-thousand—a sustainable agriculture worker cooperative has formed. Launched in December 2014, Finca Mirasol Cooperative includes ten worker-owners. All ten are aged twenty or below.

Finca Mirasol is also notable for its explicit anti-capitalist orientation. In an interview I conducted with worker-owner Cliff Martin, he remarked, “Worker co-ops are a direct assault on capitalism. We started our co-op for three reasons: (1) We love the land, will protect it, and are trying to restore it through our practices, (2) We are deeply hurt by capitalism and are excited to be a part of real systemic solutions that can have impact beyond our lives (3) We need to make money in order to survive in this political economy and to fund our other organizing.” Martin went on to state that “Co-ops are about ownership and control, who benefits and who decides, the structure of power within an institution. That’s the first point that we must leverage in order to create a new systemic logic of economics. Workplace democracy begins to dismantle the hierarchy that maintains the ownership of capital and structure of privilege.”

Martin also spoke of the internal dynamics of a worker cooperative, and, for that matter, any organization that strives to structure itself along non-hierarchical lines. When asked how he saw himself in relation to his fellow worker-owners, Martin stated that he viewed such partnerships in two specific ways. “The first is that of being total equals and peers. There is no hierarchy and in making decisions together, you have to respect all involved. The second is that of a tension of leadership. I want the other members of my crew to take more responsibility and leadership in tasks and management that I currently have to do. We have tools in place and are moving in that direction thankfully. Without developing worksheets of tasks/roles it would be much harder though.”

This remark by Martin may remind one of Jo Freeman’s essay, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” In it, Freeman states, “For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that formalization of a structure of a group will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn’t. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and make

available some means of attacking it if the people involved are not at least responsible to the needs of the group at large. ‘Structurelessness’ is organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one.”

One may find parallels between Martin’s statement and Freeman’s analysis. Martin hints at the need to formalize tasks and management. The tyranny of structurelessness can take on the double-edged sword of one person or one group of people shouldering the burden of labor, and producing an informal but quite apparent hierarchy. For those aiming to build non-hierarchical structures, neither are acceptable. Counter to what many may think, however, formalization—institutionalization—is a step in the right direction.

Problems such as these arise for any anti-capitalist group. Yet, when asked to compare with his other job experiences, Martin states there is “no comparison; Co-op is better hands down. We need to live in a world, in institutions, that daily

remind of us of our inherent dignity and power as people, as individuals, and as community. Working under a person is not only degrading to the employee but reinforces the idea that people can be separate, that worth and value is based on status and wealth, in the head of the employer. Neither person benefits in this arrangement, it disconnects us from our connected selves and further embeds harmful ideas of powerlessness and disconnection.”

In emphasizing connection as well as the dynamic between individual and community, it is no surprise that Martin sees himself as part of a larger movement. More than this, though, Martin recognizes the contradictions inherent in striving to be a single operating cooperative within a capitalist market economy. He states, “Together, as a movement, we are strong, we have the strength necessary to make big changes in this political economic system. As single co-ops, we are nothing but small competing businesses in the death cycle of growth-worshipping capitalism.”

## **Victory? Only If We Fight for It**


JUST AS “COOPERATIVES” GENERALLY mean different things to different people, the same applies to youth. Nonetheless, there are exciting possibilities for forming a youth movement that aims to transcend capitalism. The seeds for this are there, and in the last two to three years we’ve seen

“Workplace democracy  
begins to dismantle the  
hierarchy that maintains  
the ownership of capital  
and structure of privilege.”

promising growth. Beyond the above mentioned campus student groups and worker cooperatives, it is necessary to note the USA Cooperative Youth Council (USACYC).

Founded in January 2012, USACYC “facilitates & strengthens the engagement & influence of youth in national & international cooperative movements through participation, opportunity, & identity.” Because of USACYC, organizations such as Aynah, SODA, and Finca Mirasol Cooperative have made contact with each other, and are striving to build a truly nationwide youth cooperative movement. The focus is not simply worker cooperatives, but on a whole panoply of alternative institutions. One key objective is to

foster cross-sectoral alliances as well as cooperative production and supply chains.

In keeping with the goal of building a powerful movement, Cliff Martin states, “it is in the experience of togetherness, in reliance on the other, that we begin to discover our tendency towards real community, towards gifts, towards the world that we can feel in our hearts. That’s what we have the chance to experience in cooperatives. Young people in cooperatives are the critical next step of a growing democratizing movement that will turn the tables, flip the system, [and] maybe even win. Can you imagine victory? We can. But only if we fight for it.” 



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# Science and Superstition

## Why seeing should not be believing

**greg olmschenk**

IN THE 1940S, PSYCHOLOGIST B.F. Skinner placed pigeons into a box with a mechanism that would reward them with food when they pecked a button. As expected, the pigeons quickly learnt to continually hit this button. Next, pigeons were placed in a box and were randomly rewarded regardless of what they did. Something very curious happened in these boxes—the pigeons developed superstition. If one of these pigeons happened to turn to the left when food was dispensed, it would get the idea that it was turning to the left which rewarded it. It started turning to the left more often, and since the food was dispensed randomly this meant it would be more likely that it was repeating this action again the next time food was dispensed, reinforcing its belief. Eventually the bird was spinning in circles expecting its rituals to be rewarded.

Humans develop superstitions the same way as Skinner's pigeons did. Once something happens, we begin to assign causes to it. This is a perfectly reasonable thing to do. If one action results in food while another results in pain, it's obvious that we should repeat one and avoid the other. Such pattern recognition allowed our ancestors to survive in the world. Perhaps this explains finding real patterns, but why do we trick ourselves into believing something that's not true? Imagine for a moment that you're one of our distant ancestors living in the African savanna. You hear a rustle in the bush. It might be a lion ready to pounce, but then again, it might just be the wind. If you chose to move away and it was just the wind, you unnecessarily expend a bit of energy, but not much else. If you chose to stay and it was a lion, your incautious genes are no longer in the gene pool. The remaining genes are biased toward seeing the lion even if there isn't one there. We see patterns even where none exist.

Eye witness testimony is regarded, in many circles, as the best possible form of evidence. People are offended if you suggest that what they remember seeing isn't what really happened. "I know what I saw" is the usual response. But do they really know? Consider optical illusions. A clever drawing can completely baffle your senses and make you see things that aren't really there. Make you believe something

that's not true. Even when you realize from the start that it's only an illusion, it's difficult to penetrate the trickery to see the truth behind it. Unfortunately, optical illusions don't only crop up in expected places like books or magic shows. Nature constantly dishes them out in the most unforeseen places. The moon near the horizon appears much larger than it does when it's overhead, but if you compare it to the size of your thumb at arm's length, it's the same in both cases. It only looks different because our brains are wired to see perspective and it misfires when trying to add perspective between the moon—which can be considered at visual infinity—and other objects "close" to it on the horizon. If our brains can be fooled even when we know it's an illusion and we're awash in illusions we don't know about, how much value should we really place on claims of what people have seen?

It gets worse. The instant we see something our mind begins altering what we saw. Details of a memory that are deemed unimportant by our unconscious mind are thrown away. Others are embellished because of their perceived importance. Some that never existed are added simply because it would make sense for them to have existed. Accounts of someone reading a letter about or hearing of an event often enough to such an extent that they remember actually being at the event are quite common. It's only when records of their absence arise that the person knows they've fooled themselves.

The evidence for the evolution of self-deception, the ease with which we have minor hallucinations, and belief as a by-product of other brain functions all further support one idea—humans are not good data taking devices. To combat this, we need ways of understanding the world which don't rely solely on our individual perception. Too often, we simply accept what we wish to be true.

Nearly a fourth of the population of the developed world claim to believe in astrology. This egotistic view makes humans the center of the universe, with the movements of planets signifying menial developments in people's personal lives. The astrology used today was developed by the philosopher Ptolemy in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, when the Sun was

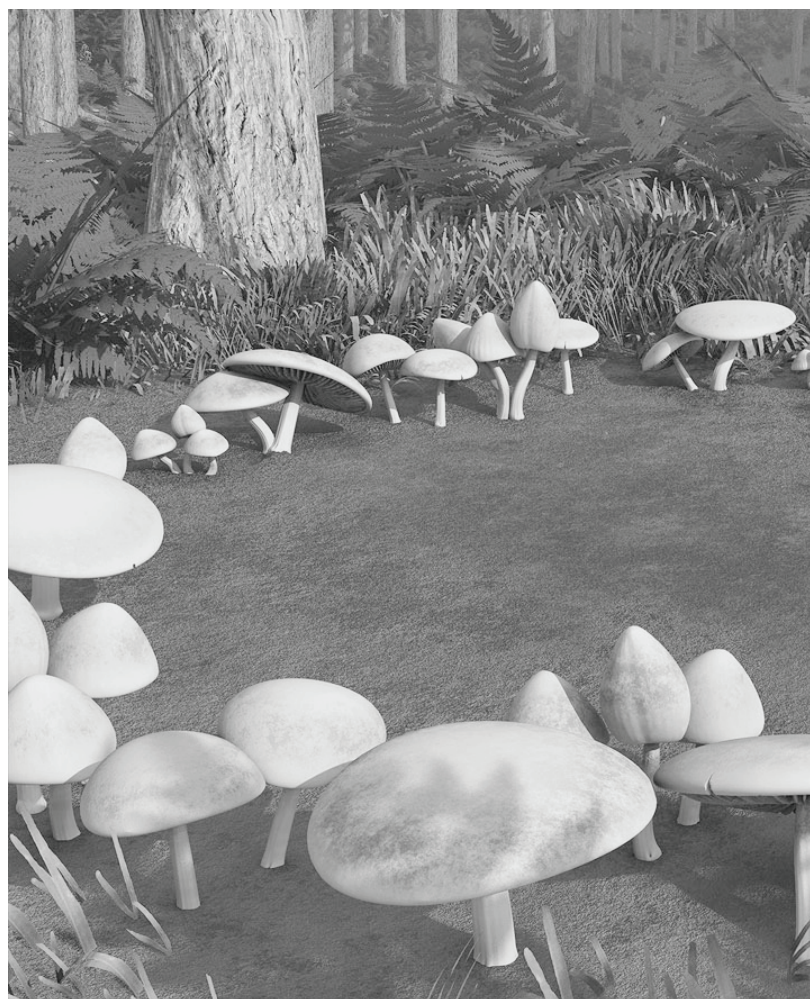
thought to orbit the Earth and the lights in the sky could be nothing other than gods. Before the development of the scientific method, it's easy to see why the heavens were thought to directly influence people on Earth. As the patterns of the stars migrated during the year the weather changed in accord. Whatever was going on in the night sky seemed to have a great impact on the climate. However, even with the discovery of heliocentrism, a shift in the Earth's tilt relative to the zodiac in the millennia since its development, and countless experiments debunking this form of pseudo-science, astrology has changed very little since Ptolemy's time. Despite the evidence against it, astrology columns can still be found in nearly every newspaper today while nearly none have a fundamental science column.

Then again, if beliefs like astrology are just harmless fun, why ruin them? For example, fairy rings are large, nearly perfect circles of mushrooms that seem to suddenly appear overnight. The explanation originally attributed to them was that they were made to grow by fairies which used the mushrooms as chairs when they gathered. It was hard to find other reasons for such an extraordinary phenomenon. That is, until it was learned that each of the mushrooms was not an independent entity. Instead, a single mushroom spore in the ground would reach its growing tendrils out in all directions, and only when the climate conditions were right would all the mushrooms grow up simultaneously, equidistant from the spore. But this knowledge isn't necessary for the average person. So why extinguish the belief that the rings were caused by fairies? Set aside the fact that the intricate biology and chemistry of the mushrooms is arguably far more interesting and magical than fairies inexplicably growing them. Set aside too the fact that discovering the truth of this process opens an array of new beautiful mysteries to be wondered at. Even without these, practicing beliefs without evidence is not harmless fun. Superstition and pseudo-science are downright dangerous.

It was once believed that epilepsy was caused by possession of evil spirits and exorcisms were the cure. Bloodletting was used as a remedy for everything from headaches to pneumonia. Lobotomies were conducted to fix mental problems. Storms and gales were caused by witches who were promptly burned to death. Only by rigorous observation did we discover the now accepted meteorological understanding of the atmosphere. Only through extensive experimentation did we develop the germ theory of disease, create vaccines, and begin combating viruses worldwide. Through these advances, the average child in the developed world today has a much better chance of surviving than did children of kings only a few centuries ago.

Yet, it's not the disuse and ignorance of medical findings that is the greatest threat from superstition and pseudo-

science. It is our willingness to believe without evidence, combined with the growing power that technology affords us, which is the problem. Science has led to unparalleled abilities to enrich lives, but also to destroy them. Nuclear and biological weapons, and technologies which alter the environment threaten us on a global scale. This doesn't mean we should throw out science—the findings of science have saved far more lives than have been lost in all the wars in history. The dangerous products only make the need to



understand science all the more important. Science sculpts nearly every aspect of our modern world, and, in a democracy, can people intelligently vote if they don't understand the underlying concepts? It's not that everyone needs to become a professional scientist. It simply means that people should at least know how to approach a new idea scientifically. They need to know how to construct a reasoned argument and identify fallacious ones. Being ignorant about a specific topic in itself is not a bad thing. The problem is when a person is ignorant, but believes they aren't.

What really is the difference between science and superstition? Isn't the switch from superstition to science just a switch in which belief to follow? The confidence in science does not come from an unerring faith that it is the



correct method. It comes solely from its ability to predict and explain the world. If another method of thinking arose which gave better results, then it would be the one to follow instead. Science does not purport to have all the answers. It not only recognizes that it can make mistakes, it thrives on them. It constantly develops new hypotheses and disproves as many old ones as possible. Unlike nearly all other systems of thought, it rewards most those who show that the deepest held convictions are wrong. Non-scientific approaches

experiment which can be reproduced with the same results. If a reproduction of an experiment doesn't yield the same result, science wants to know why. Pseudo-science, on the other hand, relies on situations that are very difficult to reproduce, results that are hard to quantify, and is described in ways that are designed to make it immune to the possibility of disproof. Pseudo-science tells us what we wish to be true, rather than what exists in reality. It provides easy and tempting explanations. Given its lure, it's entirely understandable why people accept pseudo-science.

By contrast, many find science to be arrogant. They see the scientific community as believing they know everything, instantly dismissing anything that doesn't fit in to their own way of thinking. While scientists are certainly well aware of the gaps in their knowledge, how they handle unscientific claims often supports the view that science is arrogant. Frequently, whether purposely or accidentally, scientists assume a condescending tone when taking on a claim presented to them. Often it's because they've worked over the same claim many times before with people unwilling to accept the criticism presented by the scientist. Yet, this kind of approach to such claims only isolates the scientists and promotes a view of them as being unaccepting of ideas that fall outside their own "doctrine".

In reality, science must be open to every possibility, no matter how outlandish it might seem. Yet, it must also demand the most stringent evidence. This seemingly contradictory set of views must go hand-in-hand for civilizations to progress. Allow extraordinary claims to be accepted without extraordinary evidence, and you'll fall into the ploys of superstition and pseudo-science, relinquishing your future to the charlatans who have duped you. If instead you are completely unaccepting of any new idea, you'll be left in the dust as everything else around you advances into a brighter future. Quantum physics—our understanding of which is required for the modern computer—makes predictions that seem completely preposterous in our ordinary understanding of the world, but today countless experiments have shown these to be valid. Both skepticism and open-mindedness are required.

The method of science may not always be easy. It may challenge beloved beliefs. It may tell us things about ourselves that we wish weren't true. Science is far from perfect, but it's the best we've got. Though it can be abused and misused, if we properly advance and employ science, there is no greater power to improve the world. ☸

to understanding the world almost never admit to not knowing everything, that their beliefs might be wrong, or actively works towards resolving their ignorance. While the purveyors of pseudo-science hold up even the vaguest of predictions coming true as evidence of their craft, science sends spacecraft hundreds of millions of miles and misses its planned target trajectory by only a few miles. It can predict a solar eclipse to the second more than a century in advance. Given the number of people who will believe a pseudo-science due to only the vaguest and untestable predictions, imagine how many would follow one if it was able to give the same kind of accuracy demonstrated by science.

Science must clearly define its predictions, give the ways in which a hypothesis may be falsified, and present an



# On Beauty and Being Boring

## The art of Alma Thomas

► *Alma Thomas: Moving Heaven & Earth, Paintings and Works on Paper, 1958-1978.* Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 100 Eleventh Ave

**clay matlin**

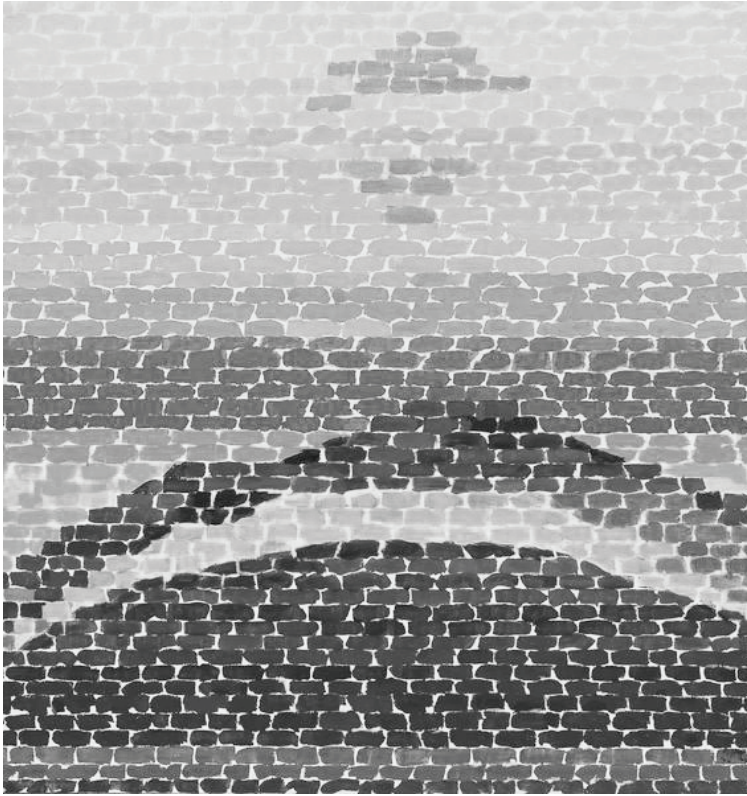
WHEN ONE THINKS OF Alma Thomas now, if one does, one thinks of her acrylic, brightly-colored abstract paintings from the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is not meant as a slight to Thomas, who died in 1978 a fairly famous artist—she was the first Black woman to have a solo show at the Whitney—but has since moved into the annals of the second tier. Thomas had the misfortune of being a Black-woman-artist in a White-male-dominated art world. She became famous when Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis became much more famous. If Joan Mitchell can't get her due credit, what hope is there for someone like Thomas? Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, though, is in the business of re-establishing Thomas as a major artist. Or maybe as a major source of art investment, as most if not all of the works in *Alma Thomas: Moving Heaven & Earth, Paintings and Works on Paper, 1958-1978* are owned by the gallery. I do not want to cast aspersions though. Galleries have the right to make money and support whomever they choose and overall *Moving Heaven & Earth* is a well-curated, if uneven, show. This is because Thomas herself was a very good but uneven painter who finally really discovered herself as an artist in the last decade of her life.

Born in 1891, Thomas was the first Howard University graduate to receive a degree in fine arts. For most of her adult life she supported herself as an art teacher in the Washington, DC school district, it was only when she retired in 1960 that she was able to devote herself fully to art-making. As such, the most productive time of her life was her last eighteen years. The daughter of a dressmaker, the role of craft and textiles is evident in her paintings, and one can chart beginning (1960-1968), middle (1968-1972), and late (1973-1978) career moments in Thomas' short but impressive production. Thomas' paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s are not nearly as successful as what, for all intents and purposes, was her mid-career work from 1968-1972, when she discovered her signature style of short, stubby brushstrokes and brightly colored vertical and horizontal bands or concentric circles. The early period paintings, while interesting, are rougher, more searching—she can be seen working her way towards her defining style. The

paintings from 1976-1978, on the other hand, are a fascinating study of an artist in transition. The verticality that defined her middle period work—with its rigid separation of color and compact brushwork—was being replaced by a more monochromatic palette and an abandonment of color spectrum theory. The brushstrokes are looser. They zigzag and mark the canvas less rigidly. The effect is of more horizontality than verticality, like a stone walkway rather than a hanging textile.

Consequently, the success of *Moving Heaven & Earth* is that one is able to see this evolution, to understand the path Thomas took as she moved away from a general abstraction that picked up on the fading relevance of abstract expressionism to a distinctive style that did not deny her commitment to abstract painting, but saw her fusing it more successfully with what she really had always been, a painter of landscapes. Thomas was interested in the world around her, the life of flowers, the shapes of clouds, how trees move in the breeze. These were really the things she painted. She did not make grand pronouncements or invest in metaphysical longings. That she worked primarily in abstraction means little. She was not, though she was painting at the same time and was influenced by them, a member of the Washington Color School. The effect that Louis, Noland, and Gene Davis desired and achieved by staining their unprimed canvasses with Magna pigment or acrylic paint, fulfilling Clement Greenberg's fantasies of flatness, the creation of post-painterly abstraction, was not for Thomas. She primed her canvases and applied thick acrylic paint that left the canvas feeling full and alive. The colors pop off from rather than exist within the confines of the stretched canvas. Paintings like *Approaching Storm at Sunset* and *Carnival of Autumn Leaves*, while abstract and painted with what the artist Jacob Kainen called Thomas' "short, brisk, uneven strokes of paint," are nonetheless exact depictions of their titles. The muted reds and oranges of both paintings leave little to the imagination. Their allusions do not get in the way. The same cannot be said of all her work. Paintings like 1970's *Apollo 12 "Splash Down"* show Thomas at her kitschy and Sunday-painter worst. For *Apollo 12*, Thomas's horizontal stripes of color conspire to create a rainbow-colored painting of what appears to be Apollo 12's reentry to Earth. It is a ridiculous painting, overly literal yet cloaked in some sort of vague abstraction that can neither commit to her abstract longings





nor fully give itself over to representation.

But I do not want to denigrate the dead for not producing endless masterpieces. There are enough excellent paintings in *Moving Heaven & Earth* to make the exhibition a real success. Even Thomas' missteps, like *Apollo 12* and her fairly dull acrylic and graphite works on paper from the early 1970s, come across as well-intentioned and inoffensive. The problem with Thomas, however, is that she was a fairly boring painter. She was a very good painter, and even produced some truly beautiful and exciting paintings, but for the most part the canvasses just sit on the wall. They often, to me, have the feeling more of decoration, something to hang in your den or over your credenza (as the Obamas did in the White House's family dining room). Thomas' work blends into the background. It is non-confrontational. If one were to have a Joan Mitchell in the dining room, it might be too much. The aggression and power would overwhelm the space.

There is no risk of that with Thomas. In some ways though, the boringness of her paintings makes them intriguing. They exist merely as paintings. There is nothing more to them. Art historians have tried to read politics into Thomas, attempting to locate some sort of political narrative in her "uneven strokes of paint." The claim has been made that simply by being a Black woman artist Thomas was engaging in a political act. This might be true. It is certainly an interesting position. She was not unengaged. Thomas helped found o's first avant-garde gallery space, The Barnett Aden Gallery, worked with Artists for CORE (Congress of Racial Equal-

ity), and as an arts educator worked to introduce young Black school students to modern art. But this does not make her political. To be engaged is not the same thing as being politically minded. Thomas was a member of the Black Arts movement in so far as she was Black and an artist. She was neither Faith Ringgold nor Betye Saar.

"I felt that Black people must look beyond dashikis and Afro hair dos for their identity," Thomas said. "There is a difference between the culture of Black Africa and that of Black Americans." Thomas did not deny the impact that traditional African art had had on modern art—really, who can?—But she also contended that "black art is a misnomer. There are black artists and they like all others draw from their experiences to produce artistic expressions. If this expression is not representational it is difficult or impossible to tell whether the artist is white or non-white." Whereas artists like Ringgold thought of themselves as Black artists and were "concerned with making truthful statements in [their] art and having it seen," Thomas' identity was first that of a painter and second that of "an American." Is this problematic? Maybe. I have always been of the opinion that Clive Bell was right when he wrote about those junior fascists, the Futurists, that to "associate art with politics is always a mistake." Bell was not claiming that political works of art lose their power or that they are not valuable, but they cease to be art as we (he?) understand it. The object still exists in the world, but its existence as art is no longer available to it. The meaning is fundamentally altered. The experience of it, the interaction with "significant form" that Bell craved is lost.

Thomas, whether she knew Bell's thought or not (I imagine she did, she had read art theory) was a follower of significant form, that particular way that lines and colors combine to "stir our aesthetic emotions." There is no place for politics in significant form, we are affected emotionally but are not emotionally riled. There is emotion, but not emotions. It seems that for Thomas, it was all color and line—that color and line if successful would subsume the artist's identity. There would be no more Black or White. It is a startlingly apolitical idea, especially when one considers the time of her most productive years. Yet it also makes sense. Thomas identified as an artist, an abstract painter in particular. She was also an old woman by that point, the fights of Black American youths were no longer fights she perhaps wished to or could fight. Maybe she thought that by virtue of the magic of color and line she could effect a different change, one that communicated through a language of abstraction and an appreciation of art. Thomas had much to say as a painter of landscapes, but she also chose not to say much more. Sometimes just painting beautiful and boring paintings can be enough. We cannot always ask more of people than they are willing to give. 🍷

# Invoking Stuart Hall

## Geographic negation and the legacy of racial capitalism

angela marie crumdy

THE “STUART HALL: GEOGRAPHIES of Resistance” conference, a two-day event, brought together an array of scholars, activists, and artists in honor of the late cultural theorist. A steady stream of people filled the William P. Kelly Skylight Room of the Graduate Center on 26 March in anticipation of the second presentation. This particular panel featured Katherine McKittrick of Queens University, with opening remarks by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and a response by Jacqueline Nassy Brown, both GC faculty. A somber picture of Hall from the cover of *Critical Dialogues* (1996) was featured prominently on two large projector screens facing the audience. Hall stood as a silent observer throughout the event but one whose legacy was rendered and extended through the voices of the panelists. What was to follow was an enlightening exploration of space, place, Blackness, and efforts to assert a geography that was never meant to be.

Following a student introduction, Gilmore took to the podium to recount some of her early memories of McKittrick, who, as a graduate student, was honing her already keen geographic sensibilities. Gilmore also talked about interviewing Stuart Hall in his Kilburn kitchen as he recounted how it is that he came to understand the already “made-ness” of a place. It is a commitment, or obsession rather, to understanding how to dismantle racial capitalism through theorizing space and place, much inspired by the work of Hall, which linked the three panelists together.

McKittrick began her talk, “I Learned a Lot Just by Looking at the Map: Stuart Hall’s Geographic Refusals,” by acknowledging the anxiety she felt when attempting to capture, in a short paper, the life and work of a man whose conceptual and analytical points of interest were far ranging and his subsequent impact immeasurable. To pursue this endeavor nonetheless, she located the work and ideas from both Stuart Hall and the general body of Black studies as products of the “ex-slave archipelago,” a term credited to Jamaican author and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter, that

is used to describe not only a physical space but one that entails “the experience of being both Black and human.” The archipelago is distinct from archipelagic theory, which does not account for the implicit limits of colonial and racialized geographic thinking. It is with these disciplinary shortcomings in mind that McKittrick insists that an ex-slave archipelago perspective “refuses positivist colonial, geographic formulations, and in this, engenders collaborative, interdisciplinary, rebellious Black knowledge and methodologies.” McKittrick continued her paper around the theme of creative space-making by those deemed place-less.

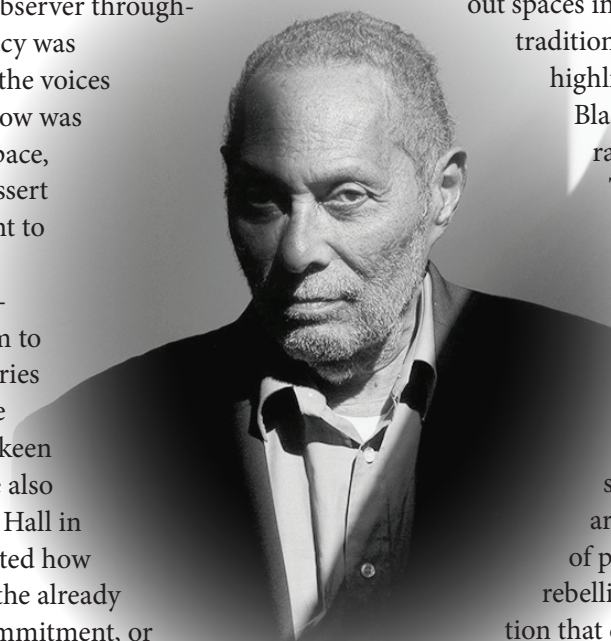
Geographic refusals or practices of resistance that carve out spaces in ways that are incompatible with

traditional, positivist cartographic practices highlight the myriad of creative ways that

Black people materialize their own geography in spite of their alienated realities.

The production of space through praxis is exemplified in mutinies, *quilombos*, maroon societies, carnival, music, drama, poetry, and theory, which are all “ways of rethinking what geography means analytically, practically, and politically.” These practices to humanize Blackness suggest that space and self-making from the site of the ex-slave archipelago is not predicated on claims of physical space per se, but rather through rebellious, collaborative knowledge production that questions “why geography as we know it thrives on racial violence and exclusion.”

Shifting the focus back to Stuart Hall, McKittrick suggested that through Hall’s life it is possible to identify a series of geographic refusals in his attempt to imagine a Black humanity in spite of the systematic exclusion of Blackness in space and place. A reading of autobiographical excerpts from *Critical Dialogues* (1996) demonstrates how even Hall’s early familial experiences living in Jamaica exemplify the fraught tensions of colonial life and lay the groundwork for his deep anti-colonial sentiment. Hall’s mother was a fair-skinned woman with plantation orientations and his father was a colored man from the lower middle class who, from Hall’s perspective, willingly submitted himself to an English world that despised and rejected him. Furthermore, Hall was





also the darkest skinned person in his family thereby making him an outsider from an early age. These early experiences set him on a path of radical thinking that he carried with him as a university student in England and later on in his career.

Brown picked up the discussion by first highlighting the sense of urgency in McKittrick's larger body of work, which suggests the possibility that we can "think ourselves out of this death obsessed morass" into a more liberated existence. If McKittrick urges us to rethink the plantation, then Brown also suggests that we should rethink the academy. She argued that the journal format in particular, was a site for geographic refusal where one can theorize Blackness and identity by using the platform of an unsuspecting audience to contest the rigidity of academic space. For example, Hall manages to weave in autobiographical details about his mother and being dubbed a "coolie baby" in his article "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates" (1985). This liberating nature of theory is also exemplified by Angela Davis' "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves"

(1971), the writing of which allowed Davis to both maintain her sanity and formulate a defense while awaiting trial. The written word then represents a site of liberation not only for Davis but also for the innumerable readers who will encounter her work. As a result, Davis' writing reaches across space in a manner that cannot be mapped using traditional means. Brown ended with a recitation of Audre Lorde's "Coal," evoking the expansive sense of words in which speaking one's Blackness is to assert one's own sense of place.

What other sites of geographic refusals are available? I offer that the panel was itself an act of geographic refusal. Throughout the talk, the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration was emphasized by the fact that the panelists were trained in either geography or anthropology. Furthermore, throughout the program, there was an outpouring of references to a diverse set of Black scholar interlocutors, including Sylvia Wynter, Clyde Woods, Richard Iton, Paul Gilroy, and Houston A. Baker Jr., among many others. The panel itself was a demonstration of how geographies of resistance are not only something to be passively observed but collaboratively made. Ashé. 🌟

MIND GAMES ANSWERS

Check out the puzzle column on our Back Page.

Thru 18 L2). For all other times, there are multiple possibilities and thus Patrick will need more information to be able to infer the answer. The first statement made by Susan implies that the day is not Tue or Thu (otherwise she could not have been certain that Patrick does not know the answer since the time could have been 10 or 18). Eliminate the Tue and Thu classes from the schedule and note that in the updated possibilities, time 14 appears only in Mon 14 L4. The second statement implies that Mon 14 L4 is not the answer (otherwise Patrick would be able to infer the answer at this stage). Eliminate Mon 14 L4 from the schedule and note that the location L4 is the sole location which appears in only one possibility, i.e. Fri 8 L4. Furthermore, the third statement reveals that after eliminating Mon 14 L4, Emma was able to infer the answer. Therefore, one can conclude that the answer is Fri 8 L4. 🌟

Similarly in numbers between 200 and 299, the only such number is 233. The count is incremented to 3. In numbers between 300 and 333, the leftmost digit is 3. So we need at least one more 3 in either of the remaining positions to obtain another number with at least two occurrences of 3. There are two possible templates: 33X and 3X3 where X can be replaced with digits 0, 1, 2, and 3. This brings the total count up to 11 (3 + 4 + 4 = 11). But 333 is counted twice since it fits both templates. Therefore we need to subtract 11 by one to get the correct answer which is 10. To recap, there are 10 numbers from 33 to 333 which contain at least two occurrences of 3. These numbers are 33, 133, 233, 303, 313, 323, 330, 331, 332, 333. **#3: Find the Class** NOTE THAT PATRICK CAN find the answer at once if the time is 10 or 18 since each of these times appears only once in the schedule (Tue 10 L4, and

SINCE THE RANGE OF numbers is inclusive, we need to count 33 as one such number. Note that in two-digit numbers larger than 33, there can be at most one occurrence of 3. So the count is one so far (for numbers between 33 and 99, inclusive). In numbers between 100 and 199, there is exactly one such number which is 133 (since the leftmost digit is 1 for all numbers in this range). The count is updated to 2.

#2: How Many?

- ▶ 1 - 2 - 34 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 = 0
- ▶ 1 - 23 - 4 - 56 - 7 + 89 = 0
- ▶ 1 + 2 - 34 - 56 + 78 + 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 + 7 + 8 - 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 - 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 - 3 + 4 + 56 - 78 + 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 + 3 - 4 + 5 - 6 + 7 - 8 - 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 + 3 - 45 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 + 3 + 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 + 8 - 9 = 0
- ▶ 12 + 34 - 56 - 7 + 8 + 9 = 0

#1: Insert Operations

# The Need for Something New Under the Sun

► Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. the Climate*. Simon & Schuster, 2015, 566 pages.

**erik wallenberg**

WHEN OVER 300,000 PEOPLE marched in the streets of Manhattan in the largest demonstration calling for action against climate change, Naomi Klein was there too. Not only marching, but racing across town to speak at multiple events, gathering support, winning new activists to the struggle, and arming those already involved with powerful arguments to do the same. Klein writes books for movements. Her first book, *No Logo*, was crucial reading for the global justice movement at the turn of the century. And who better to write on the world-wide disaster of climate change than the author of *The Shock Doctrine*. Her account of “disaster capitalism” was a bestseller in the era of an expanding US empire and a collapsing domestic economy that deftly wove history, economics, and political economy together to explain the then current moment. The book was a touchstone for the anti-war and Occupy movements. In 2009, Klein began research for what would become her latest work, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Completing a trilogy for the social movements of the past fifteen years, Klein gives us a picture of the disastrous world we face and those working to create a different path. *This Changes Everything* takes the reader through a history lesson of climate change and the activists who have been organizing to stop it. This is not just a book of history however. Klein spends an equal amount of time sifting through current policy debates and advocacy while arguing that humanity is going to have to reckon with our economic system in order to halt climate change.

Her premise is an internationalist one, a recognition that most climate change activists have embraced as central to this fight. Seeing the Earth as home, rather than the narrowing confines of a nation-state, Klein nonetheless recognizes the importance of people’s connection to the places they live at a local level. People often have strong emotional feeling for the landscapes where they spend their lives. More concretely, they recognize the centrality of maintaining clean water sources and generally healthy environments to sustain themselves and their community. In an interview with *The Independent* before the climate march, Klein said that she saw a “coming together of economic justice movements and

a new sort of kick-ass grassroots anti-extractivism movement. When people are fighting fracking” she continued, “or they’re fighting a big pipeline, generally they’re not driven by concerns about climate, they’re driven by a love of place. Often the protection of water is the primary motivation, as well as concerns about the health of their kids.” This is an argument that’s been made about the labor movements’ relationship to the environmental movement. Often, concern over health issues in a workplace is how union and non-union workers establish a relationship to the environmental movement. They are also often pulled into organizing that forces them to confront the ways in which capitalism functions and exploits both labor and nature in the name of profit.

Klein begins her book with a provocative chapter titled, “The Right is Right,” and by the end of it you know you’re in for a ride that is going to be illuminating and fearless in its truth telling. Klein pulls no punches. Her premise is fairly simple. The right-wing denies climate change and claims that it is used as a cover to institute radical changes in government spending and increased regulation, and ultimately for an end to capitalism. Meanwhile the liberals recognize climate change as a real problem but claim that through a series of reforms, capitalism and the planet can coexist. Klein is clear that capitalism is the target. The “This” in her title is not only climate change, it is also quite clearly capitalism.

*This Changes Everything* is full of the history of climate science and the movements that have been built to respond to the growing crisis. Klein writes to arm the movement with useful history. Her exposure of the false solutions promoted by what she dubs “sideshow billionaires”—those who promote “green products” and venture capital schemes to save the planet—are both damning and entertaining to read. Klein uses the failure of Richard Branson’s much touted “Earth Challenge,” in which the eccentric billionaire offered a prize of \$25 million USD for the creation of a carbon-neutral fuel. In addition, he pledged to plunge \$3 billion USD of his fortune into the development of a carbon-neutral fuel to clean up his polluting Virgin Atlantic airline. Branson’s prize, which has yet to be awarded, and his pledge, which has yet to be fulfilled, are clear examples of Klein’s argument that capitalism can’t solve the problem created by its very existence. Instead of cutting emissions, Branson’s airline business has expanded and in the process so too have its carbon emissions. Klein gives similar if less entertaining





examples of such arrogance, including Michael Bloomberg's financial market machinations to boost his returns on fossil fuel investments, and the nuclear energy start-up and geoengineering schemes of Bill Gates.

Gates isn't pioneering this field however. Plans for the deliberate modification of the climate date back at least to the Johnson administration and include many of the same mad scientists involved in Reagan's boondoggle "Star Wars" missile defense program. From the geoengineering fantasies of LBJ we end up at the Obama presidency. We learn that as chief scientist for BP, Steven Koonin convened a formal scientific gathering of geoengineers that issued a report on a decade-long project on climate modification, before becoming undersecretary for science in Obama's Department of Energy.

Klein moves beyond more recent history and shows how the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment argued for a "completely knowable and controllable earth." The Industrial Revolution severed human connection to natural processes which had everything to do with concentrating labor in large cities to create a regularly available pool of labor. Not only this, but Klein argues that this era also saw the creation of environmental sacrifice zones in the mining of coal and dumping of waste. As Klein notes, "these prices were seen as worth paying in exchange for coal's intoxicating promise of freedom from the physical world—a freedom

that unleashed industrial capitalism's full force to dominate both workers and other cultures." James Watt's steam engine and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* were unveiled in the same year. Capitalism and fossil fuel industrialization went hand-in-hand.

Today, a hyper extractive and deregulated capitalism is causing even worse disaster. Rushing to leave Alaska in time to avoid paying extra taxes to the state, a Shell oil rig runs aground. Cutting staff from five to one to save money, an oil transporting train derailed, exploding and killing dozens in Quebec. A similar derailment and spill occurred in the James River in Lynchburg, Virginia in April 2014, and since the book's publication another oil train derailed in West Virginia, spilling Bakkan crude oil into the Kanawha River. Disasters of this kind are likely to become only more common as deregulation and the search for greater profits continue. But Klein makes it clear that neoliberalism of this kind is but a particularly vicious form of capitalism. She groups the resistance to all of this under the name "Blockadia," the movement to stop fossil fuel extraction in fracking, tar sands, mining, and other related industry. She traces the origins of "Blockadia" back to the struggle led by Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria against oil spills and gas flaring by Shell Oil in the Niger delta.

*This Changes Everything* has been widely reviewed and given some confused interpretations. Rob Nixon, writing

in the *New York Times*, argues that Klein doesn't mean to indict capitalism per se, but that her "adversary is neoliberalism—the extreme capitalism that has birthed our era of extreme extraction. Klein is smart and pragmatic enough to shun the never-never land of capitalism's global overthrow," he writes. Meanwhile in the *New York Review of Books*, Elizabeth Kolbert characterizes Klein's view as simply a call for "degrowth," and claims that nobody can be won to less consumption in this world. Kolbert ignores Klein's bigger argument that there are particular sections of the economy that need to be shrunk while other non-polluting sections should be expanded greatly.


While liberals try to appropriate her, change her argument, and then claim that they all agree, many on the Left criticize her for not singling-out capitalism clearly enough. It may be the liberal response, à la Nixon, which in turn has led radicals to fear that Klein doesn't indict capitalism clearly enough (as if her subtitle is somehow unclear). If one reads Rob Nixon's review and accepts that Klein is merely talking about a particular form of capitalism as the problem, then it is understandable why some on the Left might be compelled to criticize the book. But if one actually reads *This Changes Everything*, it becomes apparent that Klein is calling for a revolution to end capitalism. The criticisms that have reigned down from some on the Left for not talking about socialism, Marxism, and revolutionary change are seriously misplaced. In fact, Klein's argument about the scale and substance of change needed is a radical one. The examples she gives as corollaries to the current fight against climate change are crucially connected to the economic system. Klein cites the movement for wages for housework and the civil rights movement as examples of the struggles that need to be waged. She goes further to suggest that the massive unionization organized during and after the Great Depression, and the subsequent government investment in public infrastructure are important precedents for change found in recent history.

Internationally, she holds up the anti-Apartheid struggle as a partial example before it capitulated on the economic front. Similarly, the anti-colonial struggles of the mid-twentieth century shook off the chains of political control only to find the economic chains still firmly in place. But her most useful example is the movement for the abolition of slavery that in fact was economic at its core. Fighting to end slavery was a battle against racism, and at the same time it was one to expropriate a wealthy and powerful ruling class of its capital. Klein notes that the estimated value of the enslaved at the time of emancipation in the United States works out to be about the same as the "value of carbon reserves that must be left in the ground worldwide" to stop run-away global climate change. The scale of the struggle against entrenched

capital is made plain.

What she doesn't do, and I would argue is perfectly valid and even a smart choice, is to talk about how that struggle played out. The long and bloody war to expropriate wealth was a revolution to end slave labor and institute a free labor system in the United States, and to finally and fully establish capitalist relations throughout the country. We need just such a revolution to institute a new system for organizing labor, one that is planned democratically, and able to take into account human and planetary needs. Klein quotes one of the most famous anti-colonialists, Franz Fanon. "What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth," writes Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He continues, "Humanity will have to address this question, no matter how devastating the consequences may be." Fanon is famed for arguing that the violence of colonialism makes a non-violent undoing of that system impossible. Regardless of the exact nature of this struggle against capitalism, Klein is clear that the lesson to draw is that "when major shifts in the economic balance of power take place, they are invariably the result of extraordinary levels of social mobilization."

Finally, people tend to turn away rather than confront this seemingly unstoppable collision between humanity and reality. But Klein is unshakable in her belief in humanity. "We have time and choices now," she asserts. Her call for a movement like others of the past reinforces the idea that the world can be changed—politically, economically, and socially—but that it never happens easily. She is hopeful in a very sober way. In *This Changes Everything*, she argues that "When we....resolve to save the planet, we cast ourselves in a very specific role. That role is of a parent, the parent of the earth. But the opposite is the case. It is we humans who are fragile and vulnerable and the earth that is hearty and powerful, and holds us in its hands. In pragmatic terms, our challenge is less to save the earth from ourselves and more to save ourselves from an earth that, if pushed too far, has ample power to rock, burn, and shake us off completely."

Last September, Klein argued in that interview in the *Independent* that "The People's Climate March will be much more diverse and it's going to be angrier than previous climate protests. That anger is a really important and powerful tool. So I think we're going to see a different kind of climate movement.... I think Seattle 1999 was a coming-out party for the global justice movement, and I think this will be a coming-out party of sorts for a new climate movement." Klein's predictions where this is concerned remain to be seen. Armed with her new book, those fighting to end climate change and to build a world that meets human needs (which includes a livable planet) will find that task a little lighter. 



# Irresistible Revolutions

## Toni Cade Bambara's emancipatory philosophy

► Linda J. Holmes. *A Joyous Revolt: Toni Cade Bambara, Writer and Activist*. Praeger, 2014, 228 pages.

**rhone fraser**

IN A BIOGRAPHY TITLED *A Joyous Revolt*, Linda Janet Holmes presents an important glimpse of an incredibly influential American writer who changed the landscape of American book publishing—Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995). Bambara introduced an incredibly refreshing new rainbow of counter-hegemonic fictional and non-fictional narratives in the historic 1970 anthology she edited, called *The Black Woman*, which featured works by then new writers like Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Nikki Giovanni, and Grace Lee Boggs. Bambara validated a range of anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist philosophies that were until then ignored in mainstream publishing.

Holmes writes that including Grace Lee Boggs in the anthology “is an early indication of Bambara’s extensive definition of the term Black,” which was not a skin color but more than a philosophy dedicated to, at the very least, challenging the social order. She once said, “as a cultural worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible.” Bambara was known to loathe talking exclusively about herself, and would probably scoff at the fact that a biography about only her life has been published. However, Holmes presents her as an incredibly interesting and influential individual who has made knowledge of her life seeking alternative ways of thinking outside the hegemony, like a vacuum, irresistible.

In her trips to North Vietnam and Cuba, Bambara made clear that supporting the people of these countries was a key component to challenging

the US social order of patriarchy and aggressive capitalism. Her support of these two nations in her life along with the ideas that her fictional characters represented essentially make revolution “irresistible.” In her “Vietnam Notebooks,” which is in the anthology about Bambara that Holmes edited, called *Savoring the Salt*, Bambara writes about North Vietnam—“through the efforts to emancipate the woman, progressive legislation that benefited everybody immediately occurred such as social security and free medical care.” In Cuba, Holmes shows us Bambara critiquing Cuban women’s adoption of Western standards of beauty.



Above: Toni Cade Bambara.

Holmes writes that Bambara's clarion calls for change within individuals and communities are not in the margins, but are "embedded in the soul of her literary masterpieces." These clarion calls are also embedded in this biography. Bambara published two novels, *The Salt Eaters* (1980) and *Those Bones Are Not My Children* (1999), and three collections of short stories: *Gorilla, My Love* (1972), *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (1976), and *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions* (1999). These novels and stories feature characters who represent challenges to the repressive patriarchal order.

Each of the chapters in *A Joyous Revolt*, organized chronologically, focuses on Bambara's writing and its intersection

with social movements in communities worldwide and in places where she lived. Holmes wrote that "in her work to combat cultural amnesia, Bambara called for rituals and ceremonies that might lead to reclaiming the authentic self. Today these rituals have become a reality." In each chapter, there is a recounting of at least one ritual or ceremony where Bambara reclaims her

authentic self or helps someone else do so. In the first two chapters, Holmes describes how Bambara's mother's "stand up attitude" in confronting teachers and other authority figures influenced Bambara at an early age." This confrontation with authority figures that uphold Western hegemony is encouraged in Bambara's fiction and non-fiction. Holmes writes that Bambara encouraged her former Queens College classmate, Harry Keyishian, to confront SUNY in his lawsuit against them for their 1967 requirement that faculty sign loyalty oaths disavowing membership in the Communist Party. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Keyishian, who said, "Toni has to be credited with giving me courage to stand up and fight." This kind of confrontation against the social order put her in a place where she "never aligned herself with political forces that invest in mainstream party politics as the most effective strategy for change."

In the fifth chapter, called "From Atlanta to Vietnam," Holmes writes that Bambara was invited by Arlene Eisen to be part of a US women's delegation to North Vietnam, where she was able to smuggle secret supplies of Valium past strict customs agents to the North Vietnamese women poisoned by Agent Orange from the US military campaign there. In a short story called "The Long Night," Bambara has a protagonist who faced the same kind of attacks that members of the

Black Liberation Army faced, that "could have been the experience of a woman freedom fighter in Asia, Latin America or Africa." Her fiction provided the space for rituals to take place in order to "reclaim the self."

In 1980, her seminal novel *The Salt Eaters* was published, dealing with a burnt-out sixties activist seeking counsel from a concerned community. Her second novel, *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, which is based on the murders of children in 1970s Atlanta, was published posthumously, and edited by Toni Morrison. "Bambara wanted the tragedy to be seen in the larger context of the greater physical, social, and economic injustices that allowed the [murders] to be ignored.

[She] criticized the city's failure to allocate needed resources to uncover the facts underlying the cases." This muzzling of children's lives and voices that Bambara witnessed was the exact opposite of the way her mother raised her. The process of writing about a fictional set of parents who lost their child with no social support networks was, for Bambara, a ritual that reclaimed her identity as a writer. Holmes quotes Gloria I. Joseph, saying that "the closer Bambara came to revealing truthful information about the murders, the more threatened her life became."

Bambara also found the bourgeois lifestyle of Atlanta too stifling, and moved to Philadelphia where she lived until her passing. There she narrated and produced films, and taught classes at the Scribe Video Center with Louis Massiah, including *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*. Holmes noted in her Introduction that "there are still areas of Bambara's writing and work, however that demand attention." This includes her incredibly incisive and relevant analysis of "Black Theater" in the book, *Black Expressions*, edited by Addison Gayle, Jr., where she discusses plays by James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, and Martin Duberman—"a quick glance at the films, literature, and social science disciplines of the majority culture seems to reveal that yes—our men are Madison Avenue automatons, our women hungry and shorted out, love perverted and distorted by money and power, social realities built on lies, our heroes are murderers, bandits, degenerates, we're all caught up in mechanical habits, in love with broken down institutions, our leaders the very dregs of the bestial swamps, and all the greedy grabbing for the top hasn't evolved a race of taller men."

Bambara insists on rituals to reclaim one's self from a superficial, materialistic society that encourages collective amnesia. Overall, Holmes presents a life concerned with revolution of the patriarchal order in a way that makes its quest, first within the self, and then outside the self, absolutely irresistible. 🍌

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# End of Year Update

## Membership

THE DSC WELCOMES NEW At-Large representatives ratified at the April Plenary: Rachel Kravetz (English), Marissa Brostoff (English), and Emmy Williamson (Ethnomusicology).

## Programs Missing Elections

SOME PROGRAMS DID NOT have program representatives option for the 2015-2016 DSC Elections Ballot. If your program had no candidates it is because none were nominated or that nominees declined or were ineligible to run. Yet there is still a chance to create a seat in the DSC for the coming year. Please contact our Officer for Governance and Membership Kyla Bender-Baird ([membership@cunydisc.org](mailto:membership@cunydisc.org)) for details about submitting a pro tempore petition to ensure your programs participation in the council and access to funding.

## Governance

STUDENTS AT THE GRADUATE Center and their representatives in

the DSC passed an amendment to our constitution clarifying the procedure of submitting pro tempore petitions to create program representatives. Essentially, petitions will be processed on first come, first served basis. A ballot is currently open on another amendment that would enable representatives to appoint a standing proxy for the duration of their term if they are unable to attend plenary due to scheduling conflicts but want to fulfill the other responsibilities of a program representatives.

## Forget your password?


IT HAPPENS TO THE best of us. Call the IT Helpdesk at 212-817-7300 to reset lost email passwords. Office 365 will soon be implementing a password reset system, but contact the IT department until then.

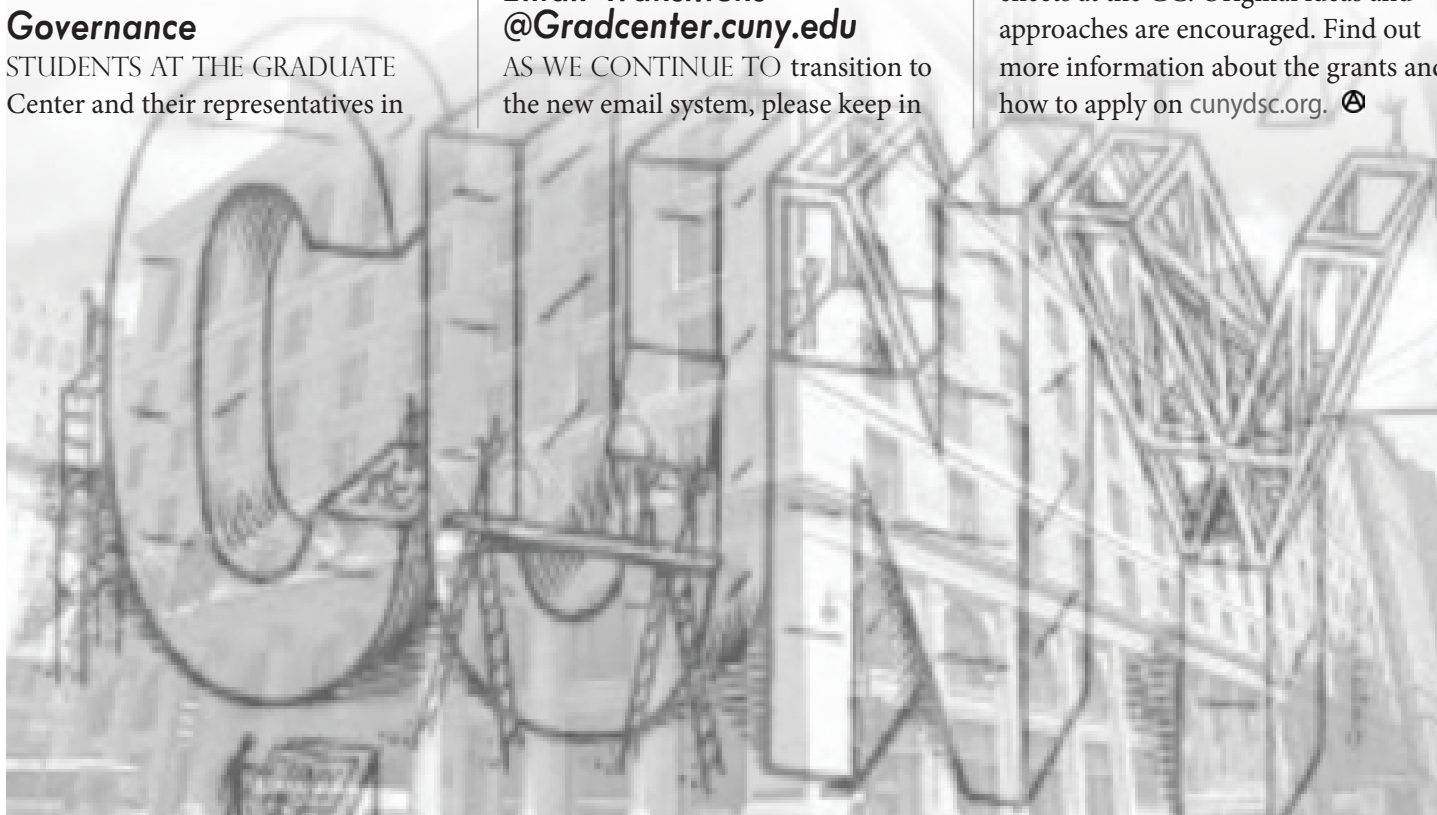
## Email Transitions @Gradcenter.cuny.edu

AS WE CONTINUE TO transition to the new email system, please keep in

mind important deadlines. Although mail will continue to be redirected from your old to new accounts, starting on 1 June 2015, students will no longer be able to access the @gc.cuny.edu accounts, and all data on the old accounts will be deleted.

## Introducing the CUNY DSC Knowledge Grants!

THE CUNY DSC KNOWLEDGE Grant is a temporary funding source for projects produced by GC students to build archival information or enhance the institutional knowledge or memory of the DSC, the GC, or CUNY. Successful projects will bring long-term benefit to GC students by recovering, preserving, or creating significant institutional history. Items produced will be used, shared, and/or witnessed by Graduate Center students for years to come or have lasting effects at the GC. Original ideas and approaches are encouraged. Find out more information about the grants and how to apply on [cunydisc.org](http://cunydisc.org). 



## MIND GAMES BY MARYAM GHAFARI SAADAT

### #1: Insert Operations

INSERT PLUS (+) AND MINUS (−) between the digits below to satisfy the equation.

$$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9 = 0$$

It is not necessary to insert an operation between every pair of digits. The order of digits should remain unchanged.

Hint: following the given rules, try to make two sets of numbers with the same total. For example, the numbers in each of the two sets {12, 7, 8} and {3, 4, 5, 6, 9} sum up to 27. Therefore one solution is  $12 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 + 7 + 8 - 9 = 0$ . See how many solutions you can come up with! There are more than ten.

### #2: How Many?

CONSIDER THE NATURAL NUMBERS from 33 to 333, including both 33 and 333. How many of these numbers contains at least two occurrences of 3?

### #3: Find the Class

A REQUIRED COURSE IS offered in 12 sections/classes. Three students, Susan, Patrick, and Emma are registered for the same section but none of them remembers the day, time, and location of the class.

- ▶ Susan remembers only the day of the class (i.e., one of Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, and Fri).
- ▶ Patrick remembers only the time of the class (i.e., one of 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18).
- ▶ Emma remembers only the location of the class (i.e., one of L1, L2, L3, and L4).

Suppose the following schedule is known by all students.

Mon 8 L1	Mon 14 L4	Mon 16 L2
Tue 10 L4	Tue 12 L1	Tue 14 L3
Wed 8 L1	Wed 12 L3	Wed 16 L2
Thu 12 L3	Thu 14 L4	Thu 18 L2
Fri 8 L4	Fri 12 L2	Fri 16 L3

In order to find their class in the above schedule, the three students engage in the below conversation.

**Susan:** I don't know the answer but I know that Patrick doesn't know it either.

**Patrick:** I still don't know the answer.

**Emma:** I didn't know the answer before Patrick spoke, but now I know it.

**Susan and Patrick:** Now we know it as well.

So what is the day, time, and location of their class?

Hint : Patrick could infer the answer at once if the time of their class was unique in the schedule. In other words, if there is no other class scheduled at the same time as their class, Patrick will be able to find their class in the schedule without the need to talk with Susan and Emma. Ⓐ

solutions on page 41

## PH.D. COMICS BY JORGE CHAM

