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IN THESE TIMES

What's Next for DEFUND?

A conversation between Robin Wonsley Worlobah, Makia Green, Andrew R. Hairston, Willie Burnley Jr and Kandace Montgomery



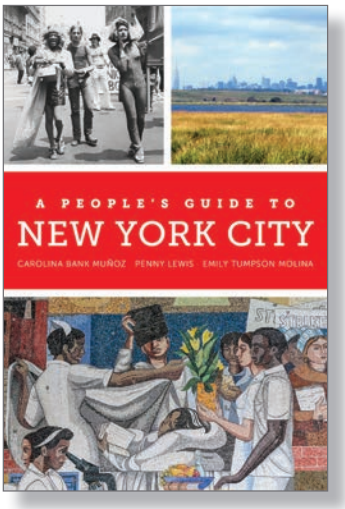
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Randi Love reports on the young Black farmers who are picking up the plow

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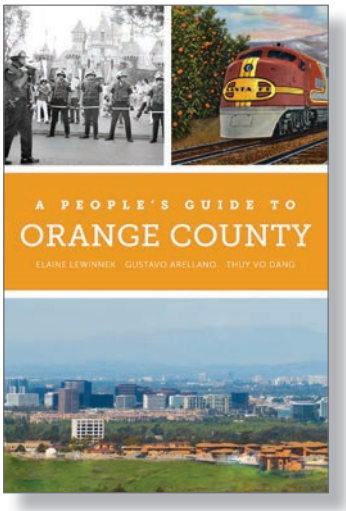
WHO BUILT THIS CITY

HIDDEN HISTORIES OF THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLACES



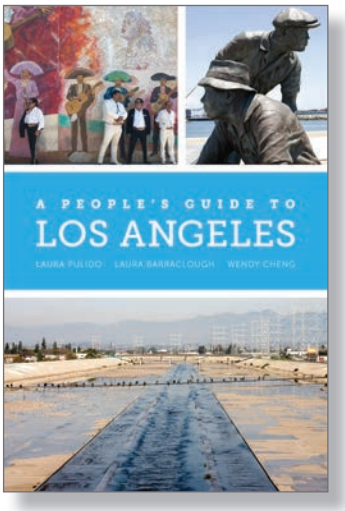
"The context and perspectives to lift and support grassroots organizing for decades to come."

—Javier Valdés, former Codirector of Make the Road New York



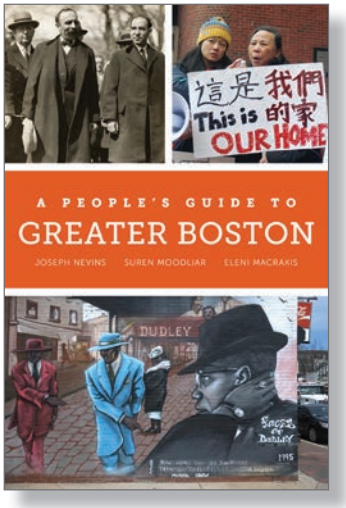
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—D.J. Waldie, author of *Becoming Los Angeles: Myth, Memory, and a Sense of Place*



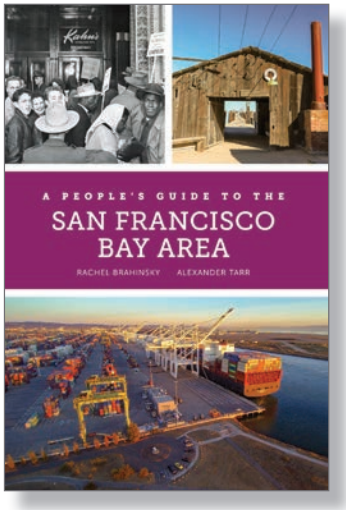
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> No political movement can be healthy unless it has its own press to inform it, educate it and orient it.
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Roe v. White Men

As we brace ourselves for the evisceration of *Roe*, let's focus on how we got here. Of course, there's Trump's remaking of the Supreme Court. But this is the culmination of white patriarchy's decades-long campaign to police women's sexuality and their bodies; in 2021, the crusade went rogue. The most outrageous evidence is the record-setting 100-plus bills passed in state legislatures vindictively designed to restrict or eliminate women's rights to control their own bodies. Media coverage typically identifies such bills as promoted by Republicans. Rarely is it emphasized that the legislatures that enact these laws are overwhelmingly dominated by white men in a fusion of patriarchy and white supremacy.



Now, as we all know, the Supremes seem poised to either uphold Mississippi's law—which bans abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, about two months earlier than *Roe* allows—or gut *Roe* altogether. And what people should be especially infuriated about is that white patriarchal institutions, which do not remotely mirror our country's demographics, are the ones seeking to impose their toxic masculinity on more than half the population.

State legislatures firmly controlled by older white men have been in an arms race to see who can regulate women's bodies most severely. Let's start with Mississippi. Its state legislature is 83% male and 57% white, and its median age is 57. One third of its legislators are white men aged 55 or older, representative of just 9% of the state's population—not a group that will ever have to wrestle with the decision to have an abortion or the life-altering impact of being unable to get one. With only 17% of Mississippi lawmakers being women, 52% of the state's population have virtually no voice at all (unless, of course, they are patriarchy's fellow travelers).

Not to be outdone, Arkansas passed a law which would have banned abortions in all cases except to save the life of a pregnant woman in some vaguely defined "medical emergency." Doctors who perform the procedure would be subject to up to 10 years in prison or a fine of up to $100,000. (This law has been blocked by the courts—for now.) Who enacted this punitive measure? A legislature that is 77% male and ranks 41st in the nation for its percentage of women in state legislatures.

Oklahoma, with its legislature just over 79% male, tried to enact three anti-abortion laws that would have gutted access to the procedure.

And, most notoriously, Texas—with just over 73% of its legislators men, most of them white—passed a law banning abortions after six weeks and empowering anyone—anyone!—to sue anyone else they allege helped a woman get the procedure.

The pro-choice movement has failed to go local and help women see how their statehouses don't represent most of them and, instead, seek to thwart their freedom.

Not only are these (and most other) legislatures male-dominated, they pander to evangelicals (only 25% of the population) while typically ignoring those claiming no religious affiliation (26%), not to mention the 59% of U.S. adults who support abortion rights.

Let's get back to the Supreme Court, two-thirds male, which refuses to block the Texas law. It's now also two-thirds (conservative) Catholic; meanwhile, only 20% of the overall population is Catholic, and of those, 56% believe abortion should be legal in most cases. Clearly, an out-of-kilter court can no longer protect a woman's right to choose.

All this data about male-dominated institutions drives home what *The Nation's* Amy Littlefield emphasizes: The pro-choice movement has failed to go local and help women see how their statehouses don't represent most of them and, instead, seek to thwart their freedom. Now, a long-term and inclusive movement for reproductive justice must be truly engaged at the state level. The obstacles—gerrymandering, insufficient fundraising for women (especially women of color), bias and entrenched power — are not insignificant. But this toxic patriarchy must be dismantled.

—SUSAN J. DOUGLAS



NATIVE INTELLIGENCE

"David Graeber's Mic Drop" (January) tells you a lot about what we *don't* learn regarding Native Americans and Indigenous societies. People don't realize "freedom and democracy" have been the natural state of most human beings for hundreds of thousands of years.

—*Linda Cree*
Michigan

DEMOCRATIC PARTY SOCIALIST

I may be a very long-standing member of the Democratic Party, but I'm also a democratic socialist who believes the country is *us*—we, the people.

The weird stigma attached to the label "democratic socialism" comes from corporate interests who are terrified of citizens organizing to balance between economic interests and the well-being of the citizenry.

Elected politicians swear an oath upon taking office, promising to uphold and protect the U.S. Constitution from all threats, foreign *and* domestic! And they break that oath whenever they put the interests of wealthy corporations ahead of those of the general citizenry.

Today, our country is more of an oligarchy or corporatocracy than a democracy, thanks to the corruption of our political/electoral process by vast amounts of money. I, for one, consider that un-American.

—*Judith Roen*
Rochester, N.Y.

WHAT'S THE REAL THREAT?

If Donald Trump is no more of a threat to democracy than the Constitution, as Hamilton Nolan writes in "Big Panic for a Democracy that Never Was" (InTheseTimes.com), then how is the Texas abortion law a "setback," as Chris Walker writes in "Wisconsin Abortion Rights Could Be Set Back Nearly 200 Years" (InTheseTimes.com)?

What's more, why is every Black activist, writer, politician and would-be revolutionary fighting the GOP's attempt to disenfranchise voters of color? It's because they recognize that, though fundamentally flawed and built in a colonialist/white supremacist society, exercising the right to vote is one way to redress grievances, expand democracy and provide the freedom to fight capitalism.

The misperception of fascism as no different than capitalism is to consign one to certain defeat—or, perhaps worse, irrelevance.

—*Marilyn Katz*
Chicago

SETTING PRIORITIES

Some 30% of election workers in Pennsylvania have recently resigned their posts. The reason was death threats, not the Constitution. Hamilton Nolan needs a little concrete analysis to go with his critique of the U.S. Constitution. We are well aware of the elitist structures, like the Senate and Electoral College. But what is under fire at the moment, and needs to be defeated, are the state-level GOP efforts to suppress voting and hijack counting and certifying votes. To defeat all these current efforts will require our organization at the base on a massive scale. We will deal with the Electoral College and such in due time, but first things first.

—*Carl Davidson*
Aliquippa, Pa.

IS HUNTING THE ANSWER?

In his piece "In Defense of Hunting" (InTheseTimes.com), Joseph Bullington rehashes the rationalizations I've heard for decades. For example, he writes that hunting is something humans have done for thousands of years. Except, hunters of the past were "good" predators; because they used primitive weapons, they only took the sick, diseased and old individuals. For animals like elk, humans were like wolves—they helped make the herd stronger by culling the weak. But now, with high-powered scoped rifles, there is little to no selection, except perhaps to find the biggest elk. We are doing the opposite of what a good predator does.

Hunting is generally more ethical than buying factory-farmed meat, but that does not make it good or necessary. So there's the challenge: Can hunters become decent predators by taking the weakest prey species? If they haven't done that on their own by now, is it likely to happen at all?

—*Glenn Wahl*
Via Facebook

TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

Tell us what you like, what you hate and what you'd like to see more of by emailing letters@inthesetimes.com or tweeting @inthesetimesmag, or reach us by post at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

RIGHT ON, BRAND



VIA YOUTUBE

Look who's reading us now! It's British comedian and activist Russell Brand, known for his pro-labor (and pro-Labour) political stances, along with his populist, often crass and comically dark takes on such issues as wealth inequality, corporate capitalism and climate change. In December 2021, Brand pushed a new video on his popular YouTube channel titled " 'F*CK YOUR JOB!!!' So THIS is WHY Workers Are QUITTING!" — in which he gives a dramatic reading (complete with commentary) of our intrepid labor reporter Hamilton Nolan's piece, "Which Side Are You Democrats On?" (reprinted in this issue as "Pro-Labor President? Where?", page 12). At press time, more than half a million people had tuned in.

As Nolan's article points out, the labor movement has seen little action from the Biden administration. "The power just bends them into the direction that power tends to move in, so they are kind of largely irrelevant," Brand says of the Democratic Party. "I believe that a strong union movement can be a healthy part of a necessary change that we require," he adds.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We've heard a lot over the past few months about how abortion rights are facing their greatest threat since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973. But this threat has been looming for at least a decade, felt nowhere more clearly and harshly than across much of rural America and in low-income households.

After years of clinic closures nationwide, one in five people in need of abortion now lives more than 50 miles from a clinic. Piling onto geographic barriers are increasingly restrictive state laws—predominately in the Midwest and the South—such as mandatory 24-hour waiting periods, anti-abortion counseling, forced ultrasound viewings and multiple in-person check-ups.

Though clinics and abortion funds attempt to make the procedure more accessible, many states also prohibit abortion coverage in insurance plans for public employees and in Medicaid. Without insurance, the abortion pill alone costs, on average, $500.

All of these undue burdens have left people like Isabelle, a 21-year-old in rural northern Wisconsin, with few options (see page 6). Unable to afford a child and more than 200 miles from the nearest clinic, Isabelle was forced to self-induce an abortion at great risk to her health. She consumed large amounts of alcohol and smoked several packs of cigarettes a day until she miscarried.

We hold our breath for a decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. If *Roe* is overturned, the nightmare Isabelle has been living could become a reality overnight for people living in 21 states. *If* Roe is upheld, however, I ask that you don't forget about the millions of folks in rural and low-income homes, who will continue to live where an actual choice post-*Roe* was never a guarantee.



Hannah Faris
Wisconsin Idea Editor

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AARON OF L.A. PHOTOGRAPHY

Above: A pro-life banner hangs on the side of a building in Tomah, Wis., on Aug. 12, 2021, contributing to the milieu of abortion's social stigma in rural Wisconsin.

Last Resort Abortion

RHINELANDER, WIS.—When Isabelle started craving pickles in summer 2021, she knew something was wrong. She assumed her late period was stress-related—until she took a pregnancy test. At 21, unable to raise a child and without access to abortion care in her rural community, Isabelle self-induced an abortion.

In Wisconsin, a state with some of the most "severely restrictive" abortion laws in the nation, people in need of an abortion have little time to lose. As of 2021, only four health centers in Wisconsin provide the abortion pill, which must be taken within 11 weeks of the last menstrual period. And only three health centers provide in-clinic procedures, all in cities far from most rural residents—two Planned Parenthood clinics in Milwaukee and Madison, and an Affiliated Medical Services clinic in Milwaukee. That means only three of Wisconsin's 71 counties have an abortion provider.

Because of social stigma, Isabelle (whose name has been changed) told few people about her pregnancy. "I [fear] everyone is like, 'You're a whore; you should have seen it coming,'" Isabelle says. "I did everything that I should have been doing to prevent pregnancy and I still ended up in this situation."

Like Isabelle, 70% of people who need abortions in Wisconsin don't have local access to clinics. Even with access, people face restrictions like 24-hour waiting periods and state-mandated anti-abortion counseling, forced ultrasound viewings and parental consent (for minors). Wisconsin also prohibits abortion coverage in insurance plans for public employees and those sold on the federal insurance marketplace. Should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned, an 1849 state law would immediately outlaw almost all abortions.

Wisconsin is also one of 23 states to have TRAP laws on the books, short for the "targeted regulation of abortion providers," which saddle abortion providers with medically unnecessary restrictions. One such law, for example, requires that health centers providing the procedure be within 30 minutes of a hospital. In addition, anti-abortion groups have established 55 so-called crisis pregnancy centers around the state, which claim to offer reproductive care but mostly exist to intercept, delay and confuse people in need of abortions. Many are located in rural cities like Beaver Dam, Elkhorn, Ladysmith and Woodruff—one of the places Isabelle called after she discovered she was pregnant.

But Isabelle never had any hesitation about getting an abortion. "At that point in my life, I knew I could not raise a child and have it be a well-adjusted human," she says. "I was still in college; I had no job; I had no money; I didn't really have my own place to stay ... it was a completely selfless act in my mind."

Still, Isabelle had no way to get to a clinic, the closest

being over three hours away. She called her local hospital, but her doctor "told me everything she could do for me if I kept it, but nothing she could do for me if I couldn't," Isabelle says.

Next, Isabelle called New Dawn Pregnancy Resource Center in Woodruff, an anti-abortion center. She knew she could not get an abortion there, but thought the "pregnancy resource center" would help. Of course, it did not.

Finally, Isabelle asked her partner to drive her to a clinic. But he refused, and she couldn't do it alone, as the 24-hour waiting period and mandatory checkups would require three or four roundtrips.

Michelle Velasquez, director of advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, says rural and low income residents are often left behind. Velasquez tells *In These Times* that because health centers often rent their spaces, landlord discretion and zoning laws can inhibit centers' abilities to move into communities. In other places, anti-abortion protestors gather outside of Planned Parenthoods, even the ones that do not perform abortions.

Many who need abortions seek discreet options, such as Just the Pill, a nonprofit that operates virtually in Minnesota, Montana, Wyoming and serves surrounding states. Because the abortion pill cannot be mailed in Wisconsin, for example, the group drops it off at the Minnesota border. Regardless, as Dr. Julie Amaon, medical director at Just the Pill, points out, rural residents still need transportation.

With time running out, Isabelle's only option was to self-induce an abortion. She started a daily regimen that included three packs of cigarettes, lots of alcohol and 5,000 milligrams of vitamin C. Within days, she started bleeding vaginally; two weeks later, another pregnancy test confirmed it was over.

"I thought, 'I am getting rid of this baby and that's all I am going to do,'" Isabelle says. "If abortion is taken away in Wisconsin completely, people will do much worse things."

SAM STROOZAS is a freelance journalist writing about gender and sexual health.

Farmers Reject Nicor's Pipe Dream

PEMBROKE TOWNSHIP, ILL.—At the end of a maze of dirt roads lies a 40-acre teaching farm called Black Oaks Center, where local residents gathered on a Sunday in November 2021 for a farmland restoration workshop and community gathering. "If you all want to bust wood again, they're out there," said Dr. Jifunza Wright-Carter—who runs the center with her husband, Fred Carter—to the newest arrivals. Some joined the group clearing felled trees for off-grid homesteading, while others stayed inside to warm up and chat.

In addition to raising food and hosting classes, Black Oaks has become a hub for organizing against a proposed natural gas pipeline some locals say threatens the area's farming way of life, which is rooted in environmental stewardship.

Founded in the 1860s by

THIS MONTH IN LATE CAPITALISM

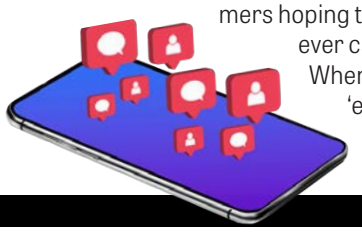
- **THE "GENIUS, EDGELORD, VISIONARY" WHO OWNS "AMERICA'S SPACEFARING FUTURE"** warns his company, SpaceX, is actually at risk of bankruptcy! (Yes, we're talking about *Time* magazine's "person of the year," Elon Musk.) To help, Musk canceled holiday breaks at the company, already known for layoffs and alleged labor law violations. What if our "spacefaring future" is just, like, still being treated poorly... *but in space??*



- **BIG COMPANIES ARE REACTING TO THE GREAT RESIGNATION BY PROMISING HIGHER WAGES,** but promises don't pay the bills. Take Lauren, 23, who was promised up to $14 at McDonald's but found the "starting" wage was actually $11. The younger generation is leaning in, though, and becoming their own bosses with multiple gigs, a trend known as "polywork." Or as it used to be called, "scraping by."

- **CVS AND OTHER CHAINS ARE BEMOANING A WAVE OF "ORGANIZED SHOPLIFTING."** Walgreens even used it as an excuse to close some stores. Back in reality, even the FBI reports larceny rates are at their lowest since 1985. Wage theft, however, is growing; the Economic Policy Institute reports workers in the 10 most populous states lose $8 billion annually. Apparently, stealing is only "bad" if it hurts the bosses.

- **NOTICE ANY STRANGERS BECOMING NEW FRIENDS ON YOUR SOCIAL?** If you're underwater, those "friends" might be debt collectors, now legally allowed to personally email and message you. It's not just creepy and unprofessional, but opens the door to new scammers hoping to score whatever cash you have left. When in doubt, kick 'em out.





SAN FRANCISCO—United under the anti-imperialist social media hashtag #NoMore, hundreds of primarily Ethiopian American and Eritrean American demonstrators gather at Twitter's headquarters Dec. 10, 2021. Twitter has been accused of censoring activists and enabling the spread of violent content. Since November 2020, the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia has faced civil war and thousands have died in conflict. Activists fear the civil war will be used as pretext for U.S. meddling. (Photo by Anibal Martel/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

Joseph "Pap" Tetter after he escaped slavery, Pembroke served as a refuge for others fleeing North and for local Potawatomi people evading displacement to reservations. It grew into the largest Black farming community in the northern United States. Farmers grew hemp there during World War II and supplied food to Chicago during the Great Migration. Generations of Black farmers have since preserved Pembroke's rare three-biome ecosystem, known for its black oak savanna habitat.

"Regenerative agriculture was what we did by default, because we couldn't afford any other method," says Carter, whose uncle came here from the South in the 1950s and bought five acres.

Now, Nicor Gas is pursuing a $10 million plan to lay more than 30 miles of gas lines to connect hundreds of Pembroke households, despite opposition. Supporters claim the project will kick-start local economic development, while opponents warn it threatens Pembroke's rich ecosystem and could displace Black farmers.

On Aug. 27, 2021, despite lobbying from Pembroke residents and environmentalists, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a bill that will allow the company to fund the pipeline in Pembroke, which is designated a "hardship area," by raising rates on all Nicor ratepayers. Three weeks later, Nicor filed for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity from the Illinois Commerce Commission to begin installation in Pembroke Township.

Pembroke residents only found out about the request a month later, in October 2021, says Wright-Carter. She helped form the Pembroke Environmental Justice Coalition (PEJC) shortly after, which moved to intervene in court. But the lost month is emblematic of how the process has played out, Wright-Carter says.

Nicor's virtual community meetings on Sept. 8–9, 2021, were held in the morning, when many residents were at work, in a community without reliable internet access—noted Gavin Kearney, senior counsel with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, who represents PEJC. "This is not the process you would create if you were genuinely interested in whether the public wants this, and what their concerns are," Kearney says.

"We're this close to them installing," says Wright-Carter, "and nobody knows where it's going to come in. No one's seen a map."

Meanwhile, Mark Hodge, mayor of nearby Hopkins Park, is promising a local economic boost from the gas lines, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition in Chicago, calls the project a "big deal" and a "new day for Pembroke, a Black farming community that has been left behind." Jackson adds it "will help bring business to Pembroke, and it will help others do business with Pembroke."

Members of PEJC, however, think the burden of the project outweighs any benefit. Many residents heat their homes with a mix of propane, wood and electric space heaters, and switching to gas appliances would be expensive—especially in such a poor community.

"I'm a senior citizen, so it's not like I have a whole lot of money stashed away to do that," says Diane McDonald, a 32-year resident of Pembroke. McDonald says she wants to see reliable internet and electricity first.

Wright-Carter also fears a natural gas explosion, as the nearest fire department is a half-hour away. Nicor has a history of gas leaks and explosions and is under investigation by the Illinois attorney general for $500 million in environmental damages, including potential water contamination at a dozen sites.

"As a farmer," McDonald says, "I'm worried about where the line is going to run and how it's going to affect my growth." Some residents also fear their land may be seized under eminent domain and trees will be torn down, and many question whether Nicor conducted an environmental impact study.

If Pembroke is going to convert to a new energy system, members of PEJC say there are cleaner, more affordable options. The Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, passed the same session as Nicor's funding bill, creates millions of dollars of incentives for low-income communities to convert to renewable energy. Nicor is "locking in natural gas ... at the same time that we, as a state, are passing legislation that says we want to eliminate fossil fuels" by 2045, Kearney notes.

Carter puts it this way: "We need a long-term plan around our future that does not include the harm of our health and our environment."

ZOE PHARO is a Chicago-based writer and *In These Times* editorial intern. She holds a degree in political science from Carleton College.

A "Roofless Prison" for Haitian Refugees

MONTERREY, MEXICO—Wilson sits, constantly refreshing his phone, waiting for COMAR, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance, to reschedule his appointment, originally set for Oct.

FOR THE WIN

- **NEW YORK CITY OPENED ITS FIRST SUPERVISED DRUG-INJECTION SITES** to help stop overdose deaths. Trained staff at two locations provide clean needles, administer naloxone (as needed) to prevent overdoses and provide options for addiction treatment. The centers prevented at least two overdoses in their first day.



- **AMAZON WORKERS HAVE ANOTHER SHOT AT UNIONIZING.** The National Labor Relations Board says Amazon illegally interfered with the April 2021 election in Bessemer, Ala., so there's going to be a redo. If a majority votes to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, it would establish the first unionized Amazon warehouse in the United States.
- **UNIONIZED *WIRECUTTER* WORKERS WALKED OUT** Black Friday weekend in protest of their treatment by management at the New York Times Company. Workers missed their expected holiday overtime but the union's GoFundMe made up the difference, with excess contributions going to other strike funds.
- **BARBADOS IS THE WORLD'S NEWEST REPUBLIC,** removing Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state in a nod to moving beyond its colonial past. The new republic does remain in the Commonwealth, along with the likes of Australia, Canada, India and Belize.



- **CHICAGO ORGANIZERS OPPOSE THE USE OF SHOTSPOTTER TECHNOLOGY.** The tech allegedly locates gunshots and dispatches police before 911 calls come in, but a report from Chicago's Office of Inspector General states that, of the more than 50,000 ShotSpotter alerts sent to police, only 9.1% involved a gun-related crime. The report also confirms activists' claims that the technology biases police behavior.

13, 2021. A day prior he received a cancelation through email.

The Casa Indi migrant shelter in Monterrey, in northeastern Mexico, received 1,600 Haitian migrants in September 2021, a month after a tropical storm damaged large swaths of the island and contributed to the destabilization that has forced tens of thousands of Haitians to flee. By early November, "of the 1,600, there are now about 800 … there's now enough space for everyone to live inside the shelter" rather than in tents, says José Jaime Salinas, Casa Indi's accountant.

But it's unlikely those who left made it to the United States as they had aspired. Under the Biden administration's Title 42 policy (initiated by the Trump administration under the pretext of preventing the spread of Covid-19), thousands of Haitian migrants seeking asylum were simply expelled back to Haiti or southern Mexico. The rest, like Wilson, remain in limbo, even as more refugees arrive. In addition to Title 42, the Biden administration is also restarting the Trump administration's infamous Remain in Mexico program, whereby migrants must wait in Mexico until they are approved, and expanding it to include Haitians.

These aggressive U.S. policies have deterred many Haitians from completing their journey north, but they face another set of hostile conditions in Mexico. The Mexican government has mirrored Biden administration policies by militarizing the country's southern border, enforcing mass detention and deportation, and subjecting migrants to a grueling asylum process.

According to Yetzi Rosales Martínez, a researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Monterrey, the chain reaction starts with the United States. "Historically, everything depends on the politics of U.S. immigration," Martínez says. "When [the United States] needs population, it

IN CASE YOU **MISSED IT**

ALL THE NEWS THAT WAS FIT TO PRINT—AND WHAT GOT PRINTED INSTEAD

HYPED

TRIVIAL

VITAL

IGNORED

More than 23,300 people have signed a Change.org petition demanding the media stop interviewing Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith. Maybe they don't know they can turn off their TVs.



The United States is crossing the threshold of 800,000 Covid deaths, with older Americans hardest hit.





Actor Jussie Smollett's bizarre hoax—in which he staged a hate crime against himself for publicity—handed the Right an opportunity to attack Black Lives Matter and criminal justice reform.



The not guilty verdict in the Kyle Rittenhouse trial will surely embolden right-wing extremists and vigilantes.

Matthew McConaughey will not run for Texas governor, the actor announced on Instagram.

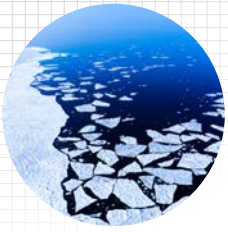


Healthcare costs pushed more than half a billion people worldwide into extreme poverty in 2021.





Celebrity surgeon and pseudoscience guru Dr. Oz is running for Senate in Pennsylvania.



A new study in *Nature Communications* suggests rain will become more common precipitation than snow in the Arctic within the next 80 years.

opens the borders. When it does not, it starts deporting."

With the crackdown at Mexico's borders, Haitians are trapped in cities like Monterrey, where they form a "permanent" community under constant threat of deportation. Wilson, 28, would be happy to build a life in Mexico with his 29-year-old wife and 2-year-old son, but he is waiting on COMAR. "If I get [my papers], I can work," he says. Migrants at Casa Indi have reported that some employers have offered them work without papers, but the conditions are exploitative, with mistreatment and little rest.

The racism that Afro-Mexicans and dark-skinned Mexicans face is also experienced by Black migrants in accessing employment, healthcare, education and housing. As African and Caribbean migration to and through Mexico has increased in the past decade, human rights groups have documented instances of local police harassing and robbing Black migrants, and a lack of adequate housing.

John Bayard, who made the dangerous journey from Chile to Mexico with his wife and 3-year-old daughter, says he could only find overpriced rent in an insecure neighborhood—and the municipal police took a large amount of his savings. "[The local police] intimidate us, threaten us with planting drugs on us," Bayard says. "Here, we have no rights."

"If all the migrants were white, we would not be seeing this," says Katy Cavazos, a psychologist and activist who has assisted Central American migrants for years. "In this classist and xenophobic state, it is difficult to make any concrete plans to assist the migrant population."



Haitian migrants Samuel, 32, and Louis, 29, pose with their 3-year-old daughter at a makeshift camp in Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, on Sept. 22, 2021, sheltering here out of fear of deportation from within the United States.

PHOTO BY PAUL RATJE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Enise Charles has had problems for months with an irregular menstrual cycle that sometimes makes it difficult to walk. She's still waiting for a gynecologist. "I want to settle in a place to receive the proper treatment," she says.

Charles, 25, who taught kindergarten in Haiti, left Chile with her boyfriend partly due to growing anti-Black and anti-immigrant discrimination. They arrived in the southern Mexican city of Tapachula, where tens of thousands of Haitians await the outcome of their asylum claims. A "roofless prison" is how a report by Amnesty International and advocacy group Haitian Bridge Alliance describes the situation.

According to Nicole Phillips, legal director of Haitian Bridge Alliance, "People are desperate to leave."

Some argue the United States has a special responsibility to support Haitians. The United States has coerced market-oriented reforms and backed the violent 1991 and 2004 coups that overthrew democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. That destabilization has contributed to Haiti's present political crisis in the aftermath of President Jovenel Moïse's July 2021 assassination. Now, the United States has inserted itself to support Ariel Henry as Haiti's leader, despite being unelected. State Department Special Envoy to Haiti Daniel Foote resigned in September 2021 in protest of this "international puppeteering."

According to Phillips, Haitian Bridge Alliance is expecting "tens of thousands of more Haitians to flee Haiti." Instead of "putting up walls and criminalizing them," Phillips adds, "the Americas and clearly the U.S. need to prepare for how we can welcome the Haitian migrant community."

CHANTAL FLORES is an independent journalist based in Monterrey, Mexico.

VIEWPOINT

HAMILTON NOLAN

Pro-Labor President? Where?

We are told that President Joe Biden is the most pro-labor president in decades. That seems to be true. It is also a good demonstration of the fact that looking to the Democratic Party for salvation is a surefire way for the labor movement to get nowhere. Let's take a moment to reflect on what our Democratic friends have done for us lately.

People who view the world through the lens of electoral politics tend to dislike the question, "Which side are you on?" It is seen as unsophisticated, simplistic—a black-and-white view of a political reality in which compromise is the path to getting anything done. But the phrase has great utility. It acknowledges that there are sides, and that you have to be on one. Power concedes nothing without a fight.

A year into full Democratic control of the federal government, and a year out from the likely end of that happy arrangement, is a useful time to consider what the labor movement has gotten out of this ostensibly ideal situation. Have we gotten the PRO Act, the number one thing labor wants and needs? No. Nor will we, until the filibuster is gone. So what else has the Democratic establishment done from the very top—where the agenda is set, and where symbolism matters?

During the pandemic-wracked year of 2021, there was no more important or inspiring union story than the effort to unionize an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala. It represented an attempt to crack the most influential and powerful (and anti-union) company in the nation, a battle which will have ripple effects on the future of work across the country in decades to come. Though the union lost that election, the company cheated, and another election will be held. In the fight to unionize Amazon, everyone must be on a side.



Biden himself did send a supportive, if vague, statement to the Amazon workers. His predecessor can't say the same. In November 2021, we learned that former President Barack Obama's foundation accepted a $100 million donation from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. It is a trifling sum for Bezos, who has accumulated more than $100 billion while doing everything possible to ensure that his hundreds of thousands of workers are unable to organize to improve their own lives. Bezos specifically asked that the donation be earmarked to build a plaza in honor of Rep. John Lewis, the late civil rights leader.

John Lewis was a strong supporter of unions. Imagine how meaningful it would have been if Barack Obama had publicly supported the Amazon union drive in Alabama. He didn't, though. But he will have a "plaza" paid for by the guy who has become richer than god by crushing Amazon workers. I hope that plaza will be spacious enough for John Lewis to roll over in his grave. Thank you for your leadership, Obama.

There is another inspiring union drive, which began in Buffalo, N.Y., and is spreading across the country, happening at Starbucks. The billionaire former chairman of Starbucks—stop me if this sounds familiar—is leading a ruthless anti-union campaign to try to stop his workers from organizing. That billionaire is named Howard Schultz, and if Hillary Clinton had been elected president in 2016, she was reportedly going to name him as her secretary of labor.

Joe Biden didn't do quite so bad. He picked as his labor secretary former Boston Mayor (and union guy) Marty Walsh—an establishment pick, but one broadly endorsed by



HAMILTON NOLAN is a labor reporter for *In These Times*. He has spent the past decade writing about labor and politics for Gawker, Splinter and *The Guardian*.

major union leaders. Walsh has had the good fortune to be the government's top labor official during a months-long wave of strikes that has garnered much public attention. There have been many inspirational strikes in the past year, none more hard-fought than that of the United Mine Workers members in Brookwood, Ala., who have been striking against Warrior Met Coal. Theirs is a tough battle. It is the exact sort of strike that has historically been won when the government helped the union, and lost when the government didn't.

In November 2021, Marty Walsh went to Birmingham to hold a news conference. It would have been a perfect time for him to stop by the picket line at Brookwood, which is right down the road. But he didn't. A couple of weeks later, Walsh went to Buffalo to talk about the infrastructure bill. Did he meet with the unionizing Starbucks workers? No. I suppose those things would just be a bit too radical for the secretary of labor of the Most Pro-Union President of Our Lifetimes during the Great Strike Wave of 2021.

What beaten-down workers really need is not a president who will smile and shake hands with both them and the boss who is beating them down. They need a president who will shake hands with them and then tell their boss, "Fuck you. I'm with the union."

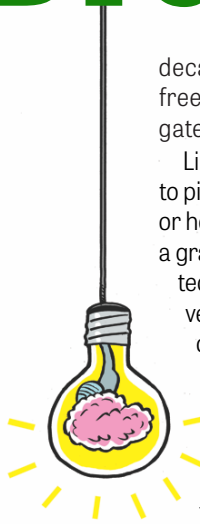
We aren't likely to see a Democratic president like that any time soon. We better go organize some workers, so that we can save ourselves.

THE BIG IDEA

de•cen• tral• ized in•ter•net

noun

1. a way to democratize web access and break Big Tech monopolies



» Is the internet really "centralized" right now? Not in the sense that any single entity "owns" the internet, but a handful of corporations do exercise enormous control over the bulk of the internet's physical infrastructure and the data and commerce that takes place onli ne. "Decentralized internet" is an umbrella term, but the basic idea is to circumvent mass surveillance and prevent giant companies (like Facebook, Google and Twitter) from having any single internet kill switch, largely by running the internet on peer-to-peer networks.

» Does this all have something to do with Bitcoin? Some cryptocurrency enthusiasts envision a decentralized internet built around crypto and blockchain infrastructure, which they're calling "web3." (Web 1.0 generally refers to the development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, while web 2.0 refers to the internet's shift toward mobile and social platforms over the past couple of decades.) Web3 is a vision of the internet free from the control of corporate gatekeepers and government regulators.

Like much else in Silicon Valley, it's hard to pin down exactly what web3 "really" is or how it would work, because it's more of a grand vision than a specific proposal or technology. Of course, that isn't stopping venture capitalists from pouring billions of dollars into the idea.

» Do we really want an unregulate-able internet, though? Probably not. A lot of cryptocurrency activity, for example, looks a lot like an evasion of financial regulation (which is to say, money laundering). And while decentralization might help break corporate control over our lives and protect us against government censorship, it's not necessarily a panacea. We know that white supremacists, for example, have been relying on peer-to-peer messaging networks to continue organizing out of public view.

» Should the Left support a decentralized internet? We should want a more democratic internet, at least. According to the Pew Research Center, 93% of American adults use the internet, so the question of who mediates those interactions is important. We need net neutrality and regulation (or nationalization!) of major tech companies and service providers, and open-source platforms to provide alternatives in the meantime. But these are political challenges more than technological ones—and, as usual, it's best not to rush into buying whatever Silicon Valley is selling.

"[We need] discussions about innovation, resilience, open protocols [and] data ownership … if we want the internet to stay free, democratic and engaging."

—IRINA BOLYCHEVSKY, AN ORGANIZER WITH REDECENTRALIZE.ORG



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERRY LABAN



PHOTO BY JOSE LUIS MAGANA / AFP

Protesters rally at Black Lives Matter plaza across from the White House as President Donald Trump accepts the Republican presidential nomination Aug. 27, 2020.



What's Next for the DEFUND Movement?

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH, MAKIA GREEN, ANDREW R. HAIRSTON, WILLIE BURNLEY JR AND KANDACE MONTGOMERY

Five police abolitionists from around the country—some of them newly elected to city councils—talk about lessons from November 2021, the efficacy of the "defund the police" demand and where the movement goes from here.

MINNEAPOLIS

In the birthplace of the summer 2020 uprising over the police murder of George Floyd, the defund movement took a blow in November 2021. Ballot Question 2, which would have opened the door for major structural changes to the Minneapolis Police Department, failed 44%-56%. Yet city council challenger Robin Wonsley Worlobah, who campaigned in support of Question 2, won by 13 votes in a runoff. And a progressive ballot measure to allow rent control, known as Question 3, passed 53%-47%.

KANDACE MONTGOMERY: The result of the summer 2020 uprising that was led by young Black and brown people here in Minneapolis was a political opportunity to create systemic and transformative change in the ways police hold power and how resources are moved within the city to support public safety. Many of us understood it as a step toward abolition. For others, it felt like a necessary step to actually ensure folks' safety.

So the Yes On 2 campaign looked to change the city charter—our city's constitution—to remove a requirement to keep the police department as it is. Then, it could be replaced by a Department of Public Safety that would take a public health approach to our safety. That department would include police officers but also a breadth of other things, like mental health responders and nonpunitive social workers.

I'm still processing lessons learned. I think our opposition made the conversation very much about abolition or not. That created a lot of fear for people who are not quite there, who have some really real concerns around their physical safety and intercommunal violence. And so the conversation became very narrow.

But my experience of talking to folks on doors, talking to our canvassers, being on the phones, is that once you are able to actually have the conversation of, "Here's what a Department of Public Safety could look like—it could include youth programming, it could include all of these things"—I found, overwhelmingly, that even people who were still very committed to the idea of still having police were able to embrace this vision. They just needed more time to let go of the policing thing. And that was OK, as long as we were consistently doing that work.

ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH: I think often in these conversations—and within our movement—it's about policing only. And that's also how the opposition tries to frame it. But actually, under a capitalist society, policing is only one piece. My city council campaign put Question 2 within a socialist analysis: "We have to correct the conditions under racial capitalism that cause a power imbalance and inequality that policing ends up reinforcing. We have to make mass investments in our public infrastructure, which we know actually address crime by stabilizing people's lives and their communities." Neoliberals don't want to hear anything about mass investments. We lead with transitional demands that not only improve people's material conditions, but also shine a light on an enemy to rally working-class people around—demands like rent control, which maintains some level of housing security for working-class people and has a very clear class enemy in corporate developers, who generate millions if not billions of dollars of wealth from working-class people through ever-expansive rents. So then we link these issues by saying, "You are going after our localized enforcement structure of capitalism, the police."

I think the movement backing Question 2 made a mistake of not naming the enemy. Because then the opposition was able to say, "You hate the police chief, this upstanding Black man." Or, "You hate Black people, you want them to live in communities riddled with gun violence." The mayor, these corporate-backed PACs like Operation Safety Now, the Downtown Council, the chief of police and the police union literally went on four months of a speaking tour. Almost every weekend, out over in north Minneapolis, where a baby has just got shot and killed, they would basically say, "Look at these grieving parents, look at these grieving Black folks, we can't afford to try something experimental."

We didn't have a narrative to counteract that at that scale. And that's fine—but if we don't have the narrative, then we damn sure have to have the ground game. Because, I mean, we're only running on people power, we ain't got none of these corporations sponsoring us.

I think there was a missed opportunity to have a strong ground game in the places that the corporate elite targeted, which was working-class Black folks. It was a great testament to the signature campaign [to get Question 2 on the ballot] that they reached 1,400 Northside residents, but what if we had joined forces with the rent control coalition [backing Question 3] to do joint canvasses across north Minneapolis? To say, "This is your better offer. Not only will you get a quality, equitable public



KANDACE MONTGOMERY is a Black and queer organizer in Minneapolis and a national leader in the Movement for Black Lives. She is co-executive director of Black Visions, which co-issued the May 2020 demand to defund the Minneapolis Police Department. She was board chair of the Yes 4 Minneapolis coalition to remove the city's mandate for a police department.



Yes 4 Minneapolis volunteer Tira Howel (right) garners support for Question 2 on Election Day, Nov. 2, 2021, which would have allowed Minneapolis to restructure its police department.

JOSHUA LOTT/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

safety system, but you'll stop paying all your money to the slumlords. This is how you don't got to work two jobs in order to take care of your kids. And then you're missing out on your kids, and they're being pulled to get involved in other things."

Another point the opposition said was, "You progressive abolitionists, y'all ain't got no plan. This public safety department ain't gonna do nothing." I'll be very frank, the coalition had internal debates about this. Very early on, we knew the opposition was going to weaponize the language of the ballot amendment. And I think there was a missed opportunity of putting out that proposal Kandace mentioned, around alternative responders.

My campaign made our own democratic socialist public safety plan. We made zines of it that we distributed when we were door knocking to say, "What if we actually invest in what Kandace named—unarmed responders, first responders, mental health providers, social workers?"

In our ward, we turned out more than 50% of registered voters, and Question 2 won [56% to 44%].

And I know Kandace wants to throw in something, too.

KANDACE MONTGOMERY: I agree with a lot of those offerings, Robin, and I'm excited to sit down to debrief. Just adding, I think it's important to see the conditions in which we were fighting, coming out of 2020. Folks were exhausted, living through a pandemic. Our organizations were all very much pulled. Multiple organizations, including Black Visions, were dealing with internal conflict. And a lot of organizers were experiencing a lack of activity from community members—because of the economic conditions, because of the pandemic, because of isolation.

Some opportunities had to be missed because people just literally didn't have the capacity to pick them up. I name that because I think our movements need to really think about how, in these low moments, we are fortifying our organizations and our bases and our relationships. How are we actually developing Black organizers so that it's not just 10 of us who are brilliant, radical Black strategists in the city? Because, to be real, it's hardly much more than that.

To the rent control piece: The rent control coalition was a bit broader, and it was not necessarily aligned on policing. Some of the leadership intentionally decided not to sign onto our question. And so those collaborations weren't really possible. Again, it speaks to the ways we have to build alignment, shared vision. I think everybody should understand how police abolition gets us to housing justice gets us to these other things, but it's long-term work.



ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH is Ward 2 city councilor-elect in Minneapolis. She has been active in Black Lives Matter since 2015 and backed the 2021 ballot measure to restructure policing. A democratic socialist, she was endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America and Socialist Alternative MN.

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Proposition A, on Austin's November 2021 ballot, would have mandated two police officers per every 1,000 residents, a major expansion. More than 80 groups joined a No Way on Prop A campaign, including the Travis County Democratic Party, Austin Democratic Socialists of America, AFSCME Local 1624 (the county employees' union), the firefighters union and the emergency medical services union. Prop A lost 31%-69%.

ANDREW R. HAIRSTON: A pretty tremendous victory was registered November 2. We defeated this unfunded mandate for the police—projected to cost up to $600 million to the detriment of parks, libraries, fire and other social services.

A little bit of political background. In 2019, Austin City Council voted to lift the camping ban that had been in place for some years and to allow folks who are experiencing homelessness to be in public spaces. In 2020, the city council started to move toward a defund strategy and mandated a series of cuts to the police department.

But in 2021, at the behest of Gov. Greg Abbott, the Texas Legislature stepped in to undo local efforts and codify in state law that local police budget cuts are impermissible without voter approval. And then this conservative-backed group, Save Austin Now PAC (SAN PAC), got a measure on the May 2021 ballot to reinstitute the camping ban. Austin DSA and other nonprofits fought against it, but it passed 58%-42%. A lot of wealthy white folks in West Austin are like, "You know, we just don't want to see folks experiencing homelessness."

Then, SAN PAC kind of doubled down and said, "You know what, let's super-fund the police. We have this momentum."

The super-funding ballot measure failed miserably. The voters were like, "You know, we don't want to affirmatively support people experiencing homelessness, but I guess we also don't want to super-fund the police."

So that's where we are. I think there's still a lot of organizing appetite to push back against the super-funding of the police pushed from the state government, but as Robin uplifted, there's this tepid response from neoliberal folks. They're like, "We don't want to super-fund the police, but ... we're not going to really entertain this conversation about abolition."



ANDREW R. HAIRSTON is a civil rights attorney and writer in Austin, Texas. He organized with the No Way on Prop A campaign to block an increase of hundreds of millions to the city's police budget. He is running a democratic socialist campaign for Travis County justice of the peace in the March 1 Democratic primary.



WASHINGTON, D.C.

Because D.C. is not a state, its election cycle coincides with federal elections, the most recent being November 2020. In the June 2020 city council primary, democratic socialist Janeese Lewis George ran on a defund platform against Democratic heavyweight Brandon Todd, a protégé of D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and a supporter of the police union. Lewis George won 55%-43% (a third candidate won 2%). But in the November 2020 election for two at-large council seats, both candidates supporting police defunding lost.

MAKIA GREEN: As organizing director with the Working Families Party, I worked on Janeese Lewis George's campaign for Ward 4 councilmember. She ran on a campaign of housing rights, good jobs, demilitarizing and divesting from the police, and investing in communities. Defund MPD [Metropolitan Police Department] has been talking about divest/invest for years: Take away the infrastructure from things that are harming us and put money into things that will help us.

The council campaign was a long shot to everyone else's mind. She was going up against an incumbent [Brandon Todd] in a seat from which people often become mayor—two times so far.



AMANDA ANDRADE-RHOADES/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Above: Washington, D.C., Ward 4 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George greets constituents after being sworn into office Jan. 2, 2021. George, a democratic socialist, defeated an establishment-backed candidate in the June 2020 primary by running on a "defund the police" platform, among other issues.

Lewis George was attacked by her own party members. This out-of-state PAC, Democrats for Education Reform, put in tons of money. Everyone was getting these postcards taking her words out of context—just a complete misinformation campaign. They made it sound like she could and would fire all the cops. Come on, right? It just missed her platform completely, as well as what was realistic. But honestly, a lot of times, we thought our folks were going to believe this.

On Election Day, the mayor, who's a pro-cop mayor, put a curfew because of the protests supporting folks in Minneapolis. There were hundreds of people downtown in front of the White House. The curfew started before the polls ended. And we knew who that was going to impact—Black and brown voters. We knew what she was doing—she was backing Brandon Todd.

And in spite of that, people stayed in line till after midnight. Young people came to vote, saying, "I'm here specifically for Janeese and I'm here to vote because Black lives matter." Folks had their fists up in the line and, around 7 o'clock, the time of the curfew, everyone kneeled together. Janeese won by a landslide, in my opinion.

November 2020 was a completely different landscape. The presidential election was polarizing everything. The Democratic Party started to say that the defund demand was eroding support.

In D.C., there was a 24-person race for two at-large city council seats. Two of the candidates, Ed Lazere and Markus Batchelor, ran in support of what we called, "Defund MPD, Refund D.C." Unfortunately, neither won.

For me, the lessons in this moment are: One, strike while the iron is hot. Context does matter. And two, run a campaign that canvasses to find out, "Is everybody really on board?" Everyone's kneeling and putting out flags on their house, but are they talking to their friends? Are they really going to be down for you when it counts?

We also want to claim our victories. We won a lot of policing reforms. We restored voting rights for everyone who's incarcerated in D.C. currently and formerly. We're trying to decriminalize drugs and decriminalize street vending. We're having hearings on getting rid of mandatory minimums. None of that would have been possible without the movement—without you all.

SOMERVILLE, MASS.

In the Boston suburb of Somerville, Defund Somerville Police Department won a 7.7% police budget cut in July 2020. In November 2021, Defund SPD organizer Willie Burnley Jr. won a city council seat, along with two other democratic socialists.

WILLIE BURNLEY JR.: Somerville is about four square miles, with about 80,000 people—one of the densest places in the country. It's 75% white, but you have a lot of white people here saying, "Oh, I love our diversity." [laughter] Massachusetts is pretty pro-police, so those dynamics all play into this conversation.

In the midst of 2020's national reckoning with police violence, our city government was saying, "We know our budgets are going to get impacted by Covid, so what we're going to do is massively cut housing." The Office of Housing Stability, which helps people stay in their homes and not be displaced, was going to get cut by 12%.

They were barely going to touch the police department—maybe a 3% cut. This flew in the face of the national conversation. So we got



WILLIE BURNLEY JR is co-founder of Defund Somerville Police Department and is city councilor-elect in Somerville, Mass. Endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America, he is a Black and queer organizer, a former union steward with Teamsters 122 and former campaign staffer for Massachusetts Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey.

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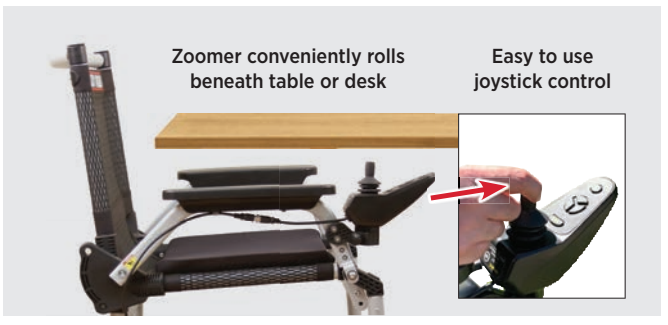
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organized. We did phone banks, emails, biking and car caravans to the mayor's house. Defund SPD organized six hours of public testimony to the city council; 148 people spoke, saying, "No, we should cut the police by at least 10%." That number came from a survey where the average actually was 60%—but we didn't think we were quite ready for that demand as an organization that was about two weeks old. We got 7.7%, which was $1.3 million. The money actually went where we wanted it to go: healthcare, housing, rental assistance, food, services, the things that make our community stronger and safer.

In the midst of that battle, we had a lot of push-back. All these people, including the police chiefs, said, "This isn't Ferguson, this isn't New York. We are different and we're better." We heard this from June to December 2020. What they didn't tell us was that, in October 2020, the local president of the police union handcuffed a man and pepper-sprayed him in the face.

We also saw continual gatekeeping around what communities of color and working-class people need and who is representative of them. So we had a bunch of white people saying, "You guys aren't representative of my people over here who are people of color. You're gentrifiers, you're rich people, you weren't born here." In fact, Defund SPD's steering committee is majority people of color and almost all renters. They are far more representative of those communities, often, than the people who have the power to decide these things.

WHERE BLACK VOTERS ARE

MAKIA GREEN: What I'm wondering is, how do we make sure that folks are not gaslighting us about where Black folks are? We get this in D.C. and I saw it when I went to Minneapolis. Maybe it's not the tagline "defund," but we know Black people deserve and want healthcare, public safety, to hold our homes—and we're told Black people don't support these things.

KANDACE MONTGOMERY: In places like Minnesota with such a huge white population and also a significant Black population, tokenization happens very easily. Particular Black people are sort of courted for positions of quasi power. Often, those people don't work in their actual community's interests. And there's also an old guard that sticks to a more moderate politic.

Minneapolis really has to move past an idea that Black people are a monolith and that Black people can't disagree. So that the conversation isn't as narrow as, "the Black community didn't get behind this."

We're also facing things like voter suppression and a lack of authentic engagement with Black community members, especially from the traditional electoral apparatus, and a lot of skepticism because of inaction from council. What I feel really committed to is we need to have a stronger vision that people can tangibly and physically resonate with.

ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH: I wonder, what would the conditions have been if we had double the Black folks to push back against the Black old guard? The public safety debate that was held in October revealed very clearly that the opposition, that included the Black old guard, did not possess a strong plan for public safety transformation. In fact, after the forum, Queen Minister JaNaé Bates [co-chair of the Yes 4 Minneapolis coalition for Question 2] had members of the Black old guard churches coming up to her being like, "Bruh, I've been lied to."

MAKIA GREEN: I really think we need to push back on the way they use the stories of our community loved ones who are grieving as chess pieces to get more funding. They use Black death to line the pockets of our oppressors. One thing we say in D.C. is, "There's a cop on every block in my neighborhood, but our kids are still getting shot."

When crime is up, police need more money so they can solve it. When crime is down,

Everyone's kneeling and putting out flags on their house, but are they talking to their friends?



MAKIA GREEN is a queer, nonbinary, fat, Black liberation organizer who is co-chair of the Defund MPD Coalition, co-founder of Harriet's Wildest Dreams and a former core organizer of Black Lives Matter D.C. As an organizing director with the Working Families Party, Green campaigned in 2020 to get supporters of police defunding elected to D.C. Council.

police need more money to keep crime down. When crime stays the same, police need more money to keep up morale. When officers quit during a huge movement—in D.C., record numbers left the force—it's, "The angry kids yelled at them so they left." Is it possible that people leave this job all the time because it's a very unsafe job, and you're putting people in a place where they have to police their own community and they don't believe in it anymore?

WILLIE BURNLEY JR.: I resonate so deeply with that. In Somerville, the police unions were able to say, "Violence is up, shootings are up," and turn that into, "I guess we need more cops." Obviously, what they're doing isn't working. So either they're incompetent or we need to find another route. Which is it?

THE DEMOCRATS

WILLIE BURNLEY JR.: I have some tension around how much time we should spend trying to respond to accusations like, "Democrats lost nationally because Cori Bush doesn't like the police," or, "We have to stop saying 'defund the police' as a party." The Democrats have never run on "defund the police"; it should be obvious to anyone paying attention that they've never lost anywhere because of defund. I ran on it, and I did not lose.

ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH: Anytime the Democrats lose for not delivering change, they blame the leftists, they blame Bernie Sanders, they blame the Squad. In Ohio, they brought a Black woman corporate establishment candidate to go up against Nina Turner.

It's their way to deflect, in hopes that they can finally win over suburban voters. This is why we see the party constantly move to the political Right and adopting conservative platforms and messaging. It all demonstrates that the party is not interested in making transformative change.

Joe Biden can, right now, with the stroke of the pen, eliminate trillions and trillions of dollars of debt for millions of students, and he refuses. Instead he does other maneuvers, like authorizing student debt payment pauses, to placate those who own capital. That's the reason the Democratic Party is about to lose heavily in the midterms. They're not beholden to the people. Working-class people spend so much time phone banking for the Democratic Party and door knocking to get nothing. But working-class people are starting to see beyond the misinformation fog. People are becoming more and more disengaged and more frustrated with the Democratic Party.



SARAH REINGEWIRTZ/MEDIANEWS GROUP/LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS VIA GETTY IMAGES

After several decades of failing to reform or take over the Democratic Party, you would think that we would learn that this strategy simply doesn't work. I ran as an Independent as a testament to say, "DSA, how's this partnership with the Democratic Party looking for y'all?" My sis Kshama Sawant in Seattle is the reason why the Fight for 15 spread nationally. It wasn't through the Democratic Party. Even under full Democratic control at the federal level, we still can't get $15. And we should be talking about $25.

So as Black working-class organizers and leftists, we should think about building independent political power, instead of constantly routing all of our talent, art, labor and brilliance into a party that we end up having to fight more than actually get something from.



2022 AND BEYOND

WILLIE BURNLEY JR.: In Somerville, the city is considering building a new public safety building to house the fire department and a bunch of police—half of the building would just be for their vehicles. The building would cost $100 million. That's more than a third of our overall budget. So we'd need to borrow money.

To the point Robin was making earlier, Defund SPD is in the midst of a community conversation about what public safety means, how we build it, how we invest in it. If we want to have a new fancy building, OK, let's do that, but why do we need police in there? Let's remove the police. Let's put in a community center. Let's put in municipal ambulances. In Somerville, police aren't often responding to violent crime; people need an ambulance, they need help for a mental health crisis or a crisis of addiction. Nine times out of 10, they don't need a person with a gun.

That council vote needs a supermajority because the measure is bond-funded. We have, now, four DSA candidates on our council, and if we vote as a bloc, we can just kill this thing outright. So we can engage in a negotiation.

ANDREW R. HAIRSTON: 2022 has notes of optimism and hope for me. Running for justice of the peace in Travis County, Texas, as a member of the Democratic Party but also as a democratic socialist and abolitionist, I'm trying to be deeply explicit in my values: This is for Black people, for queer people, for folks who have been pushed to the margins.

KANDACE MONTGOMERY: I am still wrestling with the question of where to go in 2022, to be honest. I'm really trying to assess and evaluate the data we have from the last 18 months, to create more of an arc of strategy that wins some concrete things along the way toward a larger vision. We'll also be building relationships with new council members and getting an understanding of their priorities and opportunities—especially voices like Robin's, who are more ready and primed for a much more radical approach.

We have a whole bunch of new contacts and people. We need to go out and sit down with those folks. We need one-on-ones every day.

In terms of the midterms, I think we really need to figure out when is the right time to be going for a Department of Public Safety and, like Robin said, put a little bit more meat to the definition of what that is. I think Robin might have a better sense of that timing.

ROBIN WONSLEY WORLOBAH: There's an opening now to organize the 60,000 people who voted for Question 2 to build a public pressure campaign for the mayor to create the new Department of Public Safety. He said in September 2021 that he supported one and could do it without a ballot initiative. My office released an op-ed in December 2021 encouraging him to move forward.

KANDACE MONTGOMERY: The other thing I'll say is that none of us went into 2020 and were like, "Next year, we're going to try and abolish the police." All the organizers on this call know that's a multiyear campaign arc, baby, that we tried to pull off in 18 months. The rupturings of uprisings create

Above: Youthful abolitionists and Black Lives Matter supporters mark the anniversary of the police murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2021, outside of Los Angeles police headquarters.

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A forward-looking graffiti wall in New York City in fall 2020 supports defunding the police while reading, "We'll be patience," prophetic of organizers' longview approach to the movement for abolition.

political opportunities. We all saw the political opportunity and went for it. I don't necessarily regret that. But I do know, from my organizer brain and all the mentors who have trained me up, that I think it's going to take multiple years of political education—and building up some of the models that people can rely on instead of the police—to actually fortify a base of Black folks who are able to more critically think through oppositional messages and are ready to take a step toward this kind of transformative change.

That's a real tension: You have to take the political opportunities when they come, but we also have to move at the speed of trust and understanding within community.

WILLIE BURNLEY JR.: Off election year, we need to be having these conversations in a really robust way, of, "I am your neighbor. When you are unsafe, I am unsafe. Therefore, I am not going to abandon you."

Mutual aid is the first way we establish trust. It's hard to talk to someone about Marx or Frantz Fanon if they're hungry. We have to meet people where they are. Parts of our community are dealing with deep poverty and a lack of resources. Once people have stability, they can become more open to conversations.

But we have to be very honestly strategic about the messengers and how we're reaching out. The impression in Somerville of Boston DSA is that it is almost entirely white (although there are a lot of BIPOC folks). So how do we engage our people in public housing who are overwhelmingly Black and Latino? We have to be very mindful of who is doing that conversation and how we are engaging. Is it, knock on the door, "Hey, have you heard about abolition?"

Or is it, "How can we help to make sure your needs are being met?" And then a more gradual introduction to the work of abolition.

We have to build those informal networks, that so many of our ancestors have done, in order to give working-class people enough support to be able to start moving to the front lines. Those people can actually become our leaders in this movement and can reach out to more people, and that's how we get past generational barriers.

MAKIA GREEN: I'm just grateful to still be putting forth candidates that would support a divest/invest campaign, regardless of what the Democratic elite leaders think and regardless of our wins and losses.

A lot of us are in the Black radical tradition, and we know that this movement has a longevity before and past 2020. We have been experimenting and trying and building, and that's why we're the largest movement in the country's history.

At some point, there may be a new tagline beyond "defund the police," but it will be in the same tradition. And it'll be about meeting the needs of Black people at that current time. IN

This roundtable was edited for length and clarity.

JOAN SLATKIN/EDUCATION IMAGES/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Black Farmers Sow the Seeds for the Future

A century after the height of Black farming, young land stewards pick up the plow

BY RANDI LOVE

The trek across the Interstate 5 overpass is noisy, but once the small slope leading to the farm is in sight, nearly every sound melts away. Over the chain-link gate, a vibrant sky-blue greenhouse comes into view. A large sign atop the door reads, "Yes Farm."

To the right is a busy construction site and towering condos and apartments. From the park just beyond comes the sounds of barking dogs and pickup basketball. Across the street, Seattle's Harborview Medical Center completes an almost caged-off effect for the 700-yard strip of farmland. In the distance stands the downtown Seattle skyline.

On one fall day, a few city-goers walk leisurely through the accessible urban farm, where a volunteer shovels soil near a patch of greens.

"You can get your hands dirty a bit by coming out there or just seeing where your food is grown," says Ray Williams, the managing director of Black Farmers Collective, a group of eight people who run two leased farms in western Washington. Yes Farm is the group's urban location, not far from Seattle's bustling Pike Place Market neighborhood. Small Axe Farm is about a 30-minute drive away.

Yes Farm is also home to a community garden "where folks who live in housing around here, or the neighborhood around here can get a bed or half a bed and grow their own food for their families," says Hannah Wilson, farm manager.

The nonprofit, established in 2016, aims to

PHOTOS BY RANDI LOVE

educate the community and enrich the lives of Black people in and around the Seattle area through community gardens, events and participation. It operates with the assistance of volunteers who help plant, move soil and pack beds, but the heavy lifting is done by Williams, who identifies as biracial (Black and white), and his two full-time farm managers. The organic farms sell their goods through small community markets, and their crops include berries, cabbages, kale, beets and collard greens.

"I wanted to do something to help the Black community," Williams says. "We hope that we can start to sell enough vegetables to become a model for a small farm operation. I don't see us selling enough to pay for more than the growing of the food. We will always need grants and donations to offer our education, community events, and offer free food at pantries and special events."

Daunting barriers for Black farmers

Black farmers in the United States have historically faced massive social and institutional barriers to owning and operating farms, according to a 2003 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Business–Cooperative Service research report.

"For more than a century after the Civil War, deficient civil rights and various economic and social barriers were applied to maintaining a system where many [Black people] worked as farm operators with a limited and often total lack of opportunity to achieve ownership and operating independence," the report says.

Eddie Moore, a Michigan State University agricultural professor and a former White House senior executive in the USDA during the Clinton administration, says the issues Black farmers face today date back to the Civil War. He says during that time, most resources and political power were in the South. Tobacco, cotton and other commodities were in high demand around the world. After slavery, many Black freedmen seeking work negotiated with the government and white planters for housing and land to cultivate. But Black farmers were often left with no other option than to become sharecroppers or tenants working for white

Left: The greenhouse at Yes Farm in Seattle, operated by Black Farmers Collective, awaits a plastic covering.
Below: The Yes Farm community garden program offers raised beds for local residents to grow their own food.



farmers under discriminatory financial arrangements that left them grappling with a cycle of debt.

Moore says the expenses of cultivating the crops often far outweighed profit. "So basically even though [Black farmers] were involved in sharecropping, a lot of them were worse off than when they started these arrangements with white farmers," Moore says.

While the late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by economic stagnation for most Black farmers, according to the USDA, some were successful in their pursuit of independent farming enterprises.

Booker T. Washington emerged as a leading advocate to improve conditions and education for Black farmers, advocating for land-tract purchases for small farm families and a shift from cotton to fruits, vegetables, and livestock. Washington promoted crop diversification as an avenue towards self-sufficiency for Black farmers by avoiding dependence on cotton and indebtedness from crop liens, according to the USDA.

But the combination of new mechanization and the Great Depression reduced the demand for farm labor in the South, and by the New Deal era, the struggles of Black farmers to own land only increased. Under the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (AAA), meant to bolster a faltering economy, cotton production was supported by restricting acreage and guaranteeing minimum prices—but AAA programs primarily benefited white landowners.

Black farmers, meanwhile, often had to renegotiate to keep their land, while the cost of farmland increased 15–20%. Federal aid incentives to expand farm acreage grew, but Black farmers seldom had access to those programs.

Another major barrier for Black farmers has been access to timely and adequate loans, Moore says. The USDA has faced allegations of discriminatory lending practices, and in 2010, President Barack Obama settled a class action lawsuit that alleged that USDA discriminated against Black people who applied for farm loans and farm benefits between 1981 and 1996.

At the height of Black farming in 1920, Black-owned or operated farms accounted for approximately 15 million acres and 926,000 farms; by 2017, those numbers were down to 4.6 million acres and 35,470 farms, or about 1.4% of all U.S. agricultural producers, according to numbers from the USDA.

"The issue here is really that Black families, to a large extent, will never recoup that type of financial loss," Moore says. "There is very little there for generations to come, or even the previous generations."





PHOTOS BY RANDI LOVE





Black farmers also make less money per farm than any other racial group. According to the USDA, Black farm producers in 2017 made an average net of $3,509 per farm; the overall national average was $43,053. The total market value of products sold by Black farm producers averaged $39,928 per farm; the national per-farm average was $190,245. And according to the National Agricultural Classification Survey, Black-operated farms sold just $1.4 billion of the $388 billion in U.S. agricultural products in 2017, just 0.4 percent of total U.S. total sales.

Passing the plow to the next generation

In 2020, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement brought systemic racism into the national conversation, garnering support for Black-owned businesses, including farms. But Black-owned or operated farms still face significant barriers when it comes to receiving federal aid, $4 billion of which, earmarked for Black farmers, is presently tied up in a pending lawsuit.

So farm operators like Ray Williams are looking for new ways to help the next generation of Black farmers move forward. As a former science teacher, Williams says he made the transition into farming after he gained a more defined connection between food and health as his career developed. After he helped form the Black Farmers Collective, he had a vision for what urban farming in Seattle could become.

"You don't need to be part of the large corporate farming system, but you need an economic system that pays the farmer," Williams says. "I was envisioning a cooperative urban farm where folks could come in and make a little bit of money off of what they're doing."

He says one goal of the collective is to obtain true sovereignty and ownership, but with the price of land in Washington, it'll take some time to get there. "If we're able to get into a position to be able to buy some land and continue to do this farming and then have something that could stay in the organization and could stay as a Black-owned land ... [that] is something that I dream of, that we do talk about," he says.

The 65-year-old plans to pass management over to his younger staff and board, who are all under 35, over the next couple of years, as he looks toward retirement.

Top: Farm manager Masra Clamoungou counts a bushel of beets at Small Axe Farm in Redmond, Wash., a sibling site to Yes Farm. ***Bottom:*** *Ray Williams, managing director of Black Farmers Collective, joins Clamoungou in the beet field. Williams hopes their efforts can become a model for other small urban farm operations.*

“My hope is that we can develop the systems to make us sustainable and the shared skills to keep us moving forward.”

Like Williams, many Black farmers in the United States are aging. In 2017, the average age for Black farmers was 60, underscoring the importance of training and resources for the next generation while more experienced farmers are still around to help.

Farm manager Hannah Wilson, for example, is 25. Wilson studied environmental science and geography at the University of Washington before working with Black Farmers Collective, initially to do restoration, which included clearing out invasive blackberries, and implementing the use of native plants to build a healthier ecosystem. “I was more on the environmental restoration side of things, talking about food justice and environmental racism and how that shows up in Seattle, but I hadn’t had a ton of experience actually farming yet,” Wilson says.

Wilson adds that farming offers an opportunity for authenticity while making an impact in the community. “I don’t have to try and be a certain way,” says Wilson, who is deaf and nonbinary. “I can do what I love and also bring all the disability, queerness, all of this into this space too—which is not something I felt like I could do growing up.”

Wilson gets excited about the future of Black farming and has hosted multiple community gatherings with Black chefs, book giveaways and





Farm manager Hannah Wilson wheels away equipment after wrapping up a day of hosting volunteers at Yes Farm, part of Black Farmers Collective's mission to build "interconnectedness with the environment and the community."

PHOTO BY RANDI LOVE

partnerships with summer camps and afterschool programs. "I get to teach some kids a little bit more about farming, or the science behind farming, and that's been really beautiful," Wilson says.

Farm manager Masra Clamoungou, also 25, says he was never particularly interested in working on a farm growing up but has benefited from his Black Farmers Collective job physically, spiritually and mentally. He says growing up in Seattle didn't expose him to wilderness or farms beyond what he saw on television, but elective classes at Seattle Central College sparked an interest.

"There was a small sustainable food systems, sustainable agriculture program at that college, luckily," says Clamoungou, who identifies as biracial (Black and white). "I randomly took a few classes there and they really spoke to me." Clamoungou adds that he wants to help younger generations "preserve that culture of not just farming, but just being connected with ecosystems, connected with the land around them."

Roots take hold for the future

Because most U.S. farms are family-owned, Williams says offering Black Farmers Collective to his staff after his retirement could be seen as a bit nontraditional—most land isn't owned by a nonprofit and would traditionally be passed down to family members. And Williams confirms that land ownership is the group's next big step, which would be a significant development.

"My hope is that we can develop the systems to make us sustainable and the shared skills to keep us moving forward," Williams says. "I don't have training in nonprofit development. I've just built [Black Farmers Collective] with hard work, greeting people with an open hand and a smile and lots of luck."

Williams says Wilson is very capable of building a path for the organization that will help it move in the right direction, while Wilson hopes to bring in another generation of farmers to learn—before handing over the reins to build up a third farm.

Wilson also wants to create a learning space for people of color, building the opportunity to showcase Black leadership and have a community "with folks that look like you."

Williams says he hopes his vision of the future expands beyond just what's possible in one neighborhood.

"If you grow a plant in the pot, there's only so far the roots can go. There's only so big that plant can be," he says. "If you can put the plant in the land, and those roots can stretch out and get the nutrition and experiences from that, then they can grow much larger and be way more fruitful." IN

RANDI LOVE is a graduate candidate at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY and a Reuters-NABJ fellow.

Judge-y Judy

How *Judy Justice* extends contempt for the poor

BY YASMIN NAIR

Judy Sheindlin, of the eponymous show *Judge Judy,* is so famous that, at a Shoah Foundation ceremony honoring former President Barack Obama, *he* was asked if he had ever watched *her.* Obama's response was a classic example of Obamian diplomacy (Sheindlin was nearby, making things particularly awkward): "Who doesn't love *Judge Judy*?"

It was a clever dodge, even if a little obvious. As it happens, millions watch Sheindlin even if they don't love her — *Judge Judy,* which ran on CBS from 1996 to July 2021, occasionally outranked even *Oprah* in its ratings. It made Sheindlin a multimillionaire and the highest paid daytime host. CBS was paying her $47 million a year by the time she parted ways with the network to start a new show, titled *Judy Justice*, on the Amazon-owned IMDb streaming service. Reports indicate she has so far received $25 million for a first season of 120 episodes, which debuted on Nov. 1, 2021.

Judy Justice is a reality show that features disputes over such matters as child custody, pet ownership and employment contracts. Sheindlin is a retired judge and serves only as an arbitrator, even though the set is made to look like small claims court. Participants sign contracts agreeing not to contest the results of the arbitration, and viewers are made to believe that the cases appear on Sheindlin's docket as if she were an actual judge—though the cases are, of course, vetted. Like all reality shows, *Judy Justice* carefully chooses its participants. In fact, Sheindlin's scouts scour legal cases across the country to find suitable candidates. One of the defining questions that determines inclusion appears to be: *How much of a mess can you be on television?*

The train wreck scenarios enable Sheindlin to pretend to be simply a benign and impartial judge trying to restore order among unruly people. This attitude allows her to show contempt for people of color and poor people (groups that often intersect on the show) and to be shockingly rude to them in ways she'd never dare with, say, wealthy or middle-class white people—all the while acting like someone who is forced to be overly stern with random people who just happen to behave badly, as she would have it, in front of her.

Nearly all of the people who end up on the show are poor or close to indigency, collapsing under mountains of debt as they struggle to keep up with demands of landlords, children and former spouses. Blouses have stains; some teeth are crooked or missing; pressed suits fall uncomfortably off the shoulders of those who have clearly been advised to "clean themselves up" for court. *Judge Judy* awarded a maximum payout of $5,000, an amount that has been doubled on *Judy Justice;* it's likely the higher sum is designed to attract more participants. The show also flies people to California, all expenses paid.



In exchange for their appearance, participants agree to be humiliated and berated for the supposed choices that landed them there. They are screamed at by a woman who only works five days a month and who, after the shooting is done, hops on her private jet to fly to her 23-acre home in Naples, Fla., to enjoy a daily lunch with her husband at the Ritz-Carlton.

Episodes 25 and 26, for instance, linger over a dispute between two Black women whose families had taken a shared vacation in Florida. The plaintiff appears to claim the defendant still owes her money, though it's hard to tell what the real issue is even after multiple viewings—because matters escalate quickly, with everyone screaming. Sheindlin asks probing questions that are unrelated to whatever the case might be but allow her to moralize. At one point, she wants to know whether the plaintiff drank while at dinner at an Applebee's. When the woman says she had a glass of wine, Sheindlin prods her into confessing she may have had two. Sheindlin, in the manner of a nun, points out that

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNEE SCHWANK

wine lowers inhibitions. None of this information is related to the case, but Sheindlin is a white boomer multimillionaire who appears to sincerely believe her success is owed to her and that anyone who suffers deserves it. She has the air of the elder white Karen stereotype, the ones who wear expensive athleisure on morning walks and pick up errant tin cans and place them in the trash while looking around to see which person (preferably someone of color) can be glared at accusingly.

These episodes have Sheindlin facing down a group of Black single women for whom it can be presumed a dinner at Applebee's is a treat and for whom the money they were scraping together for a big vacation was a chunk of their bank balances. At one point, Sheindlin tells the plaintiff's sister, also a grown woman, to uncross her arms and tells the defendant's adult daughter to stand up straight without resting her chin on her arms, which are propped up on the bench. Finally, *after* Sheindlin has spent time asking for needless details and watching videos of shouting matches between undifferentiated people (she takes their phones to watch) that don't seem relevant to the case, she decides they're all being much too unruly and loudly screams *SIT!* four times to three of the women. It's a shocking sight, to see a white woman so brazenly treat a group of Black women as if they're dogs in need of training. Sheindlin then turns and says smugly to the audience and to her staff, "You see? I tried to play nice. If I can't play nice, I play it any way you want to play it."



The message is clear: *These people won't listen to reason unless you shout it at them.*

Sheindlin claiming she tried to "play nice" offers her cover. It's a way of saying, "I can't control who comes into my courtroom—but I *can* control their behavior when they get out of line." This self-presentation—of a no-nonsense judge who has the same set of rules for everyone—obfuscates the fact that cases seem like they are chosen specifically for their incoherence, and for plaintiffs who (hoping to make some amount of cash from their experience) may not have the cultural savvy to push back against the demeaning manner of a woman who appears in a position of authority. It also helps cover the fact that Sheindlin is an instigator, letting tempers boil over.

At the end of this two-episode "case," Sheindlin simply tells both families to take out restraining orders against each other—something that could have been decided very early on with minimal fuss. An actual judge in an actual court, untroubled by the need to playact for the camera, would have made the decision in 15 minutes. But by the end of the second episode, Sheindlin has made it seem as if she *had* to suffer with people so incapable of behaving that they need to be yelled at. There is, of course, a long and racist narrative of unruly Black people needing to be disciplined by stern white figures who are just there to show the right way to be. It's a form of social and political control, legitimized by the charade of righteous justice being handed down through some kind of judicial process.

Sheindlin's role as moral superior and social arbiter extends to white people as well, especially those who stray from normative standards of life and presentation. In one case, for instance, a gloriously punk woman wants to sue her ex-boyfriend on clearly specious charges of property damage. It emerges that she in fact stole his car and peed on the seats. The case is cut-and-dried even to a layperson, but Sheindlin extends the questioning needlessly while the camera lingers on the woman's tattooed, buzz-cut, leather-jacketed person, admonishing her that she needs to move on from her ex—even though Sheindlin has no business or authority to say so. The message is simple: *Look at this useless, actual punk.*

Sheindlin's vicious barking has become part of her lore, collected in various places on the internet for people to revisit and laugh over. It's all part of her persona as everyone's favorite stern Jewish mother, a low-rent Ruth Bader Ginsberg. This new, retooled version of *Judge Judy* knows better than to mess with the formula. The differences are superficial: Sheindlin's robe is now burgundy instead of black, she has dispensed with her white lace collar and the set is nominally more modern looking (but still overwhelming in its wood-ness). The effect is of everyone operating inside a box. Despite the new influx of cash, *Judy Justice* looks as homey as its predecessor and as if it hires the cheapest camera operators and set designers. In early episodes, Sheindlin's robe almost merges into the wooden panels of her chamber, lending her the look of a snarling Cheshire cat.

YASMIN NAIR is a writer, academic, and activist. She's currently working on her book *Strange Love: A History of Social Justice And Why It Needs To Die*. Her work can be found at yasminnair.com.

The most significant change is personnel. In a move that appears to have shocked even her longtime fans, Sheindlin chose a new bailiff, Kevin Rasco, without telling Petri Hawkins-Byrd—who had worked on *Judge Judy* for 25 years. According to Hawkins-Byrd, he only found out through the media and had to call Sheindlin to confirm. She apparently told him that paying him a salary that matched his experience was untenable (clearly, her own salary must have bankrupted Amazon), but did not acknowledge she could have talked to him first and at least tried to negotiate. Both Rasco and Hawkins-Byrd are Black, and Sheindlin has not publicly addressed the matter of what is, at the very least, an egregious personal insult to someone with whom she had a decades-long professional relationship.

The new show also features more on-screen staff. A law clerk, Sarah Rose Levy, sits to Sheindlin's right, and a court stenographer, Whitney Kumar, sits to her left. They're all extremely attractive and Levy is the most conventionally so, her porcelain skin, wide eyes and untroubled brow lending her the look of an expensive, vintage Dresden doll. She also happens to be Sheindlin's granddaughter. At the end of every case, Sheindlin retreats to her chambers with Levy who, sipping delicately on the nectar of nepotism, proceeds to ask her grandma some softball questions. This gives Sheindlin a chance to further criticize the participants while delivering homilies about the necessity of personal responsibility, independence and bootstraps. (All irony dies on this show).

Of all the episodes so far, it's episode 15 that most illuminates the anti-poor sentiments of *Judy Justice*. All the elements that make for salacious viewing are present: The plaintiff and defendant are mother and daughter (inter-family squabbles that dredge years of simmering resentments are a favorite), the case is mostly about a tummy-tuck procedure (cosmetic surgery is always a draw for audiences) and the entire story involves a large, possibly interracial family whose members mostly live (or have lived) under the same roof, including children with different fathers and the same mother (happily combining a "the poor breed too much" narrative with one about how "the poor just sleep around"). It gives Sheindlin the chance to do what she seems to love best: dispense her form of justice while demeaning and scolding people.

As the story unfolds, Annalise Araujo is being sued by her mother for charging $7,000 in tummy-tuck payments to her mother's credit card. None of them appear to have much money beyond the basics, and yet Araujo claims the money was a gift—the sort one might expect from a wealthy socialite mother at Christmas—and that her mother was fulfilling a parental responsibility of sorts. There's also the matter of car payments for a car that's in both of their names, and it appears that Araujo has not been regular on that front either. Deciding the case is not a complicated affair, since the mother has a record of her daughter's commitments to pay. But because this is *Judy Justice*, the money matters are beside the point. Sheindlin toys with Araujo, subjecting her to a barrage of questions designed not to elicit any useful facts but to reveal what she clearly thinks is a dumpster fire of a life.

The message is clear: *These people won't listen to reason unless you shout it at them.*

It transpires that Araujo left her customer service job of seven years because of Covid-19 and to become a full-time homemaker, as she puts it to Sheindlin. Sheindlin grills Araujo with her characteristic cruelty and mocking contempt, demanding to know why she left her job and for whom she was a homemaker, the implication being that her new boyfriend could not possibly count. Sheindlin asks Araujo how much she made at her job—$600 a week. Then, how much does Araujo get from unemployment—$600 a week. At this point, Sheindlin lets out a "gotcha!" laugh and shares a smirk with her staff. Then she launches into a rant about what's wrong with America: "The fact that you're getting the same amount for not working as you did when you were working means that there's something wrong with the government, which is why nobody can get anything done around this country now because everybody says, 'We don't have to work, now I can stay home, I can be a homemaker when I'm 26 years old.' "

Sheindlin's contempt here is no surprise. She's made similar comments before and once campaigned for Michael Bloomberg, who believed the poor needed to be taxed more so they would change their behavior and somehow, maybe, become less poor.

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As she makes her judgement in favor of the mother, Sheindlin can't resist getting in more digs at Araujo. "She needs a car because she's a *homemaker*." Then a stinging insult: "You're 26 and you have four kids? Yeah, you have enough children for a while."

This kind of eugenicist talk is directed at a young woman who doesn't make for a particularly sympathetic figure as she rolls her eyes and insists her Social Security-dependent mother could easily pay for the procedure. The audience in the courtroom laps it all up, laughing every time the judge hurls another insult at Araujo, who stands seemingly unmoved by the vitriol. Afterward, Levy begins with what purports to be a sympathetic note, saying about Araujo, "The defendant and I are practically the same age and I couldn't imagine trying to prioritize yourself that young with four children at such a young age, so that must be difficult. But priorities are always key. What do you think?" (Of course, this is like asking Rep. Lauren Boebert what she thinks of Muslims.) Sheindlin sighs, "You [should] think with your brain before you have a bunch of kids, with two fathers. The children who are the innocents always suffer—before you decide to have kids make sure you're able to take care of them."

Sheindlin's dispensations of "justice" have little to do with resolving any legal issues. Instead, they're about effectively imprisoning people inside societal expectations induced by their class positions. A suburban, upper-class housewife would not have been sneered at for calling herself a homemaker with her husband and for wanting a car to ferry her children to endless activities. But a working-class 26-year-old who wants to escape her life of childbearing and care and marriage, and who sees Covid-19 as a potential rescue plan, is rhetorically beaten back by a judge who has no problem hiring her own granddaughter as a doubtlessly high-paid "law clerk."

Judy Justice is filled with contempt for anyone who isn't, well, like Sheindlin herself. She's enraged at people living off subsidies—after all, this means there might be fewer people to serve her breakfast at the Ritz or collect her trash for low wages. Even physical labor doesn't impress Sheindlin. In episode 23, she looks at a photo of a wrought iron maker's gate and sniffs that the object—simple but lovely—isn't much by way of work (no doubt, her home's own gates rival those at Versailles). As with the labor of childcare and homemaking in the case of Araujo, Sheindlin's brand of justice, a highly popular one, involves erasing everything that people have to do and focusing only on who they are in her eyes: deadbeats who think they're owed something.

Sheindlin has never been shy about her success or her wealth. Her biggest rival is the *Judge Judy* show, which now runs in syndication. As she put it nonchalantly when asked about the prospects for *Judy Justice,* "I did the math, and I've already got enough for 24/7 nursing care until I'm 150." That all of her money has been made by working less each month than most Americans have sick leave has probably occurred to her; she just doesn't care.

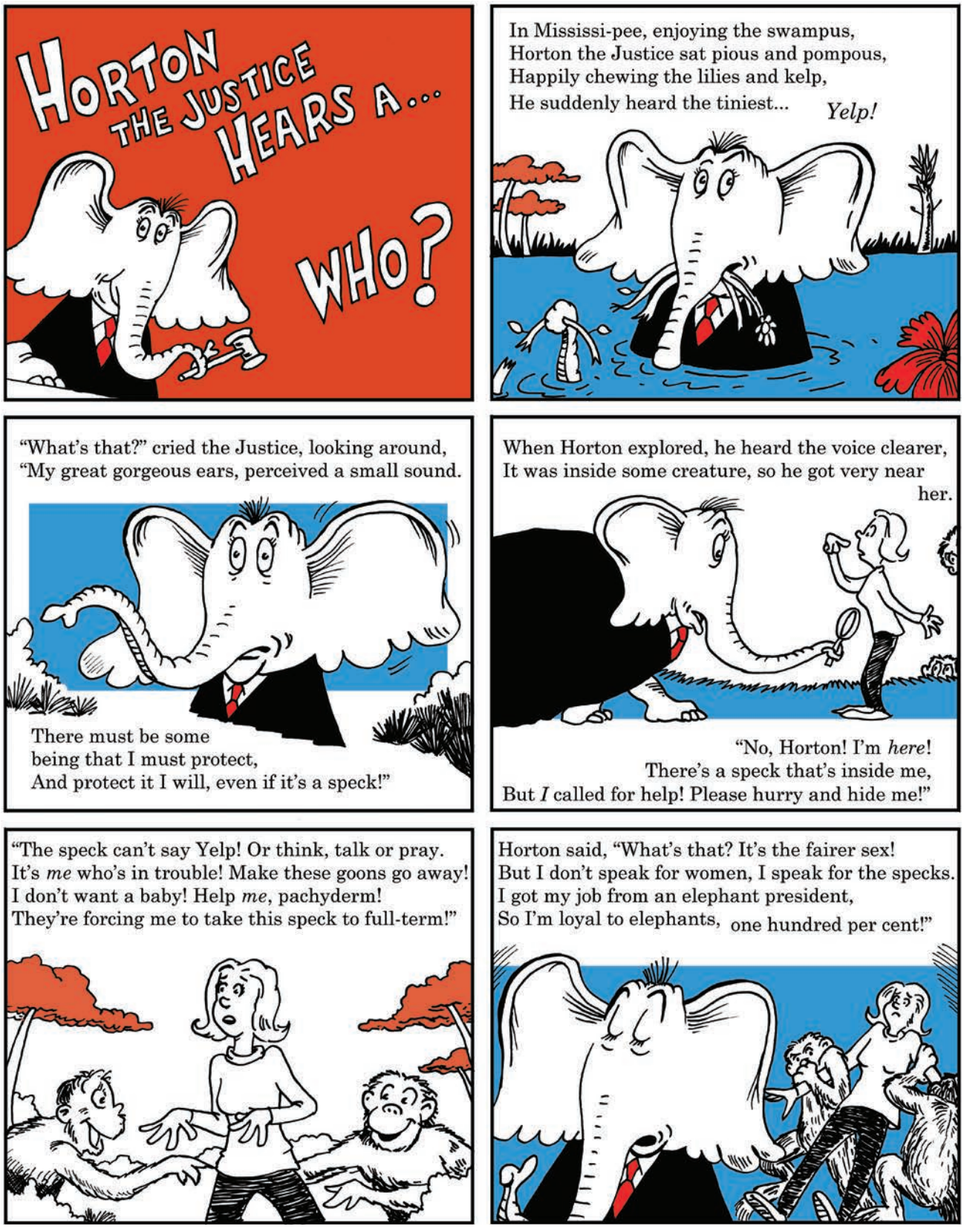
In the logic of this economy, the poor deserve whatever trials and tribulations they suffer.

Sheindlin can't send anyone to prison, but *Judy Justice* illustrates the carceral economy that undergirds American life, the one that dictates the poor and precarious need to always be terrified of the fear of harsh consequences for even the slightest infractions (lest they face an angry, white, berobed judge lady who berates and humiliates them). In the logic of this economy, the poor deserve whatever trials and tribulations they suffer; they will always need to have their lives, their money and even their bodies regulated by people with infinitely more resources.

Like its predecessor, *Judy Justice* is cruel and contemptuous toward the poor, but Sheindlin's cruelty and contempt have earned her devoted fans among regular viewers and celebrities (including Amy Poehler, Nicki Minaj and Samuel L. Jackson). *Judy Justice* allows us to abdicate not just our responsibility for widespread inequality and dire poverty, but to turn all of that into a comforting spectacle. Sheindlin often notes that the people who show up in her court are also among her viewers (and many openly volunteer that information), a startling reminder that we've reached a stage in which shows like *Judy Justice* can numb us to the stark evidence of our own precarity.

Poverty, according to the show, is a result of individual choices; anyone who's struggling deserves to spend the rest of their lives in misery. It's not "justice" it peddles but the spectacle of people's lives as they spin out of control. IN

RUBEN BOLLING



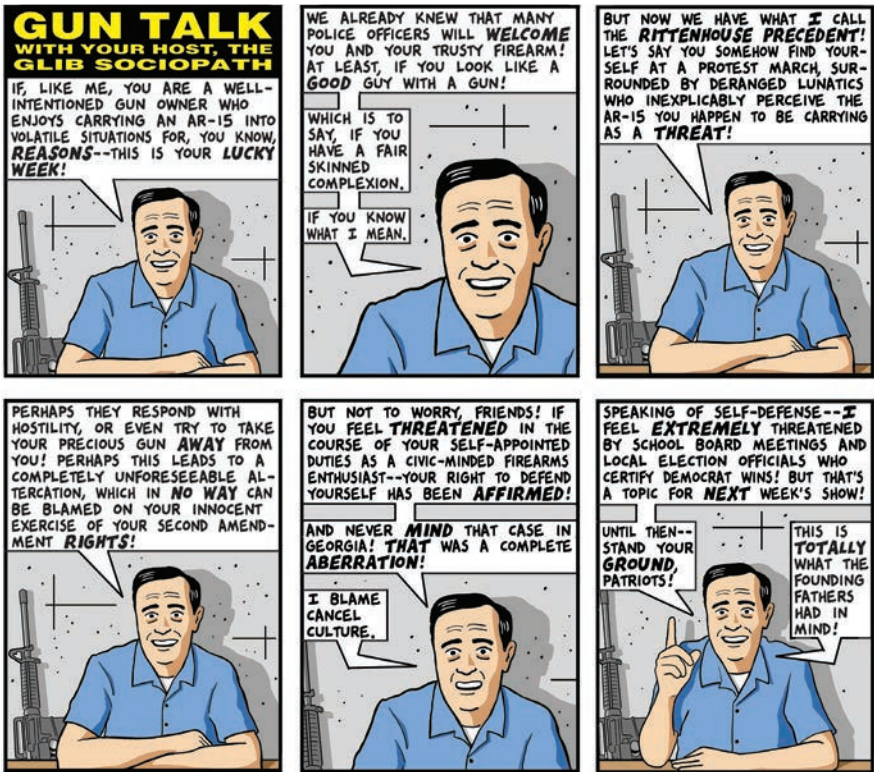
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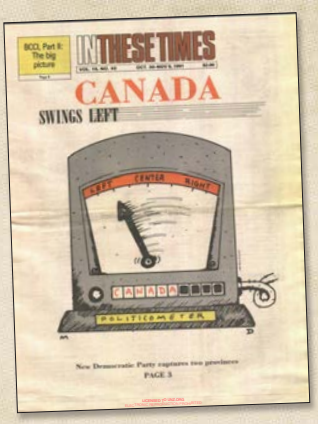
IN THESE TIMES

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Vaccine Apartheid: Straight from the Measles Playbook

In 1991, amidst new measles outbreaks, leading medical associations recommended all children receive a second measles-mumps-rubella shot. As *In These Times* intern Zoe Zolbrod reported, the price of the vaccine rose 300% in a decade, straining clinics. Merck, the vaccine's sole manufacturer, saw its stock shoot up with a 427% return.

Now, Pfizer and Moderna expect their Covid-19 vaccines to tally more than $20 billion in revenue for 2021, even as the patents they hold have limited vaccine production in poor countries. And healthcare workers across the globe have condemned Big Pharma's patents as human rights violations—a prioritization of profit over public health.


IN THESE TIMES
CANADA
SWINGS LEFT

IN 1991, ZOE ZOLBROD WROTE: Capitalism is the unspoken reality of American politics. That is the one thing the major parties agree upon: praise capitalism (not too often and preferably by another name) but don't discuss it. Preclude serious discussion of the central reality of our times. ...

When Davice Anstice, a vice president of a big U.S. pharmaceutical company, declared that "it's time to make measles a major public health priority again," it came as no surprise. The sobering statistics on the three-year-old American measles epidemic demand that the country take action against this disease.

But Anstice has good reason to encourage immunization. His company, Merck, Sharp and Dohmc, is the only manufacturer of a vaccine known as MMR that prevents measles, mumps and rubella. Merck's prices and stock dividends have soared in the last decade.

Merck makes too much money from measles, according to critics. "As a nation, we cannot allow corporations to make huge profits from vaccines," said Joseph Liu of the Children's Defense Fund.

The high price of MMR — combined with a lack of adequate insurance coverage—has forced thousands of parents to turn to public clinics for their children's vaccination. This influx has both put a strain on the limited clinic staff and has caused vaccine shortages. As a result, many children are simply not receiving the needed doses of MMR.

A growing epidemic: Measles is an entirely preventable disease. Yet in 1989, it affected more than 18,000 American children — the highest number in over a decade and more than ten times the all-time low number in 1983, when only 1,500 had measles. 1990 brought another increase, with more than 25,000 cases reported. Measles can result in deafness, brain damage or death. More than 100 children died in the 1989-1990 epidemic and that total continues to climb.

Although by law American children must receive adequate immunization when they enter school, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that only 70 to 80 percent of children acquire their proper vaccinations in the preschool years. That number drops to approximately 50 percent in large cities. Vaccinating children at an early age is crucial because most of the children who contract diseases in epidemics such as measles are under the age of five.

Easy money: Ever since the 70s when the government first made measles a priority, Merck's prices have skyrocketed. A single dose of the vaccine now costs more than $22. Public health centers purchase the vaccine at a discounted rate under a contract negotiated by the

federal government. Nonetheless, the contracted price has risen 500 percent since 1981 — with taxpayers picking up much of the tab.

At a March 11 hearing of the House subcommittee on health and the environment, chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) was particularly disturbed to discover that Merck-manufactured MMR costs less in Canada and some European countries than it does in the U.S.

"We think the vaccine is a bargain at its current price. It protects against three diseases," Merck spokesman Gary Bruell told *In These Times*.

A sick system: The escalating cost of this vaccine — as well as the fact that most insurance policies do not include immunization as part of their basic benefits package — has put a strain on many American families. A growing number of parents who would normally take their children to private physicians are now forced to turn to publicly funded health centers for immunization.

In Dallas County, Texas, for example, the percentage of children referred to clinics for immunization increased 693 percent between 1979 and 1988, according to testimony before Waxman's subcommittee. Shifts this large are common nationwide. In an era of budget cuts, public providers have a larger base to serve than ever before.

The federal government, through the CDC, provides yearly grants to public health clinics to cover 50 percent of the cost of vaccinations. State and local governments contribute the other 50 percent.

The Children's Defense Fund, a Washington-based advocacy group, conducted a study which revealed that 70 percent of Community and Migrant Health Centers have recently experienced shortages of childhood vaccines. Only half of these clinics could afford to replace these supplies — and they were often forced to purchase them at the higher private-sector rates. Experts say that public health facilities need longer clinic hours, increased staffing and more extensive outreach programs in order to control the measles epidemic. The money clinics are forced to spend on supplementing their vaccine supply takes away from funds that otherwise go toward improvement of their immunization programs.

Merck makes too much money from measles, according to critics. "As a nation, we cannot allow corporations to make huge profits from vaccines," said Joseph Liu of the Children's Defense Fund.

An alternative solution: Some physicians advocate removing the manufacture of vaccines from the profit-making sector. "The government should manufacture and distribute all vaccines for free," said Dr. Richard Biek, chief officer of health for the Chicago Health Department.

Some states have experimented with this approach. Massachusetts, for example, makes its own diphtheria, tetanus and rubella vaccine. State-manufactured vaccine "does save us quite a bit of money," said Massachusetts Department of Public Health spokesperson Kate McCormack. "We experience far less occurrence of preventable disease than the national average."

The number of inner-city children under two who are not immunized is probably higher in the United States than in any Western Hemisphere nation other than Haiti and Bolivia. If these rates do not improve, future epidemics of preventable childhood diseases are almost inevitable. With federal, state and municipal budgets so tight and with so many children uninsured or underinsured, any money designated for public health which ends up lining the pockets of a few stockholders seems cruelly wasted.

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