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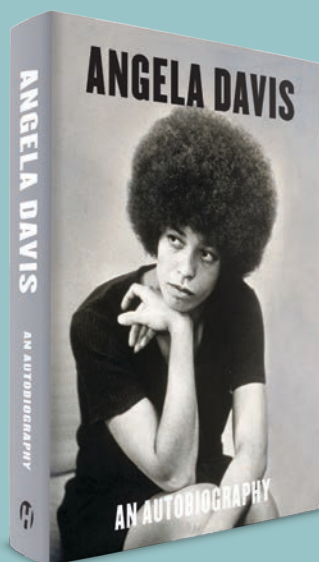
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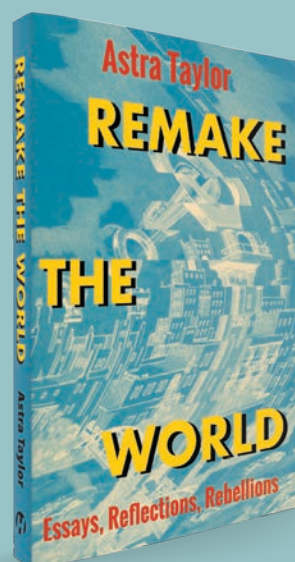
**Daisy Pitkin on the
Triangle Shirtwaist
Factory fire and
the emotions that
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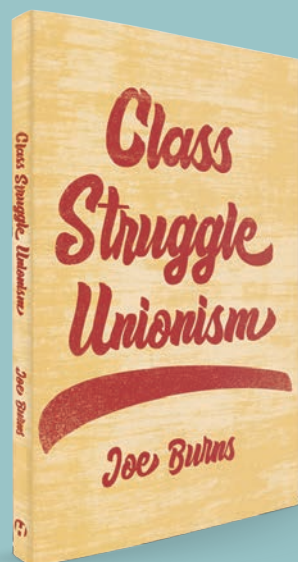


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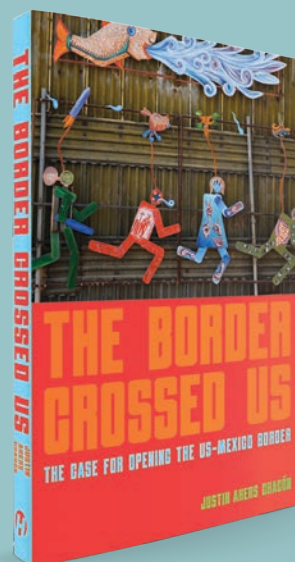


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Joe Burns

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—Sara Nelson



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The Case for Opening the US-Mexico Border
Justin Akers Chacón

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—Nandita Sharma



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“ No political movement can be healthy unless it has its own press to inform it, educate it and orient it. ”
 —IN THESE TIMES FOUNDER JAMES WEINSTEIN

IN THESE TIMES

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Art Direction by Rachel K. Dooley
Illustration by Ryan Olbrysh

A Progressive Response to Ukraine?

FIRST, LET'S DISMISS THOSE NEOCON commentators who are so eager to flex military muscle, such as Frederick Kagan from the American Enterprise Institute.

Stoking the fires of war, Kagan wrote in the *Hill*, "With a Russian takeover of Ukraine ... the re-emergence of a serious Russian conventional threat on the Polish and Romanian borders would ... require a remobilization by NATO states and the deployment of significant forces on those borders." What good, exactly, will that do? President Joe Biden is not going to go to war with a nuclear power.

Second, let's not fixate on NATO, that dinosaur of Cold War strategy. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, from the center-left Social Democratic Party, has made clear that Ukraine will not be joining NATO as long as he is in office, and Washington clearly has no appetite to assimilate Ukraine into the mutual defense pact anyway. NATO is only relevant because Russian President Vladimir Putin, cynically exploiting Russian anxieties over NATO expansion, is stirring up Russian chauvinist resentment in an attempt to justify a reckless and illegal war.

Third, let's recognize that Ukraine, a sovereign state, has the right to its territorial integrity, which is being dismantled by its bigger, more powerful neighbor. Yes, there are Russian-speakers on both sides of the Ukrainian-Russian border, and Russia and Ukraine do share profound historical ties. These facts do not justify the flagrant violation of this most fundamental international norm.

Fourth, let's recognize that Putin's Russia has violated Ukraine's sovereignty for the past eight years. Recall the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea and Russia's military support for Russian-speaking separatists. Putin, with his deployment of "peacekeepers," now appears set on remaking Ukraine in the image of Belarus (a Russian vassal state along the Ukrainian border), in which Russia has deployed 30,000 troops.

Now, during the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, certain elements of the Left rationalized Russia's actions and preemptively

blamed the United States for any forthcoming military operations, a reflexive reaction against Washington's position. Over at *Common Dreams*, for example, Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J.S. Davies—from the antiwar group CODEPINK—wrote February 17 that a Russian invasion was the "least likely outcome" of the crisis, but should

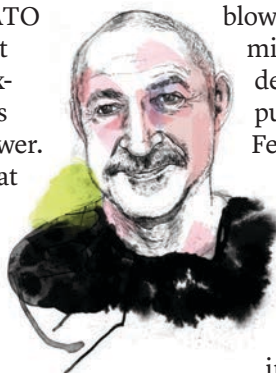
Russia invade: "Biden would achieve the full-blown Cold War that successive U.S. administrations have been cooking up for a decade, which seems to be the unstated purpose of this manufactured crisis." On February 28, after the "least likely outcome" occurred, Benjamin and Davies were back on *Common Dreams*, still lamenting "the role of the United States and NATO in setting the stage for this crisis."

Their confused version of anti-imperialism falsely assumes all world developments are determined by schemers in the U.S. government, yet we ought to be able to criticize U.S. empire without denying other bad state actors exist, each with their own objectives. Here's how Martin Kimani, Kenyan ambassador to the United Nations, rebuked Russia in his remarks on the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, by drawing an illuminating analogy to 20th-century history:

Today, across the border of every single African country, live our countrymen with whom we share deep historical, cultural and linguistic bonds. At independence, had we chosen to pursue states on the basis of ethnic, racial or religious homogeneity, we would still be waging bloody wars these many decades later ... We chose to follow the rules of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations charter, not because our borders satisfied us, but because we wanted something greater, forged in peace.

To the extent that Russian-speaking Ukrainians have legitimate grievances about the cultural politics of 21st-century Ukraine, those complaints must be addressed through some means other than the conquest, annexation and fracturing of Ukraine by a militarily superior power.

—JOEL BLEIFUSS





DEBTING THOMAS

In response to the plaint of Paige Oamek urging cancellation of student debt (“Youth to Biden: Drop Debt,” March), I have two rebuttals.

My first objection to student debt cancellation is based on the fact that 42% of people above the age of 25 have chosen to pursue (and ultimately obtain) some kind of higher degree. Millions of people—the other 58%—did not make that decision. Those millions of people show up for work on a regular basis and have taxes withheld from their paychecks. Student debt cancellation would force those working people to pay for a choice they opted out of for themselves. People without a degree already make less than those with a degree; burdening these working people with other people’s school loans is fundamentally unfair.

Second, moral obligations should not be ignored. A loan agreement is a legal contract,

but in more simple terms it represents a promise. A foundational moral truth is that, when a promise is made, that promise should be kept. Allowing people to renege on a promise, especially at the expense of others, is contrary to some very basic ethical principles.

—HARRY W. FENTON,
Philadelphia

CRYPTO FRAUD

Cryptocurrencies were an attempt to bypass banks and regulators, such as the Federal Reserve and the Bank of England (“The Big Idea: Decentralized Internet,” February). Crypto advocates claimed the new “currency” was a new gold standard, one that countries could not manipulate through, for example, deficit spending. Crypto was promised to be so secret and secure that “snoops,” like the Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, would no longer be able to track global payments if the system were used. It sounds just perfect for money launderers and terrorist financiers who want to move money around the world.

By now, crypto should be considered as a known Ponzi scheme. The prices of crypto coins reflect how badly people have come to desire a particular cryptocurrency, but the value rests on nothing

real. Buy a futures contract in soybeans or hog bellies and you will own the underlying thing if you hold on until delivery. Buy Bitcoin and you “own” a long number.

—JOHN WELCH
Via Facebook

VACCINE PROFITEERS

Yes, let’s control the pharmaceutical industry, but we need to be very careful not to use corporate greed as a pretext to undermine medical science (“Vaccine Apartheid: Straight from the Measles Playbook,” February). We don’t use it to undermine things like our energy sources, cell phones and technology and pretend as if other technologies aren’t effective or critical.

—JOANNE MCINTIRE
Via Facebook

USE YOUR BRAIN

“Defunding the police” is a stupid idea (“What’s Next for Defund,” February). More funding for case workers and more funding for drug rehabilitation programs and more funding for officer training would have been a winning concept that a lot more U.S. citizens could

have gotten behind.

Police can barely do their jobs in our large metro areas now. Most incidents go without a response because police departments have to prioritize cases based on urgency. I have personally been unable to get police assistance in emergency situations more often than I’ve been able to get assistance.

Want to fix society? Address the root causes of crime and create economic equity so that no one is so poor, and so uneducated, that they turn to crime just to survive.

—CHARLIE McDONALD
Via Facebook

SANITATION STRIKE NOT A WASTE

Sorry, this whole thing smells (“Sanitation Strike Not a Waste,” March). Exactly who decided the sanitation workers shouldn’t join a real union, a successful union, and why? And the use of the phrase, “while others were cowering at home,” is insulting. No one was cowering. We were just being socially responsible.

—PATRICIA PAULSEN
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](https://twitter.com/inthesetimesmag), or reach us by post at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

➤ LEAVE YOUR MARK



In the coming weeks, a new mural from Cheri Lee Charlton will be featured in the entryway of our Chicago offices—to honor the members of the *In These Times* Legacy Society, Solidarity Forever.

There are many ways to contribute to the independent, progressive journalism that *In These Times* produces, and we couldn't do it without your contributions. One way is to join Solidarity Forever and leave a lasting legacy through your will or estate plan.

To show our deep appreciation, donors who submit their planned giving intentions by May 1 will have their names

featured in Cheri's new mural. "Anybody who walks through the door," our development coordinator, Jamie Hendry, explains, "will be able to view the piece, a constant reminder of and tribute to the readers who support this magazine."

The unveiling of our new "legacy wall" will be held at our first Solidarity Forever celebration in May, with additional work on display from Cheri's Columbia College art students, all inspired by *In These Times* stories.

To join Solidarity Forever and discuss your planned giving intentions, email *In These Times* at solidarityforever@inthesetimes.com.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The big applause line from the State of the Union address? "Fund the police. Fund them. Fund them."

Watching the bipartisan display of ecstasy for channeling more resources into the carceral state, you might think that the fire of the Movement for Black Lives had dissipated into smoke.

But you'd be looking in the wrong direction.

As abolitionist scholar Barbara Ransby wrote in these pages in July 2020, urging people to "vote against Trump":

Biden is nobody's dream. ... Despite the theatrics, presidential elections are never about saviors. ... We have to build social movement organizations and coalitions, reinvigorate our labor unions, protest in the streets and lobby local officials, and struggle for fundamental and systemic change on multiple fronts.

For our February cover story, we spoke with five local organizers and newly elected city councilmembers working on those multiple fronts. Faced with Republican fearmongering and Democratic scapegoating, they prescribed year-round movement-building to engage communities (not just during the fervor of election season) and concrete local victories to build toward a larger vision.

In this issue, we report on that work with three Dispatches. In Minneapolis (p. 9), teenagers self-organize a walkout of thousands in response to the police killing of Amir Locke. In Culver City, Calif. (p. 7), a Black, DSA-endorsed mayor works to transform a former sundown town. And in St. Louis (p. 6), organizers model the "inside-outside" strategy—long advocated by *In These Times*—to pressure a movement-backed Democratic mayor to keep her promises.

"The win is not the candidate getting into office," St. Louis organizer Kayla Reed says, but "the moment where the candidate is in office and meets the demand."



Jessica Stites
Executive Editor

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PHOTO BY NYARA WILLIAMS

Activists to Movement Mayor: Get Moving

Above: Jae Shepherd, Close the Workhouse campaign organizer, plants yard signs in St. Louis ahead of the April 2021 mayoral election.

ST. LOUIS—“What is the delay in closing the Workhouse?” moderator Maquis Govan asks Mayor Tishaura Jones at a virtual town hall on “re-envisioning public safety” February 8.

The event was co-organized by Action St. Louis, an affiliate of the Movement for Black Lives. The group’s 501(c)4 arm, Action St. Louis Power Project, endorsed

Jones during her 2021 mayoral run. The Rev. Michelle Higgins opened the event by thanking Jones warmly for “valuing and loving the constituents of this city in this way: taking the time to listen to our questions directly.”

Now, activists want clarification on when the mayor will fulfill her campaign promise to close the St. Louis Medium Security Institution, more commonly known as the Workhouse, which activists have been advocating for years.

The jail itself opened in 1966, but its nickname and legacy is a reference to the 1840s, when St. Louis sent manacled scofflaws to

work off debt 10 hours at a time in a rock quarry. Since the Workhouse opened, it’s been followed by a reputation for human rights violations and poor conditions, including pests, mold, lack of heat and poor medical attention.

In 2017, a video of people screaming inside the Workhouse circulated online. At the time, the jail did not have air conditioners; the temperature inside hit 115 degrees. In 2018, momentum from the resulting protests led Action St. Louis, with legal advocacy group Arch-City Defenders, to launch the Close the Workhouse campaign.

Action St. Louis formed after the 2014 Ferguson uprising and has been primarily focused on organizing street uprisings into long-term issue campaigns. Alongside other local and national groups, for example, it succeeded in 2018 in ousting county prosecutor Bob McCulloch, who had declined to press charges in the police killing of Michael Brown in 2014.

“Issue campaigns don’t have the same timeline as electoral campaigns,” says Kayla Reed, the group’s co-founder and executive director. “It may take several years to get something like [Close the Workhouse] done, but it’s been worth the investment.”

A 2018 report from the Close the Workhouse campaign found up to 95% of people were held in the Workhouse because they couldn’t pay pre-trial bonds. And, in a city whose population is 50% Black, almost 90% of the people held were Black.

In July 2020, the Board of Aldermen voted to close the Workhouse, and the campaign declared victory—but the jail

remained open because, the city said, moving people to another jail would cause Covid-19 overcrowding.

When former city treasurer Tishaura Jones announced her second bid for mayor, in November 2020, her platform called for the full closure of the Workhouse, which she had advocated since 2016—and Action St. Louis made a rare foray into electoral politics by endorsing Jones.

Paid and volunteer canvassers with Action St. Louis Power Project knocked on more than 60,000 doors, and Jones won by 4% to become the city's first Black woman mayor.

On Jones' first full day in office, April 21, 2021, she filed a budget proposal to close the Workhouse. By June 2021, most of the Workhouse's detainees had been moved to St. Louis' other jail, the City Justice Center—but the Workhouse remains open, though only the jail's most recent addition, known as the CJC Annex.

At the town hall, Jones reassured the audience that the "Workhouse as everybody knows it is closed" and the 23 people held at the Annex would be transferred as soon as repairs were completed at the City Justice Center, potentially by the end of February.

As of press time in early March, the Annex remains open.

The town hall drew more than 180 people with more than 150 questions, and Action St. Louis is converting the feedback into a list of new questions and demands.

"It's really important for voters to understand that elected officials work for them, and

that they can ask questions between elections," Reed says. "We shouldn't only engage with our elected officials during [get-out-the-vote] cycles."

Reed adds that "the win is not the candidate getting into office," but "the moment where the candidate is in office and meets the demand."

SKYLER AIKERSON is a freelance reporter based in Chicago and a former *In These Times* intern.

Getting Past Sundown

CULVER CITY, CALIF.—"There's the California that people imagine, a place I would love to visit and maybe buy a house on one salary," Mayor Daniel Lee, now running for Congress, says with a smile. "Then, there's the actual California."

Back in 2018, when Lee was elected as Culver City's first Black councilmember, he didn't know about the city's history as a "sundown town," a reference to all-white areas that enforce segregation through local laws, intimidation and violence. It was only at the Annual Legislative Conference hosted by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation that other Black elected officials told him their stories of taking roundabout drives in their youth to avoid the notoriously racist Culver City Police Department.

The city was founded by Harry H. Culver, who advertised it in the *Los Angeles Herald* in 1913 as a "model little white city." Lots were reserved for white buyers into the 1960s. Property deeds still bear legacy "non-Caucasian"

THIS MONTH IN LATE CAPITALISM

🔥 **BIG PHARMA COMPANIES HAVE HIKE** **NEARLY 870 PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICES** an average of 6.6% this year. Meanwhile, Big Pharma-funded Republicans and Democrats have blocked legislation to reduce prices on life-saving medications. The price of anti-cancer drug cisplatin more than doubled, for example, and generic lisinopril, for high blood pressure, increased by 536%. Maybe the charge that capitalism is a death cult isn't an exaggeration.



🔥 **LIKE CHICKEN WINGS AND HATE MONEY?** Domino's Pizza is reducing its wings-per-order from 10 to 8 and making them available to be ordered online only, which, Domino's CEO Richard Allison reassures, will have "several benefits." Ostensibly those benefits are added profits to its \$4 billion in quarterly retail sales, rather than better compensation for Domino's workers. But the comfort of enriching a global corporate behemoth surely makes up for smaller portions.

🔥 **HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES HAVE BEEN ON THE PANDEMIC FRONT LINES FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS**, with grueling schedules. And since they apparently love work so much, what better reward than the chance to work for free? The Minnesota nonprofit hospital system M Health Fairview is asking its workers to volunteer during Covid-19 surges with tasks typically reserved for paid nurses, such as "setting up rooms" and "stocking supplies." What a treat!

🔥 **FUNDING CIVIL LITIGATION ISN'T JUST FOR BIG FINANCE ANYMORE!** Tech startup Ryval wants everyday Americans to fund expensive court proceedings (with crypto tokens, of course), who will be rewarded (with crypto tokens, of course) if their side wins. And if the scheme hits any snags, maybe just turn the whole thing into an NFT? Is that how this works?





MOSCOW—A protester at a February 24 antiwar demonstration in Pushkin Square holds a sign that reads, “No To War With Ukraine.” Earlier that day the Russian military launched an invasion into Ukraine, a non-NATO state, under the pretext of protecting the Russian people. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on the European Union to grant Ukraine immediate EU membership, hoping for support from Europe against Russia. (Photo by Sergei Savostyanov/TASS via Getty Images)

clauses today, though they are unenforceable. The price of these single-family homes grew exponentially, with the typical home in Culver City now priced at more than \$1 million. Generational wealth comes through that legacy, says Lee—the only renter on the council—while “poverty comes from a lack of generational wealth or any wealth at all.”

This understanding motivated Lee to fight for affordable housing policies while on the council, passing temporary rent freeze measures in 2019, passing permanent rent control and tenant protection ordinances in 2020 and ending single-family home

zoning. In June 2021, the council passed a resolution addressing Culver City’s history of discrimination, segregation and police abuse, creating “a system of reparations designed to narrow the racial and income housing gap.”

But calling Culver City “progressive” is “still aspirational,” Lee says.

The night when the council approved the temporary rent control measure in June 2019, for example, Culver City resident Ron Bassilian also founded Protect Culver City, an anti-rent control political action committee purporting to “represent the forgotten resident, the

moderate resident who feels spurned by council.” Bassilian has also published what he calls an “alt-right manifesto,” has used racial slurs in deleted Tweets and appeared to call for violence against women; he lost his 2018 bid for California’s 37th Congressional District seat, where Lee is now running.

Protect Culver City (not to be confused with the pre-existing, pro-rent control group, Protect Culver City Renters), was fundamental in getting the anti-rent control Measure B on Culver City’s November 2020 ballot. Measure B failed, 55-45, but would have repealed the

council's rent control ordinance and reopened loopholes to let landlords evict at-will.

Protect Culver City also warned against defunding police and wants to criminalize homelessness, as explained in the group's blog post titled, "Harry Culver's Dream City Reduced to Skid Row By Local Politicians." Meanwhile, the local police union—the Culver City Police Officers' Association—put out a press release criticizing UCLA professors they labeled as "Defunders," created a video vilifying individual community members who support police reform, and ran attack ads against two council candidates who supported cutting police budgets.

One of the candidates targeted in 2020, Yasmine-Imani McMorrin—who was recommended by the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America—won the first Culver City council seat ever occupied by a Black woman. The election created a progressive majority on the five-person council, with (at the time) Mayor Alex Fisch and Vice Mayor Daniel Lee.

Then, "An Unincorporated [sic] Group of Culver City Residents" attempted to start a recall movement against Fisch and Lee, the group stating on its website that if the two "remain in office, Culver City will lose the small town community aspects that have made our town as desirable as it is today." The group failed to gather enough signatures to get the recall on the ballot.

Lee, who loudly supports such issues as the Green New Deal, Medicare for All and reparations, is running to represent Culver City as well as parts of Los Angeles in Congress—a seat being vacated by Karen Bass as she runs for mayor of Los Angeles.

One of Lee's motivators for seeking higher office is to address the corrosive influence of corporate money on politics. Proposition 209, for example, a 1996 anti-affirmative measure backed by conservative business tycoons, is holding up Culver City's reparations program.

Lee serves on the board of Move to Amend, a coalition to end *Citizens United*—the Supreme Court decision that deems corporate political expenditures to be protected free speech—through a constitutional amendment. Lee also wants to re-examine the constitution more broadly as a document "designed to protect moneyed interest."

In the meantime, as Culver City mayor, Lee has pledged to "[use] the instrument of government to address and excise the traditions and practices that we should leave in the past: racism, classism and other bigotry." He notes how the crises of climate, income inequality and the "ever-loudening march of fascism" can "bleed into and reinforce the worst parts of each other," and adds, "These are not election year issues. We have a lot of work to do. We must do it quickly."

PAIGE OAMEK is an *In These Times* editorial intern based in Chicago. They are a graduate of Grinnell College and the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

Teens Walk Out for Amir Locke

MINNEAPOLIS—"The system is quite literally working how it's supposed to work," Ezra Hudson, 17, a leader of MN Teen Activists, says over the phone. Hudson is lamenting the police killing of Amir Locke on February 2.

FOR THE WIN

📌 MORE THAN 500 ACRES OF REDWOODS IN CALIFORNIA ARE BEING RETURNED

to the various tribes of the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council. Nonprofit group Save the Redwoods League purchased the land in 2020 as part of the landback movement. The area will be renamed Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ (pronounced tsih-ih-LEY-duhn), which translates to "Fish Run Place" in Sinkyone.



📌 CUBA IS SHARING ITS COVID-19 VACCINES AND VACCINE RECIPES WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH.

Cuba developed five vaccines during the pandemic and boasts an 87% vaccination rate, compared with just 1 in 8 vaccinated people in poor countries and 2 in 3 people in rich countries. Cuba will distribute as many as 200 million doses.

📌 THE TENANTS' RIGHT-TO-COUNSEL MOVEMENT IS GROWING,

with Philadelphia and towns in Connecticut being the latest to adopt plans. The year 2021 saw eviction filings double from the previous year. The goal of right-to-counsel programs is to protect poor renters from eviction through free legal representation.

📌 CALIFORNIA IS CLOSING ITS DEATH ROW WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS,

one of the biggest in the United States. The state has not executed anyone since 2006, though hundreds of people presently sit on death row, often in solitary confinement. The move follows a state moratorium on executions in 2019.

📌 MENTAL HEALTH RESPONDERS WILL REPLACE POLICE OFFICERS ON SOME EMERGENCY CALLS

in certain Chicago neighborhoods, thanks to a new state-funded program. The goal is to assist people in crisis situations while prioritizing treatment over criminalization and police encounters, with the idea to eventually expand the program statewide.



Locke, a 22-year-old Black man, was killed by a SWAT officer of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) during a no-knock apartment raid. Locke was not named in the no-knock warrant nor a resident of the apartment.

Twin Cities high school students organized quickly through social media and on February 8, more than 3,000 high school students from across the Twin Cities metro area walked out of class and marched to Gov. Tim Walz's mansion.

Hudson got involved with racial justice organizing in his first year of high school, joining the group Students Organized

Against Racism at St. Louis Park High School, in a Minneapolis suburb. He co-founded the nonprofit MN Teen Activists his sophomore year. As a senior, Hudson has helped organize multiple walkouts around Minnesota. "I think the key is being conscious enough to see why you have to keep going," Hudson says.

Sandra Tougnon, 18, co-founded the Black Student Union at Central High School in St. Paul in 2021 in collaboration with her friend Beth. At the time, "We didn't have the space to talk about issues or what was happening," Tougnon tells *In These Times*. She wanted to create a space for

other Black students who were feeling similarly—"who look like me, who deserve that community," she explains. Central's Black Student Union now has 40 members and, according to Tougnon, is growing by the week.

After attending a protest for Locke in downtown Minneapolis, Central Black Student Union Member Grace Mutombo asked the group what they thought of organizing their own. "She was thinking about how this has affected her and other youth in our community," Tougnon says. Grace reached out to another activist, Chauntyll Allen, who put Central's Black Student

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

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

Disgraced former Trump adviser Rudy Giuliani appeared on reality singing competition *The Masked Singer*, a new low for reality TV not seen since the previous administration.



HYPED

The FBI claims it has no leads in the wave of bomb threats affecting historically Black colleges and universities.



The child poverty rate jumped 5 points—from 12% to 17%—the month after the Child Tax Credit expired. Coincidence?



The GOP somehow spun a federal harm reduction program for people struggling with addiction as a "free crack pipe program," which makes you wonder what the GOP's been smoking.

TRIVIAL

Disgraced former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich took to Tucker Carlson's show to opine on the good ol' days when Democrats would've suppressed street protests even more brutally.



Biden's decision to seize billions of dollars from the central bank of Afghanistan is somehow not helping the country's humanitarian disaster.



Police in Haiti tear-gassed garment factory workers during protests for higher wages. Since thousands of garment factory workers went on strike, their average daily wage increased from \$5 to \$7.50, half of their \$15 demand.

VITAL



New York City Mayor (and former cop) Eric Adams is promoting plant-based diets by comparing being "hooked on cheese" to being hooked on heroin. Honestly it sounds like he just really, really loves cheese.

IGNORED

Union in touch with Jerome Treadwell, executive director of MN Teen Activists.

Tougnon says the students' demands arose from two questions: "What led to this situation?" and "How can this situation never occur again?"

Students are calling for a complete ban on no-knock warrants and a full overhaul of the department—as Tougnon says, to "re-evaluate the practices of the MPD." An additional demand to demilitarize the Minneapolis Police Department she says aims to, "rebuild the police system and base it on collective care for *all*." The students are also calling for a full review of MPD and SWAT practices, the resignation of Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and MPD Interim Police Chief Amelia Huffman, and accountability from Judge Peter Cahill, who approved the no-knock warrant that led to the death of Amir Locke, with some calling for his resignation.

The students' clear demands stand in stark contrast to the confusion around strategy following the failure of the public safety ballot initiative and Mayor Frey's supposed ban on no-knock warrants. The mayor's office told the *Intercept* that the MPD has served 11 no-knock warrants just between January 1 and February 8 of this year.

"I think a lot of lack of action is rooted in deeper problems," says Hudson. "It's some deep unrooting that we're going to have to do." Hudson cites the 1963 Children's March as an example of the importance of youth movements, which culminated with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Hudson says word of the walkout spread fast. "Jerome



High school students rally outside Gov. Tim Walz's residence Feb. 8 in St Paul, Minn., after walking out of class in protest of the police killing of Amir Locke.

[Treadwell] made a flier, I put it on my [Instagram] story, other people started spreading it," Hudson says. "We started getting tons and tons of people swiping up, saying, 'I'll bring my school, I'll bring these people.'

Tougnon says the response was overwhelming: "Knowing that people are with me, with us, we just all have one message—that was really amazing."

Teens like Hudson and Tougnon have come of age during a new public awareness of police brutality and racial reckoning. Tougnon remembers fearing for her life after the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin 10 years ago. As a child, she remembers running outside in the cold Minnesota air, wanting to put up her hoodie but "instantly decided against it"—because if "Trayvon Martin couldn't" be safe, how could she?

"We're fighting for the people but we're also fighting for ourselves and fighting for our

own lives," Hudson says. "That takes a mental toll on you." Hudson emphasizes that MN Teen Activists has evolved to prioritize in addition to forming community.

The students have yet to receive a response from officials, but Hudson says they plan to hold future walkouts: "At the end of the day, [walkouts] force people to pay attention, they create change and they show that we want change."

Hudson and Tougnon are also eyeing the future. "I think down the line we want to do some more national stuff," Hudson says. "Garner some more attention to garner some more power to push more on issues."

"It doesn't end here," Tougnon reassures. "It does not."

MAGGIE DUFFY is a Brooklyn-based writer and an *In These Times* editorial intern. She is a graduate of Occidental College.

PAIGE OAMEK is an *In These Times* editorial intern based in Chicago.

HAMILTON NOLAN

Biden Throws Labor a Bone, When We Need Steak

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN has repeatedly claimed he is overseeing the most pro-union administration in generations, while it increasingly feels like having a very generous friend who is also broke: You appreciate their altruistic spirit, you just don't actually get much out of it.

The White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, a group with the unenviable job of deciding what the federal government can actually *do* for organized labor, released a new, underwhelming report in February. And instead of taking the report as another occasion for humdrum press releases, unions should take it as a kick in the ass from the land of political reality.

The context, of course, is that almost all of the really meaningful things the government can do for labor are contained in the PRO Act—as in, Protecting the Right to Organize—a massive labor law reform bill that would be historic in expanding unionization but will not pass Congress so long as the filibuster exists in its current form. Given this fact, the task force report amounts to a search for consolation prizes, like a desperate rummage through the closet for a last-minute birthday party gift.

As a laundry list of pro-labor executive actions and technocratic government agency tweaks, the report is encouraging. As an account of what

America's declining unions can expect from the most pro-union president we may see in decades, it's rather grim.

The report's recommendations would make the federal government's contracting dollars come with more pro-labor strings attached, bolster unionizing among federal government employees, issue union-friendly public information campaigns and try to better enforce existing



regulations. These reforms are good, and enacting all of them would be better than not, but the report carries the intrinsic burden of the White House's limited reach. Rather than seeing this administration as one that can revolutionize labor law, it is more accurate for organized labor to think of Biden as the very friendly boss of Federal Government Industries. He can do some good things for workers in his own little kingdom, but for anyone outside the public sector, the brutal class war carries on.

The administration understands this dynamic perfectly

well. The task force report says up front, "The Task Force began its work in late April [2021] with a clear understanding that it could not unilaterally reverse the trends [of declining worker power] discussed above," that "it is important to acknowledge that the Task Force recommendations do not and cannot take the place of the robust legislative change that is needed to fix our labor laws." That makes the text of the report more frank than the raft of cheery statements some unions issued upon its release, calling it "a significant step forward" and "a historic course correction."

Just how significant or historic this sort of thing is depends on what you expect. Major unions, battered by corporate America's wild post-Reagan successes, expect little. They are grateful to be thrown a bone rather than be kicked in the ribs. But if we are going to have a labor *movement* in America—one that's worth a damn, that's larger and stronger than any individual union's parochial interests—the expectation must be that the half-century-long decline in union power is reversed, that organized labor becomes strong enough to halt the relentless growth of economic inequality.

The higher the expectations, the clearer it becomes that labor must ask for more—while it still has the chance.

What should that ask be?



HAMILTON NOLAN

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

THE BIG IDEA

What is the thing that would be most useful on a large scale, in absence of the PRO Act? Simple: money. Money can hire organizers and produce unions in the same way that money can hire soldiers and produce an army. The labor movement needs a lot of money to spark a lot of organizing. Luckily, the federal government has a lot of money and a purportedly genuine desire to drive unionization. What's missing? The will of unions to ask for the money to organize the millions of workers who need unions.

As long as unions are satisfied with scraps, they will never ask for the meal.

The task force report rightly states that “the National Labor Relations Act, enacted in 1935, noted that it is the policy of the United States to encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining. Unfortunately, the federal government has not always done its part to turn this policy into action.”

Unfortunately, the Biden administration is at risk of failing to do its part as well.

We know the current Congress won't pass the PRO Act—its Democratic majorities won't even approve Biden's signature Build Back Better plan. And the modest steps proposed by this White House report will win only modest gains. With Democrats widely expected to lose control of Congress after the midterms, the time for the labor movement to act is running short.

If this administration really is the most pro-union in generations, then unions should get the federal government to fund union organizing while they still can. ■

five-hour • work • day

noun

1. Transforming the 9 to 5 job into a 9 to 2

⇒ **How would we get everything done?** Economist John Maynard Keynes, in 1930, predicted his grandchildren would grow up to work just 15 hours a week. Advances in technology and education had already led to an explosion of productivity, after all.

Needless to say, that prediction hasn't quite worked out as expected. Despite productivity gains in every sector—one study estimates a full day of office work in 1970 can now be completed in an hour and a half—Americans are working more than ever.

That's because what's been determining our working hours isn't our collective material needs, but the pursuit of profit for the ownership class.

⇒ **Why would employers let us have a five-hour**

workday? A growing number of start-ups are already experimenting with shorter work days, and it's not all a feel-good PR effort: Shorter workdays tend to

make people work more efficiently. The human brain can't concentrate on a task for eight uninterrupted hours anyway, and history is full of famous scientists and writers who stuck to a strict daily schedule of 4–5 hours of focused work.

⇒ **Wait—I thought we wanted a four-day workweek?** As always, the devil is in the details. Some companies are rolling out shorter workdays alongside fewer breaks and more worker surveillance in an effort to wring maximum output out of every minute. So that's not great. And the tightly controlled implementation allows few opportunities for workers to form relationships or discuss shared problems, the building blocks of collective action.

“If you hire people who are aligned with the values and mission of your organization, if they're motivated to do great work and contribute, then giving them time to pursue other hobbies or interests rarely results in them bailing.”

—STEVE GLAVESKI, CEO OF COLLECTIVE CAMPUS, WHICH BEGAN A FIVE-HOUR WORKDAY IN 2018

The four-day workweek, meanwhile, is being tested on a larger scale in some European countries, and Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.) has introduced legislation to shorten the standard workweek to 32 hours (making employees eligible for overtime pay sooner). But a longer weekend, for example, doesn't do much for hourly workers or low-wage shift workers struggling to make ends meet.

As part of the larger project to make our working lives more humane, the question of shorter workdays or workweeks is a classic case of, “Why not both?”

⇒ **What would I do with all of my “extra” time?** That one's entirely up to you—which is exactly the point.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERRY LABAN

STARBUCKS COFFEE



STARBUCKS BARISTAS FILL A TALL ORDER:

BY HANNAH FARIS

In interviews, Starbucks workers tell *In These Times* that starting a union campaign is the first time they've felt hopeful in their adult lives. "A lot of us have gotten used to a sense of hopelessness and helplessness when it comes to our jobs," says Rachel Ybarra, 22, an organizer



NATIONWIDE ORGANIZING

at a Starbucks in Seattle. “But unionizing can give you a sense of agency,” Ybarra adds.

“If a union is involved, your coworkers have the power to go to bat for you.”

In Memphis, Tenn., Nikki Taylor, at age 32, is one of the oldest Starbucks baristas at the busy corner of Poplar Avenue and S. Highland Street. She says she feels like a mother figure to a “close-knit, regular barbecue-type family.” When she started as a shift supervisor two years ago, working in the café was a dream job—but this soon changed.

During the pandemic her store has faced chronic

staffing shortages and baristas have been tasked with the work of three or four people. “You’re getting hundreds of drink orders, making them all yourself, still having to give that ultimate customer service,” Taylor says.

So workers began to talk. “When you’re working alongside people going through the same thing every day, you guys bond so much,” Taylor says.

One concern was pay. The starting wage at the store is about \$12, and some workers take multiple jobs to make ends meet, Taylor says. According to MIT’s living wage calculator, the living wage in Memphis is \$13.26 for a single adult, \$18.02 for a family of four.

Another issue was Covid-19 policy. Vaccinated workers who were exposed to Covid but had no symptoms were expected to work their shifts. During the highly contagious Omicron wave of the virus this winter, workers

Above: Former Starbucks workers rally on the picket line at Poplar Avenue and Highland Street in Memphis on February 26. Starbucks claims the workers were fired for what it calls protocol violations, but the workers suspect their terminations were a retaliatory effort.

PHOTO BY ANDREA MORALES



say they'd see people with known exposures come in for work, only to develop symptoms while on the clock.

Asked for comment, “Anthony D.,” a corporate Starbucks representative, told *In These Times* in an emailed statement, “Throughout the pandemic, we have met and exceeded the latest direction from the CDC. ... Over and above that, all leaders are empowered to make any changes make sense [sic] for their neighborhood, which includes shortening store hours or moving to 100% take-out only.”

Taylor says the store's policies still presented a dilemma: “[Do] I not get paid and be at home and try to be safe—and then not be paying my bills? Or go to work and continue to be exposed?”

In January, Taylor contracted the virus soon after working alongside someone with a known exposure. At home, Taylor exposed her fiancé and 8-year-old daughter, who developed a 102-degree fever days later.

The previous month, a location in Buffalo, N.Y., had become the first unionized Starbucks café in the country. (Some smaller Starbucks “kiosks,” such as those inside grocery stores and airports, do run under union contracts with the larger venue.)

When Taylor heard that, she thought her Memphis store might have a real shot at a union, too. She contacted Starbucks Workers United, the Buffalo-based campaign assisted by Workers United, itself an independent affiliate of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

When they replied, Taylor says, she jumped and cried with excitement.

The Starbucks union drive went public in Memphis on January 17, Martin Luther King Jr. Day—a deeply personal event for many of the Memphis workers.

“We have [workers] here that were born and raised in Memphis, whose grandparents were in those same rallies and walks that Martin Luther King Jr. did,” says Beto Sanchez, 25, an R&B and jazz musician who began working at the Memphis café after the pandemic decimated the music industry. “We are practically 10 minutes away from Lorraine Motel [where King was assassinated]. Whether it was the Kellogg's strike, whether it was the sanitation workers, there's a lot of union history in this city.”

But immediately, workers say, they felt like they were under surveillance, with high-level managers frequenting the store, loitering in the café and watching the counter.

On February 8, Taylor, Sanchez and five other union supporters were fired without warning. The company cited minor policy violations that workers and a former store manager, Amy Holden, say were never enforced nor taught in training.

“One of the employees literally walked in, signed her union card, took a sip of a drink and left—and she was fired,” Taylor says.

Starbucks rep Anthony D. claims the workers “violated several safety and security policies and protocols, including opening the store after hours, allowing unauthorized



personnel inside, leaving the doors unlocked and opening the safe without permission.” Workers reply that, on the night being referenced, they did let a local news crew film in their lobby, all within 10 minutes of the store closing, which they say is company policy—but then they talked about the union campaign on camera.

“How we got fired is not why we got fired,” Sanchez tells *In These Times*. He notes he was the one fired for opening the safe while off-shift, though he generally had that authority as a shift supervisor. He also points out an irony: “Starbucks decided to tweet about Martin Luther King Jr. and then ... decided to fire Black workers here in Memphis for unionizing.” Two of the seven fired workers, including Taylor, are Black.

“It’s union-busting, completely,” Taylor says. “We were loud, we were bold and the company tried to use us as examples. ... That scare tactic wildly backfired.”

News of the firings spread rapidly, and the workers became known as “the Memphis 7.” Workers and community members gather outside the Poplar and Highland store early each

morning to picket in solidarity. Within a week, rallies demanding their reinstatement sprang up in Boston, Chicago and on the doorstep of Starbucks headquarters in Seattle.

Starbucks responded to the Memphis pickets by drastically reducing store hours in the name of “worker safety.” Sanchez says this shows they’re hitting the company “where it hurts ... in the wallet.”



SINCE THE FIRST STARBUCKS UNION CAMPAIGN succeeded in Buffalo, N.Y., in December 2021, more than 110 Starbucks stores in 27 states have filed union petitions for elections. That effort encompasses more than 2,000 workers, from Miami-Dade to Seattle.

Common goals include a living wage, access to benefits, adequate staffing, consistent scheduling, more hours, improved health and safety conditions, proper training—and for “partners,” the corporate lingo Starbucks uses to refer to employees, to actually be treated like “partners.”

For Ky Fireside, 31, who works at a Starbucks in Eugene, Ore., one driving force is a living wage. After nearly seven years at the store, Fireside makes \$14.70 an hour. According to MIT’s living wage calculator, the living wage in Eugene is \$15.58 for a single adult, \$22.10 for a family of four.

“In my store, we’ve got three partners who have been with the company for over 15 years,” Fireside says. “These aren’t

Above left: Union organizer and former Starbucks worker Nikki Taylor looks on in Memphis. *Above center:* Former Starbucks workers rally outside their former workplace February 26. *Above right:* Former Memphis Starbucks workers (from left) Nabretta Hardin, Kylie Throckmorton, Emma Worrell, Beto Sanchez, Nikki Taylor and LaKota McGlawn pose in solidarity after being fired out of retaliation, union organizers suspect.

people working temporary jobs, these are people that are trying to support their family on this income. I'm in my 30s, this is my career. And we're watching the prices of everything go up, including the coffee that we serve."

Starbucks has touted itself as an industry leader in wages and benefits, pledging to raise wages nationwide to a range of \$15 to \$23 by this summer. Benefits include paid parental leave, healthcare plans that cover gender-affirming procedures, and tuition for an online degree at Arizona State University.

According to Fireside, however, less than half of the 30 workers at the Eugene location are scheduled enough hours to be eligible for benefits.

"I'm on state healthcare," Fireside says. "Starbucks doesn't pay me enough to buy health insurance and does not work me enough hours to qualify for Starbucks insurance." Starbucks requires its workers to average 24 hours a week to qualify for the health insurance benefit, which, on the recommended plan, still costs workers a minimum of \$84 each month.

Brick Zurek, 25, a Starbucks worker in downtown Chicago, says their store organized after management's dismal response to workers receiving death threats in December 2021. When a customer threatened to shoot up the store one night, Zurek says, management refused to allow the store to close early. "Starbucks really laid the foundations [for organizing] themselves, on accident," Zurek says. "When we were so understaffed, when we were threatened, and when we were scared—we were taking care of each other. ... We were forming those bonds and connections."

Meanwhile, as these small union campaigns await their election dates from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), they are facing a multimillion-dollar anti-union effort considered to be one of the most intense in decades.

* * *

IN THESE TIMES SPOKE WITH MORE THAN A DOZEN Starbucks workers trying to unionize their shops. They say, within weeks of their filing for an election, corporate broke out the union-busting playbook. Common tactics include disciplining workers for infractions that were never a concern previously (such as wearing buttons on their aprons or even how they tie their aprons), hiring new workers en masse to dilute the union vote at the store, tense meetings with workers, and surveillance on the floor.

During Buffalo's campaign, organizers from Workers United say corporate flew in more than 100 "support managers" from across the country, including such high-ranking corporate officials as former CEO Howard Schultz, to cafés throughout the district. They began hosting mandatory

Right: Former Memphis Starbucks shift supervisor Beto Sanchez proudly dons a Starbucks Workers United T-shirt. Starbucks Workers United is a mostly volunteer, worker-led offshoot campaign from the Workers United union.



PHOTO BY ANDREA MORALES



“listening sessions” between managers and workers. The sessions run under a pretext of addressing grievances, but management uses them to disseminate “facts” about unions.

Workers at other stores with unionizing efforts say the listening sessions, once unheard of, are now routine. While it’s illegal for management to threaten to take away benefits in response to a union campaign, *In These Times* spoke with Starbucks workers who say managers imply their current benefits won’t be guaranteed with a union, claim that union dues are expensive and suggest that a “third party” (i.e., the union) “will get between” workers and management.

Fireside says listening sessions are a daily occurrence in Eugene and workers in a district-wide group chat alert each other when management is en route, so they can prepare. Fireside adds that, in addition to pulling workers off the floor during busy shifts, the sessions cause stress in other ways, like the anxiety that comes with being cornered. “They say things like, ‘You never know what’s going to happen in a contract: You could lose your benefits, and then where would you be? Where would your kids be?’”

After some sessions, Fireside says, workers leave the floor to cry privately.

Starbucks Workers United has filed an NLRB complaint of unfair labor practices, alleging that the company waged a campaign of interference, intimidation and coercion during the Eugene union drive.

As of March 1, all eight Eugene cafés had filed for a union election.

* * *

“YOU WOULDN’T EXPECT US TO BE THE FIRST store, after Buffalo, to unionize—but we did,” says Tyler Ralston proudly. Ralston works at a small, “hole-in-the-wall” Starbucks “connected to a Smashburger” in Mesa, Ariz., a conservative community in a state not known for its union support.

Workers felt compelled to unionize, Ralston says, when manager Brittany Harrison was fired after leaking a video she recorded of Starbucks corporate coaches warning Arizona managers against union organizing. Harrison shared the video with Starbucks Workers United and the *New York Times*, and “[corporate] started calling me, asking if I was the ‘whistleblower,’” Harrison says in an interview with More Perfect Union. Harrison put in her notice to quit, but was fired instead.

In response, workers in Mesa filed for a union election Nov. 18, 2021. As one of the earliest stores to file, they have been subject to corporate’s full arsenal of anti-union tactics. Within weeks, three new managers were hired to oversee the store—who, according to workers, spent most of their days just sitting in the lobby on laptops or watching employees at the counter.

Starbucks began holding “captive audience meetings,” meetings in which management tries to dissuade workers



from unionizing. (These types of meetings would be banned under the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, or PRO Act, a pro-labor bill currently stalled in Congress.) Workers who had been outspoken about the union were taken to a meeting at an offsite hotel, while everyone else talked at the store.

Ralston was outraged at what he says were “intimidation tactics,” and printed out a 12-page document detailing workers’ allegations of mistreatment, passing it around at a captive audience meeting in December 2021.

“I thought it was time for [management] to feel intimidated,” Ralston says.

Ralston was then called into a meeting with two managers. “We sat down at a table and they called me a bully to my face,” Ralston says. “They said I needed to apologize [to the store managers] because of the union and everything that [the union] has done to them.”

Ralston, of course, did not.

Then, in advance of the February election, management began mass-hiring new workers, a tactic the union alleges is used to dilute the vote; staffing went from 25 to 40. According to Ralston, the influx of hires caused chaos, at times doubling the number of workers necessary, reducing hours and diluting tips.

Starbucks has also contracted legal services from Littler Mendelson, one of the largest and most notorious union-busting law firms in the country, with hourly rates reportedly as high as \$600 to \$700. The firm worked with

McDonald’s and Uber during two of the largest labor battles of the last decade: the national fight for a \$15 minimum wage, and the corporate campaign to pass California’s Proposition 22, which classified app-based gig workers as contractors rather than employees.

Starbucks is not required to disclose how much they’re paying Littler Mendelson, though in a February review of NLRB filings, *HuffPost* found at least 30 Littler lawyers attached to Starbucks cases.

Starbucks does seem concerned that the company’s anti-union efforts are hurting its image as a forward-thinking corporate citizen, writing in a February 1 report to the SEC that “our responses to any union organizing efforts could negatively impact how our brand is perceived and have adverse effects on our business.”

Starbucks’ “Anthony D.” tells *In These Times*, “From the beginning, we have been clear in our belief that we are better together as partners, without a union between us, and that conviction has not changed. Our position since the beginning is all of our partners in a market or district deserve the right to vote.”

But Workers United organizer Richard Bensinger, 71, former national organizing director of the AFL-CIO, sees no sign of Starbucks letting up on its anti-union efforts. “This has to be the most intense [anti-union] campaign in modern U.S. history, and there’s really nothing in second place,” Bensinger says.

On February 16, for example—the day the Mesa store’s

LEFT: LIBBY MARCH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES, CENTER + RIGHT: ELEONORE SENS/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES



votes were scheduled to be counted—corporate Starbucks lawyers appealed to the NLRB to delay the vote count, arguing that stores should vote district-wide rather than one by one. Organizers allege the goal of this tactic is to dilute the vote. Starbucks lost the appeal.

“They’ve lost this case [for district-wide votes] [four] times now, and they’re going to lose it 100 times,” says Bensinger, who works with the Buffalo union campaigns. “This is 50 years of legal precedent.”

Starbucks also lost the union vote—with a landslide 25-3 win for the workers of the Mesa café, which became the third unionized Starbucks in the United States.

But for every successful union drive, Bensinger notes, countless stores silently buckle under immense corporate pressure before filing. Bensinger describes one failed effort at a store in Buffalo where 80% of workers signed union cards; Starbucks simply closed the store and converted it into a training center, relocating the workers to stores that were miles away. Most of them quit.

“We’ve passed 100 [organized] stores,” Bensinger says. “That’s great. But that’s in spite of what [corporate] is doing.”

Above left: Pins and union collateral wait for disbursement at the Starbucks Workers United hub in Buffalo, N.Y. Above center: Buffalo Starbucks workers celebrate their union victory Dec. 9, 2021, a first in the United States. Above right: Union organizer Richard Bensinger (left) and a Starbucks worker are overcome with emotion as the union vote tally comes through on Dec. 9, 2021.

* * *

PREVIOUSLY, THE ONLY UNION TO TRY TO ORGANIZE Starbucks nationwide was the Industrial Workers of the World, with a campaign that started in 2004. They never won a union election, and the campaign was hindered by relentless corporate anti-union efforts and high worker turnover (often due to firings the union said were retaliatory); the effort died out by 2017. But by garnering free media attention, organizers did pressure image-conscious Starbucks into regional wage increases, fairer scheduling and one additional paid holiday—Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

When Workers United began organizing cafés in Buffalo in 2019, Starbucks was not a consideration.

While on the picket with striking Rainforest Cafe workers in Niagara Falls, Canada, Bensinger was approached by workers from SPoT Coffee, a Buffalo-based chain. Those initial organizers were fired in short order, but SPoT workers won a union that year.

Bensinger says that union election was a rallying cry for Buffalo’s labor and progressive community. After SPoT workers secured a strong contract (the median hourly pay rose \$4), workers at the Starbucks across the street took notice. They soon reached out to Workers United.

“The partners really get the campaigns going,” Bensinger says. By 2021, Starbucks Workers United had formed an organizing committee with more than 100 workers from Starbucks across Buffalo, training them in union organizing.

“It’s all organic,” Bensing says. “Any good organizing campaign is either run by the workers, or you lose.”

Workers United formed in 2009 (by splitting off from Unite Here) and operates as an “independent affiliate” of the SEIU. The Starbucks unionizing effort, however, bears little resemblance to the SEIU’s Fight for \$15 campaign, which attempted to organize fast-food workers nationwide for “\$15 and a union,” and for which the union hired dozens of organizers in 2011 and 2012, investing millions.

For starters, Fight for \$15 was not focused on store-by-store organizing. Its primary strategies were to build momentum for a \$15 minimum wage while pushing the NLRB to allow franchises (such as McDonald’s) to be unionized at the national level, rather than shop by shop. The SEIU lost its case under the Trump-era NLRB, then lost a final appeal in 2021.

Starbucks Workers United, however, is a worker-led campaign with support from Workers United. The union is primarily made up of volunteer organizers from around the country who continue to work at Starbucks and serve on their cafés’ organizing committees. Fewer than 20 paid organizers with Workers United nationwide help by facilitating communication between stores and filling support roles like printing and delivering union cards. The union is not planning new hires. Instead, at national trainings, workers at active campaigns learn to move

other stores in their region through the process.

Casey Moore, 25, a Starbucks worker in Buffalo, runs communications for Starbucks Workers United as a volunteer. Moore had never been involved in a union campaign before joining her store’s organizing committee. Now, she helps new stores start organizing every day.

“I joke now that I don’t have a life; this is my life,” says Moore. “But I think it’s the coolest thing ever to be a part of.”

Workers interested in learning more about unionizing often email Starbucks Workers United or reach out via Twitter and Instagram, accounts run entirely by Starbucks workers. Since the Memphis 7 firings, Moore says, there’s been a surge in organizing.

“I’ve heard from a lot of partners that this just angered them and was the driving force telling them to message us,” Moore says.

“I’m on Zoom call after Zoom call, just listening,” Bensing says. “On many of the calls, I never say a word—just marvel at it. It’s an honor just to listen to them. And everybody knows exactly what to do. The partners all are wired in through social media and they share everything. The second something new happened in a store, it’s all over social media. They’re wickedly, devastatingly funny and positive.”

Starbucks Workers United is also building a virtual network of organizers to share resources, answers to common questions, organizing strategies and updates

“We make media that gives a platform to the voices that you won’t hear anywhere else, that treats you not as a passive consumer but as an active participant in a shared struggle for democracy.”

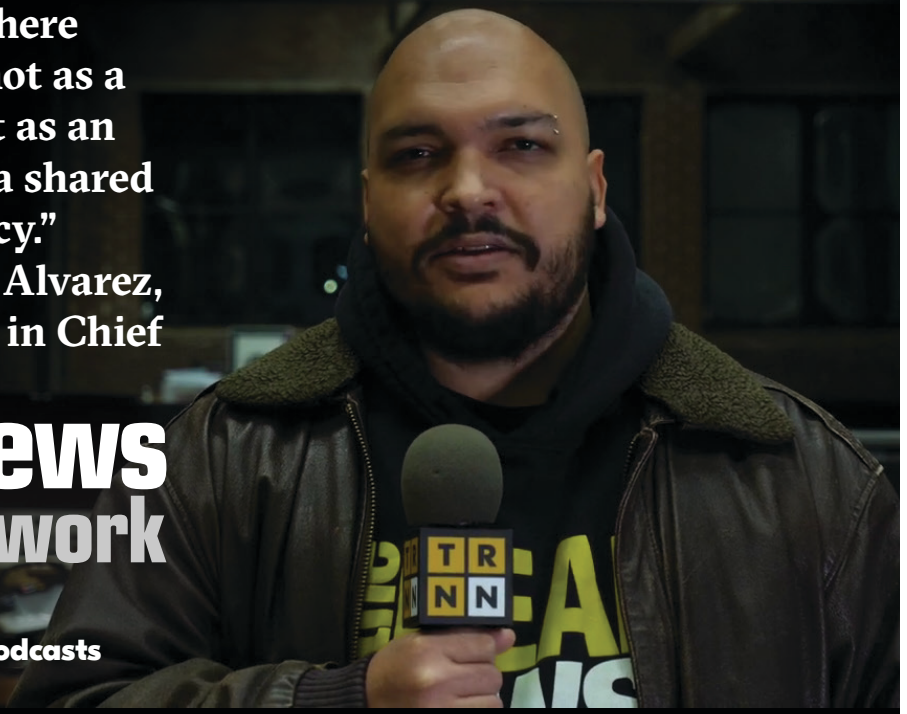
**—Maximillian Alvarez,
Editor in Chief**

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on corporate tactics. If a new anti-union leaflet pops up in Seattle, for example, Moore says a worker in Knoxville or Cleveland can confirm they've seen identical material and share how they responded.

"A lot of the things that people are asking for," Moore says, "are, 'What can I share with my coworkers to dispel these lies that Starbucks is telling to scare people?' And answering questions like, 'What is a union? What do we fight for with the union? Why organize? What's collective bargaining?'"

* * *

LABOR HISTORIANS ARE CONNECTING THE Starbucks Workers United momentum with the wave of labor militancy that began in 2018 when West Virginia public school teachers went on strike.

Importantly, "[the teachers] framed the strike as being about community, rather than about just being themselves," says Erik Loomis, associate professor of history at the University of Rhode Island. "It's about dignity. It's about fairness."

Christian Sweeney, deputy organizing director of the AFL-CIO, confirms the AFL-CIO has seen a significant increase in organizing interest since 2018. He notes, however, that larger labor unions have limited appetite for organizing a few dozen workers at a time, store by store, as the Starbucks campaign is doing. Though the campaign is growing rapidly, the number of stores that have organized for an election are a fraction of the 9,000 company-operated Starbucks in the United States. And across all sectors, U.S. union density has been on the decline for decades, bottoming out at about 10% within the past few years.

Instead, Sweeney says, unions have been looking for ways to work around a "terribly broken" NLRB process by putting resources into getting reform legislation, such as the PRO Act, passed.

The PRO Act, however, is likely stalled in the current Congress without filibuster reform. Sweeney sees in the Starbucks campaign one alternate way forward.

"Waves of labor movement growth [in the 1880s, 1910s, 1930s and 1950s] have been associated with different ways that workers figured out how to organize, reflective of both changes in the economy, but also changes in the ways that work is organized," Sweeney says. "I think we're on the verge of bigger things to come, and these Starbucks workers might just be the caffeine that we all need to figure out the next thing."

"Maybe there are lessons to learn from this for established labor unions, that if you can get in the door, you can create this wave you're seeing in Starbucks," Loomis agrees. "There's lots of other kinds of companies, both in fast food and other forms of service industries, that can easily build on this." Loomis cautions that rebuilding a powerful labor movement will take decades, just as building one did. "It does give me hope every day knowing that people are

On lunch breaks and after clocking out for the night, workers brush past management and head straight for the picket.

starting to recognize the power that they have, as a collective force, as a workforce," says Sanchez from the Memphis store. He adds that "there are always going to be more of us" and hopes the rest of the coffee industry will follow suit, "whether it's the coffee farmers, whether it's the suppliers, whether it's the manufacturing area." As of press time, two of the nation's three flagship Starbucks roasteries have filed to hold union elections.

* * *

IN THE MIDST OF A FIERCE CORPORATE INTIMIDATION campaign, organizers say that public attention and community support are crucial. "Everybody's rallied around the Starbucks workers, and that's what it's going to take to win, because you have to get [Starbucks] to stop their anti-unionism," Bensinger says.

When captive audience meetings began at one of the first Starbucks to file for an election in Portland, Ore., members of the Democratic Socialists of America, the Teamsters and other union members occupied the café with a "solidarity sip-in" at a table adjacent to management. Management was eventually forced to conduct meetings outside.

When the first captive audience meeting hit the downtown Chicago store, a crowd of 50 from Workers United and the other two Chicago stores with unionizing efforts picketed directly outside.

Members of the Memphis 7 say workers there have since formed a new organizing committee and are going harder than ever. On lunch breaks and after clocking out for the night, workers brush past management and head straight for the picket.

"Like I said, we're a family," Taylor says. "You hurt one family member, you hurt them all." ■

HANNAH FARIS reports on labor and city politics in Chicago. She is former editor of *The Wisconsin Idea*, an independent reporting project of *In These Times*, People's Action Institute and Wisconsin Citizen Action.

MORE THAN 140 DIE AS FLAMES SWEEP THROUGH THREE STORIES OF FACTORY BUILDING IN WASHINGTON PLACE

New-York



Tribune

Vol. LXX, No. 23,506 NEW-YORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 1911.—FIVE PARTS—SIXTY PAGES. ** PRICE FIVE CENTS

MEXICAN REBELS TO LAY DOWN ARMS

Understanding Reached Between Diaz Government and Insurgents Headed by Madero

From a Special Correspondent at the Times, Mexico City, March 25.—Upon information received from official and authoritative sources tonight the Tribune correspondent is able to announce that an understanding has been reached between the government and the insurgent forces, headed by Francisco I. Madero, whereby the rebels will lay down their arms and submit themselves to Federal authority.

It was with this end in view that the members of President Diaz's Cabinet met in their sequestered residence, the programme provided for a thirty-one day session, with the exception of José Yves Limantour, who retains the portfolio of Minister of Finance. The personnel of the cabinet will be announced in Mexico.

Changes will be made in administration a measure, both national and state, to make them conform to the spirit and the letter of the Constitution. Full freedom is to be granted in the exercise of the franchise, although it is probable that the election laws will be amended so as to bar illiterate voters. General Huerta, who has been elected in Sonora for two years on a platform to study the military measures of the President, has been ordered to return to Mexico immediately. The President is expected to return to Mexico in the near future.

MORE THAN 140 DIE AS FLAMES SWEEP THROUGH THREE STORIES OF FACTORY BUILDING IN WASHINGTON PLACE

DIAGRAMMATIC SKETCH OF THE SURROUNDINGS OF YESTERDAY'S FIRE HORROR
Bodies of some of the unfortunates who jumped from the windows, lying where they struck the pavement.



Scores of Girls Leap to Death in Streets Ten Stories Below Them.

HAD NO CHANCE FOR LIFE

Unable to Reach Elevators or Stairways, Employees Rush to Windows.

CROKER BLAMES ESCAPES

None on Outside of Building. Says Fire Chief, Saying That Is Reason for Fearful Loss of Lives in Disaster.

ELEVATORS SAVE HUNDREDS

Frightful Panic as Trapped Workers Fight Like Furies for Places in Cars. Almost the Only Means of Escape, as Flames Sweep Through the Workrooms.

Nearly one hundred and fifty lives were lost in a fire that swept through the three upper stories of a ten-story factory last building at the northwest corner of Washington Place and Greene street at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon, occupied by the Triangle Waist Company and a clothing house. At midnight 112 bodies had been taken to the morgue.

The Chief Croker said: "This calamity is just what I have been predicting. There were no outside fire escapes on this building. I have been advocating a building that has escapes both on buildings and outside."

Like a Moth to a Flame, Workers Unite

THE FIRST TIME I TALKED ABOUT the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire of 1911 was at a union training in early 2004. I got choked up and had to bite down hard on the edge of my tongue to let go the catch in my throat. I stood in front of 20 or 25 workers who were leading campaigns within the industries that were actively organizing in Phoenix: ironworkers, roofers, painters and laundry workers.

BY DAISY PITKIN

This was the first day of a three-day intensive training, and I was supposed to give a short history of UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees), which was an offshoot of the legendary International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The short

history I was supposed to recount was a story of dispersion, of a union chasing an industry from place to place around the world.

The Triangle fire was not necessary to this narrative. The fact of the fire, the fact that dozens of people, mostly women and girls, jumped eight or nine stories to escape it, the sound their bodies made on impact with the sidewalk—no one was expecting to hear about these things during a weekend training focused on how to conduct a union house visit. But by this time, we were a year into the campaign and I had started thinking about the emptiness of that broader history, how it didn't feel anything like the work of organizing, how devoid it was of lives and bodies and of the often-gruesome reality of industrial work.

At the training, I wanted to talk about fires and

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about people; about women and mainly immigrant women, fighting in what seemed to be echoing moments at both ends of a century. I started by saying that 100 years ago—even before the fire—garment workers were organizing in New York City, and that they were doing it, at first, shop by small shop. The only way to force companies to pay attention at that time—before workers had a federally supported process for holding union elections—was to strike, so the garment workers struck. They demanded better pay and shorter hours but also safer factories, to not have to rent chairs to sit in, to have sewing tables moved closer to windows to make it easier to see

the needles, to be able to use the toilet when they needed to, to keep the factories clear of scrap fabric and piles of lint to stop the spread of fire.

That shop-by-shop strategy changed in 1909 when a worker named Clara Lemlich spoke out of turn at a union meeting and called

Above left: Exits locked to prevent breaks, workers are trapped inside the burning building that housed the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City on March 25, 1911. Above right: The final remains of workers, some of whom jumped to their deaths, lie in the streets March 25, 1911. Left: Rosaria and Lucia Maltese, who died in the fire, pose here.



for a general strike. The workers at the meeting rallied around her, and the next day they rose up into a strike that would grow 20,000 strong. I explained to my audience at the training that 13 weeks later most of the industry—in fact nearly every garment company except Triangle—acquiesced to the workers' demands. They gave raises. They capped working hours. They put some basic safety practices into place. I had learned the story of this strike months before but had learned only the night before my talk at the training that the Triangle owners had held out, that they had refused to recognize the union and give in to any of these demands, and that the strike of 20,000 garment workers was settled without their compliance.

I got through this part of the story—the 1909 uprising and its aftermath—calmly, matter-of-factly, and, I imagine, very earnestly, as one does when conveying an urgent lesson not rooted in personal experience but in a collective past. And that's how I felt about it, that the training was part of a long, nearly sacred tradition of teaching workers the skills they need in order to organize and win. But when I started talking about Triangle, the shirtwaist company that refused to settle with strikers and where, 16 months later, the most violent factory fire in US history would kill 146 workers, my voice broke, and I had to stop talking for a few moments and stand there, embarrassed, in the front of the room, before I was able to continue.

Unions are built on solidarity, and solidarity is a form of closeness, maybe even intimacy, a network of deep connection that rewires a splintered collective.

On the shop floor of the Triangle shirtwaist factory, one of the exit doors was locked—the company had grown concerned about workers stealing scraps of material, or spools of thread or time in the form of unsanctioned breaks, so they locked the door and then single-filed workers through the only other exit at the end of the day, making them turn out their pockets and purses for a security guard. When the fire swept through the factory, the workers were locked inside. They made their way to the windows, out onto the window ledges and then out onto the cornice of the building. Some of the workers jumped; some of them fell. The managers escaped to the roof through a doorway most workers couldn't access and then climbed up and over to another building. From the safety of the roof next door, they could see bodies jumping/falling.

The story of the fire was not necessary to the training, but it was important to UNITE—both to its idea of itself, its origin and significance, and as a reminder of the urgency and high stakes of organizing, of what can happen if we lose. The telling and retelling of the story of the fire is an easy conduit to the anger that often serves as an engine to a

fight. It works on me in exactly that way—reminds me how monstrously inhuman it is to disregard the lives of some humans so that other humans can eke a little more out of the world. But it does something else to me, too; it breaks me in a way that organizers are not really supposed to break, at least not the organizers I knew at UNITE, especially not at the telling of the stories we used to move others. It was not our place to be caught up emotionally in the work of organizing, outside of the righteous indignation that underlay everything we did. We were there to serve as guides, to help workers navigate their fights, which were not our fights, to win unions that were not our unions but belonged to the workers who had fought and risked and been moved to build them.

I had been nervous the night before the training—it was the first I'd ever helped to facilitate. I would be the youngest person in the room, one of only four women, and the only person not fluent in Spanish. I stayed up late, going over what I wanted to say, reading and rereading what I could find on the internet about the fire, practicing the words out loud. I scribbled notes and threw them out. Finally, I decided to trust that I would know what to say in the moment.

My reaction to my own telling of the story made the trainers from the other unions uncomfortable. They kept their distance for the rest of the day, as if they were afraid of contracting my too-thin skin. That night, during a palpably tense debrief, they rightly advised me to leave out any details about the fire the next time I ran a training. It was hard to listen to, they said, and I had taken more time than allotted. People don't learn to organize through emotional outbursts, one of the trainers said. Organizing is a system, rational and teachable. There are five steps to a house call. There are plant maps and worker assessments. We collect data and analyze it. We build timelines, set clear goals, and then calibrate our tactics accordingly.

I believe in this system. But I'm not sure the trick of moving people without being moved, of telling stories meant to evoke emotion that I, the teller, was not meant to feel, helped to make the union (or me, or anyone) any stronger. After all, unions are built on solidarity, and solidarity is a form of closeness, maybe even intimacy, a network of deep connection that rewires a splintered collective. By definition it is "unity or agreement of feeling or action." Feeling or action. What would it mean to build a union on both?

It was November 22, 1909, one year and four months before the Triangle fire, when 23-year-old Clara Lemlich stood up in the large meeting hall at Cooper Union and moved for a general strike. She spoke at first from the floor, where hundreds of workers had stood for over two hours listening to speakers—union leaders, all of them

Right: Union demonstrators gather to mourn the workers who died in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in 1911. Far right: Daisy Lopez Fitze, who died in the fire, poses here at age 26.



men, calling for cautious, deliberate action, trying to talk angry workers down from walking out of the city's garment shops—their measured approach stemming from the belief that women workers were un-organizable, unwilling or simply physically unable to stick out a strike.

Clara interrupted Jacob Panken, a union organizer who had just begun to speak. She spoke in Yiddish, in a voice that seemed too loud to be pouring from her small body: "I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!"

* * *

AT THE END OF THE THREE-DAY TRAINING, WE held a kind of graduation. I and the other facilitators handed out certificates to the workers who had participated, and then we all sat together and ate chicken and rice from El Pollo Loco. We joked with one another about the funny things that had happened during our long days together: Gaspar confusing inoculation with vaccination, which stuck and became the name with which we referred to that step of an

organizing conversation in which we prepare workers for the company's threats by anticipating them; the ongoing teasing about my terrible gringa accent; and other inside jokes. We were leaving the training prepared to launch separate fights across the city and in different industries, but we'd be there for each other, in solidarity, we promised. And we were. For the next several years, we showed up at each other's rallies and strike lines, marches, and meetings.

When we'd finished eating, I asked if anyone had a final question or announcement, guessing someone would respond with another joke or an exaggerated call for me to just wrap it up already. For a moment, no one said anything, and then you raised your hand, Alma—a formality that brought a sudden seriousness to the room. You asked a question that stays with me still, though I don't hear it in your voice or even in Spanish anymore—it comes as a memory of my own translation. You were wondering about the will to fight, a phrase I had used in my story about the shirtwaist strikers in 1909. *Las ganas de luchar*, I had said, and those were the words you used, too, when you asked. You wanted to know what drives some people to fight while others don't, or don't



want to, or can't. Everyone is afraid, you said. So what is it that pushes some people across the threshold of fear? Is it all rage? you wondered. Is it courage? Are the ones who fall down in their fear too afraid or just not angry enough?

* * *

BY THIS TIME, EARLY IN 2004, YOU AND I had started calling ourselves Las Polillas—The Moths. At night in the motel I was reading a book about Las Mariposas, the Mirabal sisters, who worked clandestinely to oppose the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and were nicknamed The Butterflies. We joked that we were their ugly cousins, grinding out our organizing one house call at a time in the dust of south Phoenix, so driven by the will to fight that we were bludgeoning ourselves against the porch light.

In the years after I left the union, my fascination with moths grew. Among the things I learned is the nerve-racking fact that there is no definitive answer as to why moths are attracted to light, though people have wondered at the ill-fated-ness of the habit for a long time.

As is true of most idioms, *like a moth to flame* is shorthand for something harder to describe, in this case an irresistible, often irrational, attraction to someone or something that has the potential to lead to the desirer's downfall. Most idioms work as shorthand because there is cultural agreement on their meaning. But interpretations of the relationship described by moth to flame seem to contradict each other; some placing agency with the moth as the active seeker of the flame, and others with the flame, luring the moth to its death.

We know that moths use transverse orientation, a kind of celestial navigation, to find their way—in as much as they do—in the dark. They orient their bodies to a source of light through a series of instinctive muscle contractions. As information from the light changes with the moth's movement, its muscles react immediately and in concert with each other. The leading theory regarding their attraction to light is that moths have been unable to adapt this navigational strategy to humanmade points of light, that, by design, moth flight works as a function of distance. They confuse our porch lights and campfires for the moon and then collide with them because they've evolved to know that orienting around the moon's light will help them get somewhere, though not ever to the moon itself.

In 2012, archeologists in South

Catherine Maltese, who died in the fire at age 38 or 39, poses here.



Africa discovered the remnants of the oldest known campfire and dated it back 1 million years. If the leading moth-to-flame theory is correct, then moths have had 1 million years of human fires, of localized light, to adapt their navigation and have failed to do so. How has nature not selected out the trait of mistakenly burning oneself alive?

I was taken aback by your question at the end of the training: What drives a person to fight? I listened and nodded as one of the other trainers said something about struggles needing leaders and about it being the job of those leaders (Of you, here in this room, he said) to be courageous and to lead their coworkers through their fear. If I had tried to answer then, I think I would have said that people who fight and people who don't aren't very different from each other, or that the difference has less to do with anger or fear and more to do with vision—that some people can't imagine or haven't yet imagined what good a fight will do, can't see a version of the world that doesn't yet exist.

Now, having thought about this question nearly continuously since you asked it in 2004, I wonder if the will to fight is unrelated to vision or imagination, if instead it's a kind of metamorphosis, a state of being so ravenous for change that you are changed. The skin tightens around the neck and body of the caterpillar, which is already walking around with parts of another, future body tucked inside. The you before the fight denatures, exploding into newness out of necessity. ("He must shed that tight dry skin, or die," writes Nabokov of a caterpillar in its final stage.) ■

From On the Line: A Story of Class, Solidarity, and Two Women's Epic Fight to Build a Union by Daisy Pitkin. © 2022 by Daisy Pitkin. Reprinted by permission of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. All rights reserved.

DAISY PITKIN has spent more than 20 years as a community and union organizer, working first in support of garment workers around the world and then for U.S. labor unions organizing industrial laundry workers. She lives and writes in Pittsburgh, Pa., where she works as an organizer with an offshoot of the union UNITE.

PHOTOS VIA BETTY IMAGES



Q & A with Daisy Pitkin

In *On the Line*, you talk about how you got caught up emotionally during an organizing training while discussing the Triangle Shirtwaist fire. Can you talk more about, as a staff organizer, the tension between evoking emotion in others and experiencing it yourself?

DP: In the early 2000s, UNITE was a small, scrappy union that put an immense amount of resources into new organizing. They had small teams of organizers who flew around the country and lived in hotels and motels and spent their life organizing. I think it's really important for unions to be oriented in that way, to have just about every arm focused around new organizing and building the labor movement and having militant sites.

At the same time, we have to really think critically about the role of organizers. Organizing can be such a science: We assess things, map workplaces, determine our tactics. Our tactics add up to be our strategy. It's all very methodical and stripped of emotion. I write about standing up in front of the group and telling the story of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, which is something organizers in UNITE get trained to tell. It's part of the union and its history and its own myths. So we hear that story as young organizers, we learn how to tell that story to move people to action—move them to sort of build solidarity with each other—and we're not really supposed to be moved by those stories. I can't do it that way and some of the best organizers I know can't do it that way.

I think the role of the emotional momentum of people who work inside the union is worth examining.

This model, of using trauma as a motivating factor, sounds difficult. What's an alternative?

DP: We learned as organizers that anger is one of the only emotions strong enough to move people, but I don't think that's true. I think we can build unions that function differently—in terms of making connections and building solidarity on the sidelines—if we can tap into other emotions and bring them into the organizing process. There's potential for hope and care for each other, mutual respect and love, even. All good organizing tears an old structure down while building something new. In the process, we are reverse-engineering the narratives, so deeply ingrained in our minds, about power and agency at work.

What does that look like, to reverse-engineer narratives about power?

DP: When I first started organizing, it seemed right to think that, if we take power away from the boss, then the power is ours. But we actually don't want the kind of power the boss has. It's authoritarian; it's paternalistic. The kind of power workers build with each other is built over time and through



relationships, and not even through the sexier moments of organizing where we're marching or rallying. It's the quieter moments, when you're just sitting in the car with someone driving around the city for hours, looking for their coworkers. Those slower, time-consuming moments are what actually build the structure of power we're interested in, to reorganize communities and workplaces around solidarity and collectivity, rather than the sort of top-down power the boss has.

A lot of this book is in second person, addressed to Alma. Why?

DP: I started writing letters to Alma in 2011. We weren't in touch at the time, so I just kind of put them in a box and stashed them away. I saw a picture of her on Facebook seven years later, got in touch and pulled them out. The book organically took that shape because I had all this material that was already written to her in second person. There aren't many literary accounts of organizing campaigns. The second-person address creates a sort of intimacy that invites readers to live inside of the book in a different kind of way.

For people who haven't read the book, can you say more about Alma?

DP: Alma is the gutsiest worker-leader I've ever met. She has a natural charisma that her coworkers in that laundry couldn't help but respect. No matter what this massive, multi-million dollar corporation would throw at her, she was not backing down. That fierceness is what really carried that campaign through the many years it took to organize those 220 workers. The workers have to confront their own fear about organizing, then confront anti-union campaigns and broken, loopholed labor laws. I really want the book to show what it takes to be someone like Alma.

—PAIGE OAMEK

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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In 2021, *In These Times*' reporting was made possible by 5,944 donors.

Dear *In These Times* Community,



Together we enter our 46th year of publishing *In These Times*, an independent magazine of news and opinion with a democratic-socialist orientation. Since our founding in 1976, we have relied on the financial support of a community of readers to send the magazine to press and, in recent decades, to post daily stories on our website, InTheseTimes.com.

On these pages we thank all 5,944 of you for this collective accomplishment. The magazine you hold in your hands, *In These Times*, could not exist without the support of you and your fellow readers.

In addition to acknowledging the donors among you, we also want to introduce you to some in the *In These Times* community who donate their knowledge, skills and talents (page 42). If they inspire you, we hope you, too, will consider volunteering your time in support of the *In These Times* community. Also, in the past year, beloved members of our community have passed. We commemorate several of them on these pages. Specifically, we would like to send a posthumous thanks to Rosalie and Ross Thomas for leaving *In These Times* a bequest in their will.

OUR 2021 DONORS

Looking toward our 100th anniversary in 2076 (which I will be sorry to miss), here at *In These Times* we will be working to build and serve our audience of the future.

Many of you who read and donate to *In These Times* are, like me, on the sunset side of life. We are among the more than 37,000 who read the magazine in print. It's likely we own a thing called a "checkbook." The converse is true for the 24,000 younger, less affluent, more diverse community of readers who visit InTheseTimes.com two times a month or more.

As part of our mission to make *In These Times* accessible to all, our website does not have a paywall and our journalism is free to read and share. That poses a question: How does a media institution like ours carry on in an economically sustainable way without accepting corporate advertisements? To succeed, this initiative will take a community effort.

With a resurgent nationalist Right, the years ahead are critical to the movements for racial, social, environmental and economic justice. "We must hang together or we all hang separately" was a literal truth for the colonists who, in 1776, rose up against the English crown. Today, it is a metaphorical imperative. Thank you for being there for *In These Times*.

Onward,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher

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WE DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT

We regret to announce but are honored to recognize In These Times supporters who died in the past year.



LEWIS "KELLY" FLOCK (Aug. 10, 1953–Dec. 30, 2020)

Kelly, 67, died after a long battle with leukemia. The former video game executive was born in Long Beach, Calif., and grew up in the San Fernando Valley. Kelly served in the Air Force in 1971 after graduating from high school, and he earned a bachelor's degree in English literature from San Francisco State University in 1983. After graduation, he began his illustrious career in the gaming industry, eventually becoming president of Sony Interactive Studios of America, Sony Online Entertainment and 989 Studios. Kelly was an avid golfer and loved music, literature, films and history.

He is survived by his wife, Teri; daughter, Alison; son, Kyle; and brothers, Keith and Barry. Kelly and Teri have been supporters of *In These Times* for 26 years.



TIMUEL DIXON BLACK JR. (Dec. 7, 1918–Oct. 13, 2021)

Timuel, 102, was born in Birmingham, Ala., and his family moved to Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood a month after Chicago's 1919 race riots. He spent his life fighting for social justice and civil rights for Black Chicagoans.

Timuel helped form a chapter of the Colored Retail Clerks Union as a store clerk after high school and walked his first picket line in 1931 at age 13. He served as president of the Negro American Labor Council in the 1960s and helped mobilize Chicago residents to join the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. He also helped organize the 1963 Freedom Day protests against segregation in Chicago Public Schools.

In 1983, Timuel organized support among the Black community for Harold Washington's groundbreaking and successful mayoral campaign. He later mentored a young attorney, Barack Obama, on how to build a political base and career on Chicago's South Side.

Timuel is survived by his wife of 40 years, Zenobia Johnson-Black. A longtime supporter of *In These Times*, Timuel also received the 2016 *In These Times* Activism Award.



ROSALIE APPLETON THOMAS (Nov. 24, 1933–Aug. 24, 2021)

Rosalie, 87, was born in New York and died in Malibu, Calif. Though her formal education ended in the third grade, the autodidact and lifelong learner worked at the Library of Congress and the University of California, Los Angeles, Biomedical Library. In 1947, Rosalie married Ross Thomas, a renowned writer of political thrillers and mysteries. They traveled widely and made friends throughout the world, even dining at the White House with the Clintons.

Rosalie was a small woman but had an enormous appetite for news, progressive politics, social justice and the arts. She read three newspapers a day, her coffee table covered with multiple bookmarked volumes. She loved the Metropolitan Opera, Mark Taper Forum, and the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens. She also was a fan of chocolate, creamed spinach, Johnnie's Pizza and instant coffee.

Rosalie was preceded in passing by Ross in 1995, after 21 years of marriage. They supported numerous organizations, such as their local Human Rights Watch branch in Los Angeles and *In These Times*. We thank Rosalie and Ross for remembering *In These Times* in their will. —ELLEN ALPERSTEIN

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VALUING OUR VOLUNTEERS

These volunteers help keep the magazine running smoothly by providing crucial expertise and support.



MICHAEL HOLLAND,
retired labor lawyer

Michael volunteers his expertise to negotiate on behalf of *In These Times*' management in union matters with Washington-Baltimore News Guild Local 32035, which represents ITT staff.

After graduating from Northwestern University School of Law, Michael began working for the United Mine Workers of America, International Union as general counsel in 1982, where he advised and represented international officers on labor law, collective bargaining and international union governance matters. Michael was appointed by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, in 1989, to supervise and conduct the first referendum election of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. He also served as the Midwest area director of the Service Employees International Union from 2005 to 2008.

Today, Michael is chairman of boards and trustee for the United Mine Workers of America Health and Retirement Funds.

SHARON BLOYD-PESHKIN,
journalism professor



Sharon is a professor of journalism at Columbia College Chicago, the creator of Columbia Votes and a volunteer proofreader for *In These Times*. She is also the author of our November 2009 cover story, "Built to Trash: Is 'Heirloom Design' the Cure

for Consumption?" Sharon says she loves being part of the proofreading team that combs through every print issue before it goes to press. A long-time subscriber, Sharon adds, "I'm a big fan of the magazine and its dedicated staff."

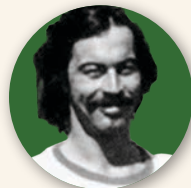
DAN COLLINS,
accountant



Dan volunteers his time as an ad hoc member of the Institute for Public Affairs board finance committee. A subscriber and reader since *In These Times* started covering the Iran-Contra Affair in 1986, Dan says,

"I would start my reading with 'The First Stone,'" the column by Editor & Publisher Joel Bleifuss. As the son of a steamfitter union member, Dan says, "I have always been impressed by

In These Times' coverage of the labor movement's struggles and progress. I'm happy to give back by volunteering."



DAN MILLER,
architect

Dan is a Chicago architect who, for the past eight years, has volunteered his services to help *In These Times* renovate its headquarters at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., which we purchased in 2014 with a grant

from the Puffin Foundation.

Dan was introduced to *In These Times* by David Wrone, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, in the spring of 1977. Later that year, Dan and a group of fellow ITT-reading history majors drove down to Chicago to attend our first annual "Chautauqua," held at the Blackstone hotel and featuring Studs Terkel. Dan says he remembers being thrilled to meet James Weinstein, *In These Times* founding editor & publisher, at the Chautauqua, along with presidential candidate, environmentalist and *In These Times* founding sponsor Barry Commoner.

Dan answered a call from Joel Bleifuss asking how to find an architect by replying, "Look no further!"



HOWARD HOROWITZ,
market researcher

Howard is president of consumer research agency Horowitz Research, known for its research on media and culture among marginalized consumers, and lends his skills to the magazine. Howard is also board chair

of the Westchester People's Action Coalition and on the executive committee of two other New York-based immigration and refugee advocacy groups.

Howard is a member of Temple Israel of New Rochelle, Jewish Voice for Peace Westchester, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Caring Majority Rising and NY Caring Majority, advocating for better healthcare, wages and benefits for care workers.

As a graduate student of Bertell Ollman, a Marxist professor at New York University, Howard once submitted an article to ITT founder James Weinstein. Weinstein rejected it, and Howard says he's loved and supported *In These Times* ever since.

BECOME AN *IN THESE TIMES* VOLUNTEER

Do you have a special skill you would like to share and a burning desire to fight the good fight? Consider volunteering your time to support the *In These Times* community. We are specifically looking for data whizzes and proofreaders who know AP style, though all talents will be considered.

To learn more about becoming an *In These Times* volunteer, email Amy Ganser, our associate publisher, at Amy@InTheseTimes.com.

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Dear Reader,

There's a story that President Harry Truman was flaying the hide off the greedy Republicans in a 1948 campaign speech. A jubilant supporter egged him on: "Give 'em hell, Harry!"

Truman responded, "I don't give them hell. I just tell the truth about them. And they call it hell."

That's the power of telling the truth. The broad majority of the public is actually harmed by the ideologies we fight, like neoliberalism, social conservatism, racism and corporatism. That's why our opponents have to lie to the public to win any support.

We can win by just telling the truth.

But we have to do so passionately, convincingly, clearly and with emotional force. We have to transcend the demagoguery of the liars on the Right and the so-called center.

And that's where publications like *In These Times* come in.

The powers that be would rather you not hear our stories at all. This past year, for instance, we've been reporting on the threat of "concentrated animal feeding operations," known as CAFOs—massive hog-raising facilities that devastate local ecosystems and pollute rural communities. When independent farmers (backbones of their communities) and sympathetic county officials in Wisconsin fought back against CAFOs, Big Ag interests in the state Capitol claimed those farmers and officials were breaking the law and threatened them with ruinous lawsuits.

This response is not just a threat to the environment; it's part of the Right's ongoing war against democracy itself. And it's the kind of thing the mainstream media mostly ignores.

That's why we implore your support. Whether the issue is labor rights, healthcare, climate change or racial justice, we're telling the kinds of truths corporate America calls hell. That costs money—and corporate America sure ain't giving us any. If you've donated already, we thank you so much for all of your support. If not, thank you for being a reader and sharing our stories. And if you're able, please consider using the donation envelope tucked inside this magazine.

In solidarity,



Rick Perlstein
Board President and Contributing Editor

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Sugar Water

Why it took my father 40 years to see the ocean

BY LAUREN CELENZA

DAD STOOD AT THE EDGE of the shore, witnessing the ocean for the first time, at 40. His green eyes peered into the horizon, unstimulated by the waves that crashed into his bare feet, liberated from the weight of his factory boots.

“Whatever, I’ve seen large bodies of water before,” he scoffed.

Of course, he had, spending most of his life in Illinois, Michigan and Ohio—states enveloped by the Great Lakes. But even as his words dismissed the ocean, his eyes refused to look away.

Maybe he didn’t want to admit it, but he knew the ocean held more significance than a lake. It stretched to lands beyond the paper map that navigated us here, from the icy roads of Ohio to the warm beaches of South Carolina. I plopped down on the shore beside Dad, removing my pink Barbie flip-flops so I could dig my feet into the gritty sand, a welcome distraction as I grappled with an uncomfortable truth.

I was only 12, but I had seen the ocean before Dad, invited on a trip to South Carolina the year before by my best friend and her family. All I could feel was the bite of shame and the stir of confusion with this flipped situation of experience and knowledge. I was used to living a separate routine from Dad, each of us immersing ourselves in our own worlds of school and work and school and work. But now, it seemed as if our lives were edging toward separate realities.

Dad worked as a warehouse distribution manager at a beverage bottling factory near Cincinnati for what seemed like most of my life. But his career didn’t start in a factory; it started on a golf course. From 13 to 17, Dad worked as a caddy at the prestigious Midlothian Country Club near Chicago, the kind of place that Al Capone built his house near. “I lived at that place,” Dad recalled. From sunrise to sundown, he carried the golf bags of powerful white men: doctors and lawyers, CEOs and senators, athletes and celebrities. He never let me forget about the time he met renowned golfer Arnold Palmer. “Could I have one more autograph please, Mr. Palmer?”

“Of course, good going, son.”

I didn’t know a lot about Dad’s father, only that he worked at a factory, too. Dad preferred to tell stories about the “fathers” at the golf course and the wisdom they shared. “They taught me how to dress, how to talk and how to golf. They told me to go to college, get an education, get a job, buy a car, buy a house. They said to keep working hard and not lose sight of my goals.”

And so he did. At 18, he left the golf course and entered college to study operations management. Although he failed his first year, he eventually graduated. He often spoke of this with pride: “At the end of the day, I never lost sight of gaining a college education.”

By 1985, Dad found work at the bottling factory in Flint, Mich., dispensing sugar water into glass bottles.



A few years later, he met Mom, became a father and bought a new Buick from General Motors. The Buick was a big deal, a car that protected Dad and Mom from the relentless bullying of previous car purchases, like an Italian Fiat.

"They had a special deal on the Fiat," Mom said, "\$99 down, \$99 a month."

But to friends and family, the Fiat wasn't a deal but a betrayal. "What the fuck are you driving a Fiat for?" they barked. "Buy American."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GABRIELLA TRUJILLO

The Buick wasn't merely a new car, but a declaration of loyalty. Loyalty seemed important to Dad, a requirement for reaching the destination that the fathers from the golf course had mapped out for him.

But glass bottles were already being replaced by plastic bottles, considered lightweight, safer and cheaper. "This plant is closing down. I can feel it," he affirmed. And it did. Manufacturing jobs in Flint were becoming harder to find, as nearby GM facilities were also closing, a move to cut costs and regain a competitive edge against domestic and foreign competitors

Dad never sheltered me from the details of his job, perhaps to prepare me for the real world.

who were building new plants in the United States.

We packed our bags and moved to southwest Ohio, where Dad found a new job at a chemical distribution plant. Mom worked from home as a call center representative for a nonprofit. I was only four, but everything about Ohio seemed fresh, from the new roads to the new technology.

Mom and Dad bought their first home—split-level, mustard yellow, trimmed with cherry red window shutters—the kind of house that stuck out among the brown tree hills and green cornfields that surrounded us. But the most memorable part of the house was the above-ground swimming pool in the backyard. The pool was far from perfect, leaky with holes from rocks that pierced through the bottom lining. But I didn't care about the holes. I floated through the water on my back, looking up at the airplanes that flew above me.

"Watch out for the waves," Dad would shout as he jumped into the water, pretending the pool was an ocean. Inside the pool, Dad was a carefree kid with a laugh that echoed across the neighborhood. Outside the pool, Dad was a worried adult, punctuated by his factory boots that stomped into the living room carpet, releasing a swell of frustration that rippled throughout the house, rattling up at the picture frames on the walls.

Soon after moving to Ohio, Dad's new job at the chemical distribution plant vanished, as the company sold this part of the business to focus on a more profitable sector—oil and gas. He found another new job at a family-owned glass distribution plant, but a year later, that job vanished, too; the plant struggled to keep pace with the competition and became acquired—alongside similar glass distribution plants across the United States—by a larger Japanese company. Ohio was no longer an escape from the shifting economy in Michigan, but part of it.

"We got to start livin' on savings," Mom said. She wore an exquisite armor of resourcefulness, no matter what battle came our way. First, she canceled the cable, then the newspaper. I grieved the loss of the Disney Channel. Knowledge and connection to the outside world were privileges we could no longer afford.

As the savings drained, losing the house and the swimming pool was imminent. Mom found a second job at the local McDonald's and Dad found work as a food delivery driver. I peered out the window and watched Dad pull the Buick away from the driveway, stopping at the edge of the street to place the taxi sign at the top of the car. "I don't want the neighbors to know where I work," he said.

By the end of 1994, Dad found employment again at the beverage bottling factory, this time in Cincinnati—dispensing sugar water into plastic bottles. It served as a stable source of income as I graduated from elementary to middle school. But Dad struggled to shake off the anxiety that rippled through him. "No matter what, I can never lose sight of this house," he repeated, a daily affirmation that cemented his loyalty to the sugar water.

Although Dad and I lived in the same house, we were never there at the same time. At the start of the new millennium, I turned 12, hustling through a crammed schedule of basketball, dance, piano or after-school practice for the next standardized test.

When my best friend asked me if I wanted to go on a vacation to South Carolina, a chance to escape school and see the ocean for the first time, I immediately accepted her offer, asking Mom and Dad for forgiveness rather than permission. At the beach, I learned how the rising tide could wash my beach towel away, how the undertow could toss my body back into the waves like a washing machine, how the saltwater could parch my mouth.

"What time does the ocean close?" I asked my friend, revealing the depths of my naivete.

"What?" She giggled. "You can't close the ocean."

There was a lot I didn't know, but it wasn't until I returned from the trip that I realized I was beginning to gain experiences Dad hadn't.

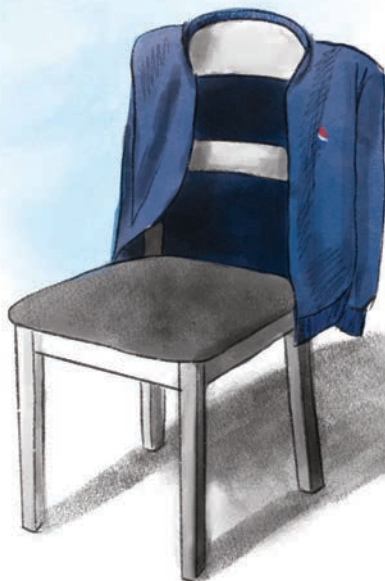
Dad spent his days at the bottling factory—14 hours a day, six days a week. His grueling schedule was getting worse, as he started to slip away into the midnight shifts at the factory and the daylight hustle of going back to school to become a teacher. I couldn't understand why Dad wanted to become a teacher, as it seemed like a daunting career path that left so many of my own teachers exhausted and overwhelmed. But Dad held onto the hope that switching careers

“might let me see my kids from time to time.”

Days, weeks, sometimes months went by before I saw Dad again. He was like Big Foot, leaving traces throughout the house but never found in plain sight. I saw him in the jacket he draped over the dining room chair, reserving his place at the table. I saw him in the potato chip crumbs that he left at the kitchen counter after scarfing down a meal before driving 95 miles between the factory and the university. I saw him in the pencil markings he drew on my algebra homework that he left outside my bedroom door. Although I couldn't see him, I could feel his longing for home.

But the more that Dad drifted away from the house, the more the sugar water moved into the house. Its logo swirled across Dad's shirts, pants, jackets, hats, socks, sunglasses, handkerchiefs and turtlenecks. It swirled across the shelves in the refrigerator, the clocks that fastened onto the wall and the ornaments that hung on the Christmas tree. It swirled across my lunch boxes, mugs, notebooks, frisbees and water bottles. It swirled across my school as Mom and I carried cases of its sticky sludge into the classroom to keep my classmates energized for the next standardized test. The logo had even appropriated itself onto my basketball, converting the orange rubber sphere into the swirl. This wasn't merely sugar water, or a brand obsession, or a place where Dad worked. It was a place where he lived, where we all lived, an omnipotent presence that governed our daily lives.

Our road trip to the beach began at a dark, empty parking lot. Dad marched away from the factory doors and climbed into the Buick; he slid his arms through his sleeves and freed himself from the sugar water jacket. It was a ritual that officially kicked off our vacation, a chance for us to be at the same place at the same time. Mom cashed out a portion of our savings, leaving just enough to keep the house afloat when we returned. Dad drained his precious one-week-a-year paid time off. I forfeited my school days so we could cram this road trip into his grueling schedule.



Even my teachers wanted to escape with us. “You’re going to the beach? Can I hide in your luggage?” they asked.

Dad started the Buick's tired engine while I held onto the paper map, a blurry, black-and-white MapQuest printout. The Buick pattered along the open highway, the bottling factory behind us and Kentucky ahead. Mom and Sis sat in the backseat, while I remained in the passenger seat, gazing out the window. I admired the beauty of the untouched fields of dewy grass that glimmered in the morning light. I imagined holding each blade of grass in my hand, a keepsake I couldn't quite catch while traveling in a speeding car.

The beauty didn't last long, disrupted by large, white buildings that cut their way through the fields, flashing with brands like Circuit City, Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, Super Target and Golden Corral. The highway exits were all-you-can-eat American capitalism, advertised as respites from the stretches of nothingness. But I felt irritated by them. I longed for the nothingness.

Other highway signs displayed the words, “the industrial heartland of America.” I had seen these signs before, on state border markers when we traveled north through Ohio to visit family in the other Great Lakes states. But as we drove further south, the radio seemed to call my home by a different name. A name I had never heard before. The Rust Belt. What did this phrase mean? Who decided who lived inside or outside the belt? And what was rusted?

“It means I got into the wrong industry at the wrong time,” Dad said. In the rare moments when I saw him, he rattled off great tales of broken machinery and unreasonable metrics to meet. “The whole structure is flawed,” he said. But Dad knew how to cope, with a biting sense of humor. “And they all think their shit doesn't stink,” he cackled.

Dad never sheltered me from the details of his job, perhaps to prepare me for the real world. He would often play a game with Sis and me to test our knowledge of that world.

“What makes the world go round?” he would ask with a smile of sarcasm.

“Money and power!” we replied in unison.

“That’s right. In this world, people want everything in excess, built on status. They believe greed is good.”

The formula for the real world seemed simple, yet there were mysteries I couldn’t grasp. Why did money and power make the world go round? What were money and power? And why were the adults around me—from my parents to my teachers—consumed with exhaustion?

But Dad refused to let the exhaustion stop him. “When the going gets tough, the tough get going,” he said with a fierce head nod, reciting words from the Ford commercial. That very commercial played relentlessly on the radio as the Buick crossed into Tennessee. The commercials were our sermon, calling on us to buy and produce, no matter the cost.

“Alright, where are we going next?” Dad asked, scanning his eyes around for the map. I pulled it out from my seat. The map had absorbed the grease from our fingers after eating Burger King Whopper sandwiches and drinking sugar water, and it was now tattered in chewy bits. But despite our careless treatment, the map still felt magical to me, possessing the power to pull Dad away from the grip of the machines and guide him toward the unfamiliar shore.

I squinted at its crinkled lines. “I think it says to take Exit 3? Merge onto I-640 East toward Asheville, North Carolina?”

“That sounds about right,” Dad replied, steering the Buick east. I released a sigh that I had read the directions correctly, making for a smoother escape. Dad glanced back at me, this time with a more serious look.

“Lauren, at the end of the day, get an education and find a career that won’t consume you. Never lose sight of a world beyond your own. And no matter what, help others to never lose sight of this, too,” he said, giving a stern, unshakable look as if he knew, without a doubt, that this was the advice he wanted to give to me.

I nodded my head, but I couldn’t help but notice this wasn’t the same advice the fathers from the golf course had imparted to him. Maybe this new advice was a form of vengeance for the promises unfulfilled, a promise he’d thought he could taste, imagining himself as one of those powerful white men. Or maybe this advice was a form of redemption for the time lost between us. I could feel a change emerging within Dad—a mistrust for the old direction and a search for something new.

Our road trip concluded at Myrtle Beach, a

town cluttered with all-you-can-eat crab shacks, pirate-themed mini-golf courses and plastic shark mouths that bulged out from the storefronts. The Buick stopped at the beachside Super 8 Hotel, where we checked into a tiny room drenched with the scents of cigarettes and seaweed.

Dad, Mom and Sis put on their swimsuits and began walking toward the beach, their hands jumbled with towels, toys, boogie boards and umbrellas.

I followed them as they walked a few steps ahead, crossing over the wooden dock and onto the sand. The beach was wide and long, feathered with light gray sand and stacked with rainbow-colored umbrellas, chairs, coolers and towels. But something in the sand was strange, the way it reflected tiny, translucent bits of light. I looked down at my feet, and that’s when I spotted it—the sugar water logo swirling across a gritty, plastic bottle.

I couldn’t make sense of it. Why did the bottling factory demand so much of Dad’s time, energy and identity, only to become trash on the shore? What exactly was Dad’s hard work going toward? Who tossed this bottle? I wanted to find them and tell them this bottle wasn’t trash. I wanted to tell them how this bottle governed our sense of identity and place, how we lived (and how we didn’t live) together. But it was too late. I resented whoever tossed the bottle of sugar water.

Above all, I resented the sugar water.

Finally, Dad shouted, “Come on, Lauren, let’s get in!” He darted for the waves. I dipped my feet into the water, brushing off the sand that stuck between my toes. Sis ran in behind me with a boogie board strapped to her ankle. I laughed at how the boogie board was taller than her tiny body, yet it didn’t stop her from hauling it into the water. We each took turns riding the waves, giggling as the water splashed into our faces. I looked at Dad, watching his carefree imagination return, except this time, he didn’t have to imagine. The waves splashed us with the kind of power that only the ocean could create, a force that obliterated the grind that swirled us away from each other. All that mattered was the water.

All that mattered was that Dad and I were at the same place at the same time. ■

LAUREN CELENZA is a writer, designer and educator. She is a former Google designer and an early member of the Alphabet Workers Union. She is working on a memoir that examines the role of the internet in society and whether it can shift toward a more inclusive direction. See more at laurencelenza.com.

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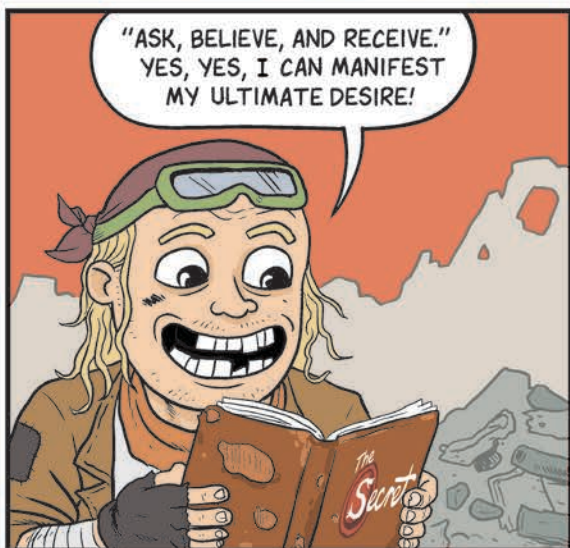


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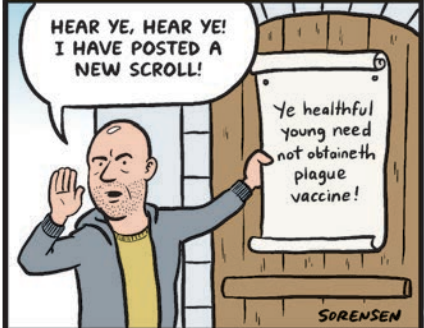
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Free Community College Is Off the Table, Jill Biden Says



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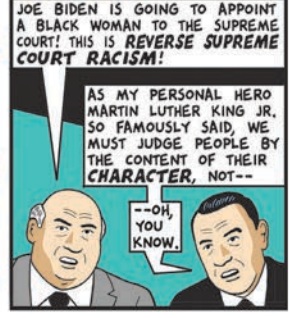
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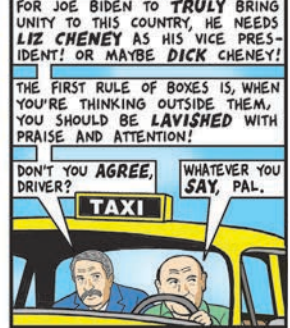
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5. WAITING FOR GODOT



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Revisiting 1990s Critical Race Theorists

Right-wing censors, interested in hindering honest conversations in schools, are using critical race theory as a scapegoat. Books by marginalized people discussing race, ethnicity and gender are being banned or challenged by local school boards at an alarming rate—including Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Toni

Morrison’s *Beloved*, Pulitzer Prize-winning books that reckon with the Holocaust and U.S. slavery, respectively.

Long before critical race theory attracted popular attention, *In These Times* reviewed the anthology *Black on White*, in which James North concludes, “The study of whiteness should continue to help us interpret America, past and present.”



IN 1998, JAMES NORTH WROTE: Labor historian David Roediger is one of the most exciting thinkers of our time. He is one of the leaders in “whiteness” studies, an approach that over the past decade has prompted a major reinterpretation of American history. ...

Black on White, a compilation that draws on 40 Black writers from Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison ... ranges across more than 150 years of American history. It is Roediger’s tribute to what he calls “the long, rich, varied and unsurpassed tradition of

Black thought about white people and whiteness.”

... Throughout American history, whites have endlessly analyzed Blacks. Presumptuously, condescendingly, ignorantly and with sometimes blatantly racist motivations. ...

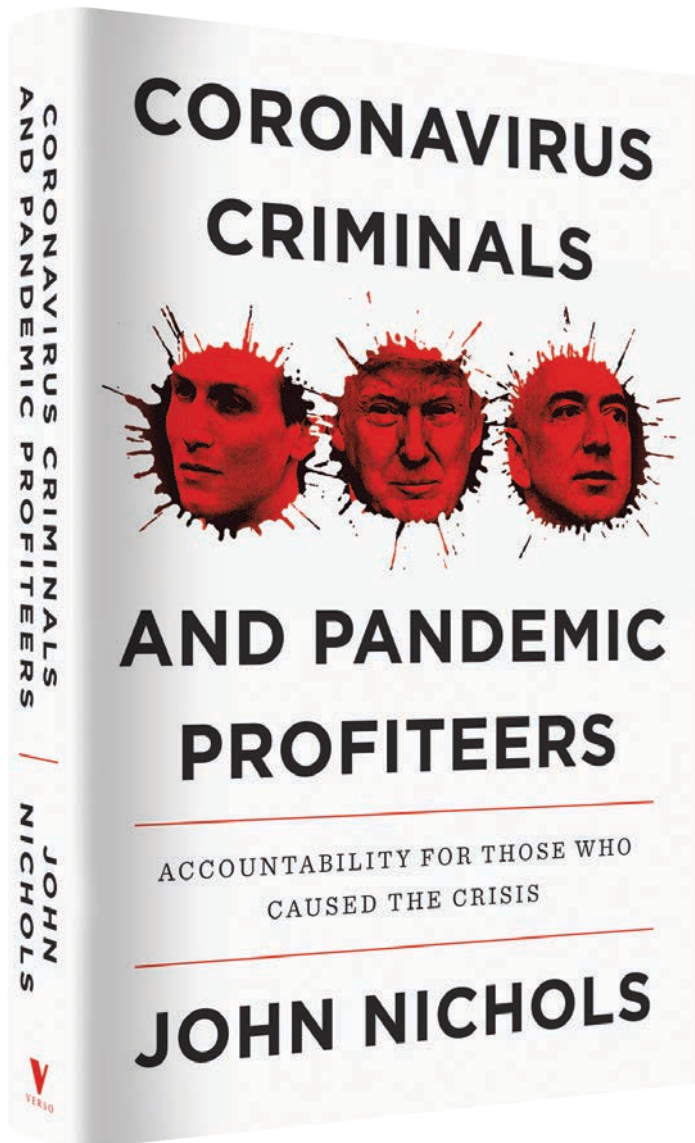
All along, Black Americans have been observing and writing about white people, with far more perception. ... So why isn’t the civil rights leader and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois a central part of the high school curriculum? Why is the writer James Baldwin fading from view, just 10 years after his death? Why aren’t Toni Morrison’s thoughts on race on *Newsweek*’s cover? ...

THIS ANTHOLOGY PROVES THAT Black writers have long understood the ambivalence and volatile concept of whiteness. ... Even as the contributors to *Black on White* condemn whiteness, they understand how it damages the people who are imprisoned by it.

Du Bois, in a stunning chapter from his 1920 book, *Darkwater*, makes a convincing case that white supremacy contributed to the horror of World War I. He argues that Europe and America, after first arrogantly seizing vast stretches of Africa and Asia, turned the same machine guns on each other. ...

The contemporary contributors to *Black on White* prove that the idea of whiteness is just as useful today. Nelson George’s essay on Elvis and bell hooks’ piece on Madonna prove that these cultural icons are incomprehensible without looking into the complexities of white racial identity. Noting that Madonna wanted to be Black as a child, hooks warns us not to romanticize “Blackness.” “It is a sign of white privilege,” she writes, “to be able to ‘see’ Blackness and Black culture from a standpoint where only the rich culture of opposition Black people have created in resistance marks and defines us. ... White folks who do not see Black pain never really understand the complexity of Black pleasure.”

... The study of whiteness should continue to help us interpret America, past and present. ... The work of Roediger and his colleagues show[s] that race is too central to be easily disregarded. As Ralph Ellison once asked, “What, by the way, is one to make of a white youngster who, with a transistor radio screaming a Stevie Wonder tune glued to his ear, shouts racial epithets at Black youngsters trying to swim at a public beach?” That contradiction is painful, but Stevie offers us some leverage. Any genuine movement for change must confront that kid, politely but firmly. ■



Coronavirus Criminals and Pandemic Profiteers

by John Nichols

“This is a brilliant roadmap for ensuring those responsible are held accountable.”
—US Representative Ro Khanna

“I hope this book spurs us to at long last hold accountable those who failed—and continue to fail—to protect lives.”
—US Representative Ilhan Omar

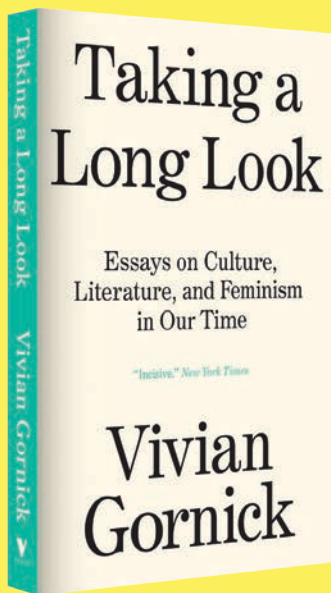
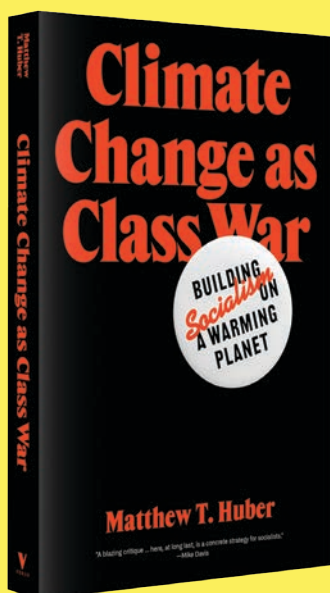
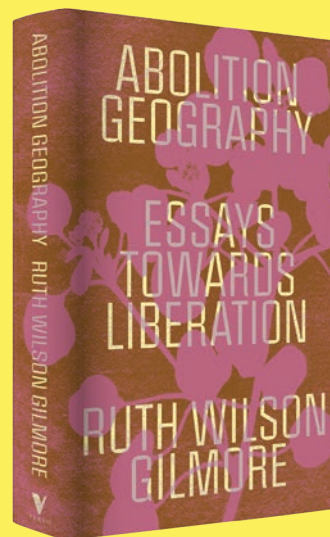
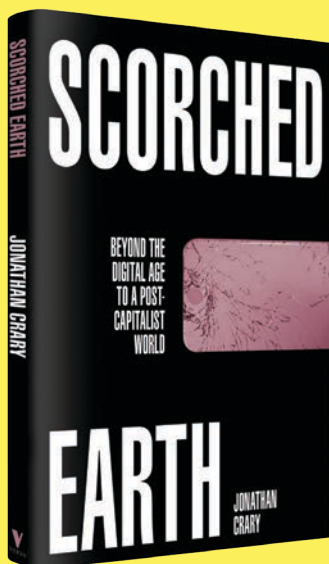
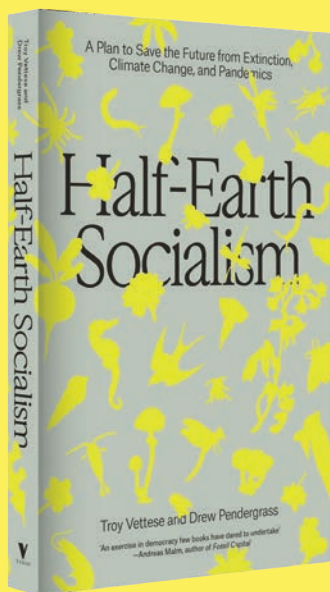
“Nichols names and shames the politicians and business leaders who let countless Americans perish from Covid-19.”
—Jennifer Taub, author of *Big Dirty Money*

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