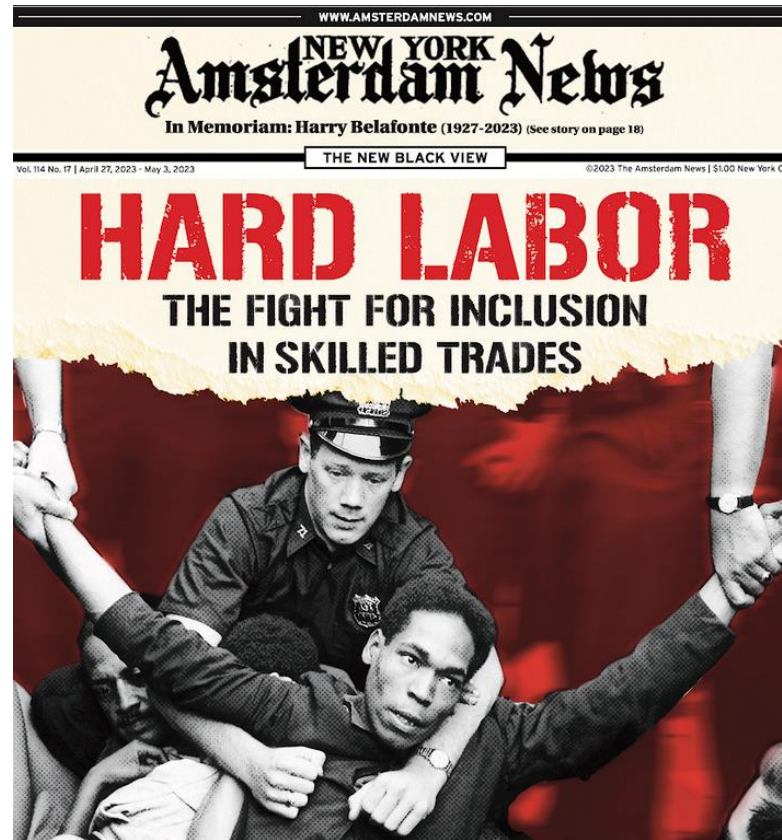


NEW YORK  
**Amsterdam News**

# Creating a **New** Kind of Investigative Journalism

Damaso Reyes  
Executive Editor

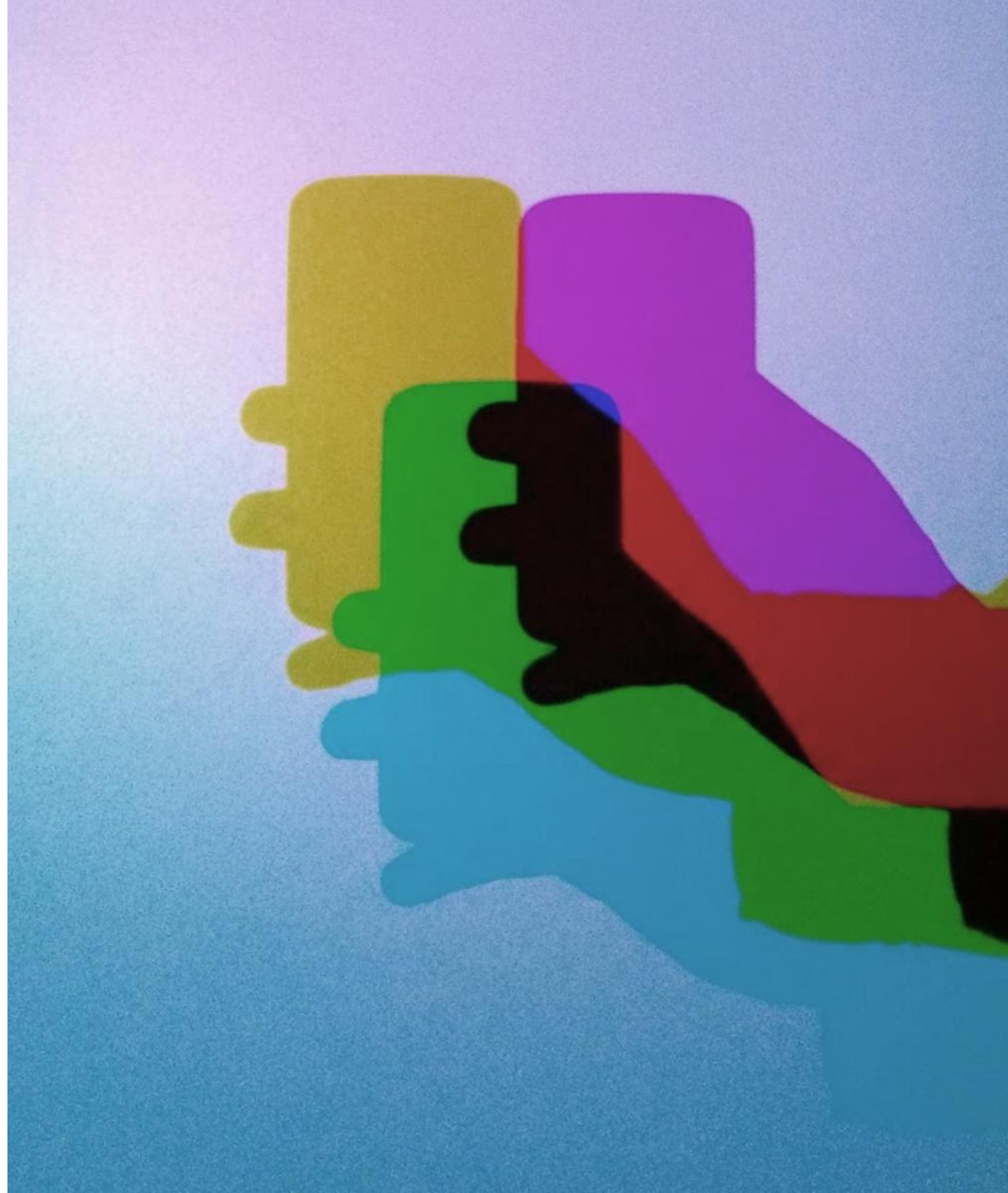


**Amsterdamnews.com**

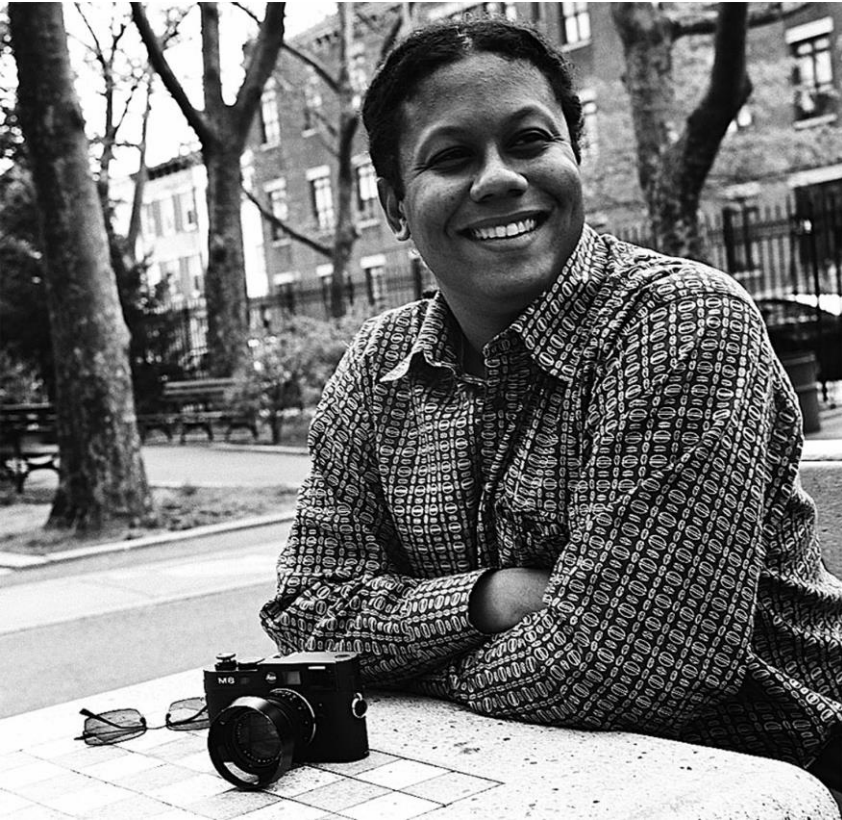


**@nyamnews**

**@damasoreyes**



# About Damaso



- Born and raised in Brooklyn, NY he has been a journalist since 1996
- Has lived and worked in Indonesia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, Sweden, The UK, Ireland, Rwanda, Tanzania, Spain and more...
- He donated a kidney to his best friend in 2014
- Once ran a marathon and still regrets it!

A young boy carries a skull of a victim of the 1994 genocide that he found during excavation of mass graves, which litter the hillsides of Kibuye, Rwanda. (Damaso Reyes photo)

# A 10-year journey

By JIMMIE BRIGGS  
*Special to the AmNews*

Early one morning last week, a small group of men worked silently behind the maternity ward of Kibuye Hospital in western Rwanda, near Lake Kivu. A steadily growing bunch of pregnant women were nearby. Under the shade of a guava tree, the men stood around a shallow pit of soft earth as two or three at a time took turns swinging with shovels and pick axes. It was an excavation site that quickly widened like a pool of blood. The mass grave yielded rock, odd pieces of metal, empty food cans but no bodies.

Nearby a solemn man in slacks and a track-suit jacket

stood with his arms folded, watching intently. Ten years ago, he had been working in the hospital's surgical ward when a young girl came in, bloodied from being slashed with machetes. For hours, he worked alone tending her severe wounds. She was conscious, alive and for him that was enough to have hope. It wouldn't last long, though, because "the killers" came to the unit where he was working. Helplessly he watched them take her away behind the hospital. The grave had already been dug and she was thrown in alive, breathing and watching. The man didn't know how many other victims joined her in the following hours and days, but he came last week to guide the searchers with a need to find the girl he almost saved. It was a moment that continues to unfold repeatedly throughout a

(Continued on Page 16)

# Painful justice

By JIMMIE BRIGGS  
*Special to the AmNews*

Over the next three months, millions of Rwandans such as Francois Minani will be reflecting and honoring their dead countrymen, slaughtered in the genocide ten years ago. A poor farmer living in the rural

community of Gitarama, one hour outside of the capital of Kigali. Minani has more reason than most to mourn the events sparked in April 1994.

When the roving Hutu militias came to his parents' home, the quiet 16-year-old was given a choice: "Come with us or you and your family die." Minani reluctantly joined the group that had slashed and raped villagers along the countryside, but as part of his initiation he was forced to murder his sister's children

with a hoe.

"I have forgiven myself for what happened in the genocide, for what I did," he wistfully observes, talking in front of his family's home. He is dressed plainly in a black-and-white striped shirt, gray slacks and worn black boots, his empty brown eyes convey a soul much older than his natural years. "It was a very long process. Sometimes when I think about it, I feel guilty, but at other times I don't. Always I ask myself, 'Why did the genocide happen?' but I don't have any answers for it. I can say it happened because of 'bad people,' but I can't tell you why they were bad."

Perhaps the most difficult struggle... (Continued on Page 17)



A young boy carries a skull of a victim of the 1994 genocide that he found during excavation of mass graves, which litter the hillsides of Kibuye, Rwanda. (Damaso Reyes photo)

# A 10-year journey

By JIMMIE BRIGGS  
*Special to the AmNews*

Early one morning last week, a small group of men worked silently behind the maternity ward of Kibuye Hospital in western Rwanda, near Lake Kivu. A steadily growing bunch of pregnant women were nearby. Under the shade of a guava tree, the men stood around a shallow pit of soft earth as two or three at a time took turns swinging with shovels and pick axes. It was an excavation site that quickly widened like a pool of blood. The mass grave yielded rock, odd pieces of metal, empty food cans but no bodies.

Nearby a solemn man in slacks and a track-suit jacket

stood with his arms folded, watching intently. Ten years ago, he had been working in the hospital's surgical ward when a young girl came in, bloodied from being slashed with machetes. For hours, he worked alone tending her severe wounds. She was conscious, alive and for him that was enough to have hope. It wouldn't last long, though, because "the killers" came to the unit where he was working. Helplessly he watched them take her away behind the hospital. The grave had already been dug and she was thrown in alive, breathing and watching. The man didn't know how many other victims joined her in the following hours and days, but he came last week to guide the searchers with a need to find the girl he almost saved. It was a moment that continues to unfold repeatedly throughout a

(Continued on Page 16)

# Painful justice

By JIMMIE BRIGGS  
*Special to the AmNews*

Over the next three months, millions of Rwandans such as Francois Minani will be reflecting and honoring their dead countrymen, slaughtered in the genocide ten years ago. A poor farmer living in the rural

community of Gitarama, one hour outside of the capital of Kigali. Minani has more reason than most to mourn the events sparked in April 1994.

When the roving Hutu militias came to his parents' home, the quiet 16-year-old was given a choice: "Come with us or you and your family die." Minani reluctantly joined the group that had slashed and raped villagers along the countryside, but as part of his initiation he was forced to murder his sister's children

with a hoe.

"I have forgiven myself for what happened in the genocide, for what I did," he wistfully observes, talking in front of his family's home. He is dressed plainly in a black-and-white striped shirt, gray slacks and worn black boots, his empty brown eyes convey a soul much older than his natural years. "It was a very long process. Sometimes when I think about it, I feel guilty, but at other times I don't. Always I ask myself, 'Why did the genocide happen?' but I don't have any answers for it. I can say it happened because of 'bad people,' but I can't tell you why they were bad."

Perhaps the most difficult struggle

(Continued on Page 17)



## Rwanda: A photographer's journal



Flies buzz around the head of Chantal, a twelve-year-old girl who supports herself and her family by picking through garbage at the Kigali city dump.

By DAMASO REYES  
*Special to the AmNews*

I love my boots. It might seem odd to have such affection for shoes, but I have owned these boots for five and a half years and they have rarely left my feet. I brought them in preparation for my first trip to Rwanda, and from the moment I put them on they fit like a glove. Since that fall day in 1998 when I first purchased them, my hiking books have been with me to Rwanda, Iraq, Indonesia and guided me through the rubble of the World Trade Center. I have resoled them six or seven times at least, and unlike far

The center gives children, many of whom had been orphaned by the 1994 genocide, not only a place to come but somewhere to learn a trade and even attend school. They told us that many of the kids in the area spent time at the dump, locally known as the "dustbin," where they search for things to sell, charcoal for cooking fires and something to eat. The center was purposefully placed near the dustbin in an attempt to get kids to come in. After a short ride in a 4x4, Jimmie and I found ourselves there, searching for kids to speak to and photograph.



Chantal picks through the Kigali city dump in search of food and charcoal.

too many people in my life, these boots have never failed me.

If you've never been to a dump, I would suggest that there are far better places to

more than a sponge of garbage in various states of decomposition. Liquefied refuse spilled over the edges of my boots, instantly coating them.

As I approached her, the young girl looked at me with an expression that I can only imagine said, "Why would anyone come here if they didn't have to?" which, as it so happened, was exactly what I was thinking. She moved around, trying to get rid of me, but after five or ten minutes accepted that I was going to do what I was going to do and went about her business, picking at the garbage, looking for food and fuel. The squadrons of flies that I disturbed with each footstep didn't seem to bother her in the least, and after about fifteen minutes I retreated to the edges of the dustbin, having endured just

they duly produced it I sat on the back stoop and washed my boots. Fifteen minutes later the smell was gone and I put them out to dry.

As I went to sleep I thought about my boots and how easy it had been to get them clean again. But what about the children and adults who live at the dustbin, how would they get their boots clean? The answer of course is simple: Many of them don't wear boots, or shoes for that matter, so it is not an issue. The smell I found so offensive was simply part of the scenery, like the hills in the distance. What I had been so eager to wash off, these children lived with day in and day out.

How often do we in our lives wash off the dirt of the world, the unpleasant smell of the society that, if we didn't create,



Chantal walks through the Kigali city dump

(Damaso Reyes photos)

spend your time - like anywhere else. Far more disturbing than anything you are likely to find in the First World, this dump was work and playground for the young children who call it home. The smell wasn't so bad, at least when the wind blew the right way, and the dump overlooked the rolling hills outside of Kigali. There we spoke to several young children, including one small girl named Chantal, far too tiny for her twelve years, who was supporting her mother and siblings by collecting charcoal and food at the dustbin. Jimmie stayed on the edges as I sank my boots into the ground, which was little

about as much as I could. It was later that day on the way to the UNICEF offices in Kigali for a meeting that I noticed it: I stank. It wasn't just an offensive odor; my boots, and as it turned out, the lower half of my pants, had been permeated with liquefied funk, an odor that can't be described and definitely not forgotten. Unfortunately Kigali seemed to have a dearth of fire hydrants or hoses that day, so it wasn't until later that evening when Jimmie and I returned to the house that we were staying at that I could remedy the situation. I asked the women of the house for some water and soap, and after

we certainly contribute to? How many times do we shuck off the unpleasantness, shrug and tell ourselves, "Oh that's really just too bad," before moving on to a nice dinner, a warm home or loving family? Most of us know that places like the dustbin exist, that little girls like Chantal go there every day looking for food and fuel. And most of us wake up, get in our cars or onto a subway or bus and live our lives as if they didn't exist, just as I will do today. Now I wish I hadn't washed those boots; at least then from time to time I might better remember that there are little girls in the world looking for charcoal.

**Stealing Dreams Part 2:****Lack of resources inhibits the fight against malaria**

By DAMASO REYES

USA RIVER VILLAGE, Tanzania - "Everyone in the family had malaria last year," Mwajuma Swalehe, a 55-year-old grandmother, said in the stiflingly hot bedroom where she and her six grandchildren sleep. She had malaria two times last year herself, making it difficult to earn the roughly one dollar a day that she does bring in selling small pancakes made of local grain. While she and her family sleep under mosquito nets, they are not treated with insecticide, which she says she cannot afford because of the costs, three or four dollars at most.

Welcome to the front lines of fighting malaria in Africa, where for the lack of two or three dollars per person, an estimated 100,000 Tanzanians, mostly children under five, will die this year.

Unlike HIV/AIDS, malaria is not a guaranteed killer. Not only do we know how to prevent the disease, sleeping under insecticide treated bed nets radically reduces the risk of being bitten



Dr. Elineem Katojo consults with the mother of a patient in Arumeru's children's wing.

For years the mantra of sustainability and self reliance has been drummed into government officials here, and now that harvest is being reaped in the form of dead young children and mil-

government policy," said Dr. Andrtew Kitua, director general of the National Institute for Medical Research, one of the leading organizations in Tanzania fighting to find a solution to the malaria epidemic. Through the international donor community, the government has instituted a program which subsidizes the costs of treated bed nets for pregnant women and those who have children under five, but even with 75% of the costs already paid for, statistics show that only about 85% of the women who receive the vouchers redeem them, leaving 15% of this vulnerable population exposed to malaria primarily because they can't afford the roughly 50 cents they need to buy a subsidized net.

Since the program has been implemented, there has been an ongoing debate between the government, health providers and NGOs on the issue of free distribution of treated bed nets. The government, in meeting after meeting, claims that people will not value something that they get for free, and that when bed nets have been given away they have, in some cases, been used for wide ranging purposes including wedding gowns

(Continued on Page 40)



Moths and other insects cling to the outside of a protective bed net used in Arumeru Hospital in Arusha. (Damaso Reyes photos)

by the mosquitos that carry malaria; the global health community also knows how to effectively cure the disease, with a course of recently developed Artemisinin-based drugs that can completely treat someone

lions of healthy adults becoming bedridden for weeks at a time whenever they contract malaria.

"If the donor community would commit itself to a course of funding, it would change

## Stealing Dreams Part 2:

# Lack of resources inhibits the fight against malaria

By DAMASO REYES

USA RIVER VILLAGE, Tanzania - "Everyone in the family had malaria last year," Mwajuma Swalehe, a 55-year-old grandmother, said in the stiflingly hot bedroom where she and her six grandchildren sleep. She had malaria two times last year herself, making it difficult to earn the roughly one dollar a day that she does bring in selling small pancakes made of local grain. While she and her family sleep under mosquito nets, they are not treated with insecticide, which she says she cannot afford because of the costs, three or four dollars at most.

Welcome to the front lines of fighting malaria in Africa, where for the lack of two or three dollars per person, an estimated 100,000 Tanzanians, mostly children under five, will die this year.

Unlike HIV/AIDS, malaria is not a guaranteed killer. Not only do we know how to prevent the disease, sleeping under insecticide treated bed nets radically reduces the risk of being bitten



Dr. Elineem Katojo consults with the mother of a patient in Arumeru's children's wing.

For years the mantra of sustainability and self reliance has been drummed into government officials here, and now that harvest is being reaped in the form of dead young children and mil-

government policy," said Dr. Andrtew Kitua, director general of the National Institute for Medical Research, one of the leading organizations in Tanzania fighting to find a solution to the malaria epidemic. Through the international donor community, the government has instituted a program which subsidizes the costs of treated bed nets for pregnant women and those who have children under five, but even with 75% of the costs already paid for, statistics show that only about 85% of the women who receive the vouchers redeem them, leaving 15% of this vulnerable population exposed to malaria primarily because they can't afford the roughly 50 cents they need to buy a subsidized net.

Since the program has been implemented, there has been an ongoing debate between the government, health providers and NGOs on the issue of free distribution of treated bed nets. The government, in meeting after meeting, claims that people will not value something that they get for free, and that when bed nets have been given away they have, in some cases, been used for wide ranging purposes including wedding gowns

(Continued on Page 40)



Moths and other insects cling to the outside of a protective bed net used in Arumeru Hospital in Arusha. (Damaso Reyes photos)

by the mosquitos that carry malaria; the global health community also knows how to effectively cure the disease, with a course of recently developed Artemisinin-based drugs that can completely treat someone

lions of healthy adults becoming bedridden for weeks at a time whenever they contract malaria.

"If the donor community would commit itself to a course of funding, it would change

## A haven for abused women in Kosovo

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**, long treated as a criminal offense in the US, is still seen as a private affair here.

By DAMASO REYES  
CONTRIBUTOR

GJILAN, KOSOVO - Avoiding eye contact and unsuccessfully fighting back tears, Fatmire describes a home life not uncommon in rural Kosovo.

Her father, an alcoholic, allowed her to attend school for only two years and would forbid her from leaving the house even to meet a male cousin. When his abusiveness escalated, finally culminating in the death of her mother, she went to the only place where she knew she would be safe.

She went to Liria. Kosovo's only women's shelter, founded in 1999, is symbolic of the sweeping cultural and social changes brought on by the presence of KFOR, the international peacekeeping force that arrived at the end of Kosovo's civil war. But pervasive traditionalist thinking about women's rights and a lack of support from local officials has made it difficult for the Liria Center for the Protection and Rehabilitation of Women - based here in Gjilan, Kosovo - to prosper.

"This is a challenge for them," says Nazife Jomuzi, director of the center, speaking of Koso-

to enter local government; and young girls became an increasing presence in schools. But in the small towns and villages such as Fatmire's, in northeastern Kosovo, "traditional thinking" still holds sway.

"I had family problems because my daddy was a troublemaker in the house," continues Fatmire, who asked that her last name and hometown not be used, for safety reasons. She describes through a translator how her father, coming home drunk, would beat her and her family.

"I had a lot of reasons to leave my house. My dad was an alcoholic, he used to drink a lot, he used to beat me a lot. Not just me but my brother and sister, too," she adds. This pattern of violence lasted for several years before her mother decided to seek shelter at Liria, leaving 17-year-old Fatmire to care for her younger siblings.

Though ending an abusive relationship can be difficult for any woman, it can be particularly hard in Kosovo. A woman who leaves her husband is often ostracized by her community - and more important, by her family - leaving her few options when she leaves the shelter.

Fatmire's father, however, wanted her mother to come home. Together with the local municipality's Center for Social Welfare, he worked to persuade her mother to return home. He would stop drinking, she was promised. He would stop beating her and their children, he swore.

Three weeks later, Fatmire's father killed her mother as she watched. Now he is in prison, her younger brother and sister are in the care of the municipality, and she has come to the only place that her mother found safety.

Funded initially by international nongovernmental organizations, Liria is now supposed to be funded jointly by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the local municipality, according to the shelter and KFOR. But while the municipality, which declined requests for abused women such as Fatmire to comment, agreed to provide an equal share of the funding (it has already provided a building free of charge), it has so far refused to disperse any money to Liria. Austrians are waiting to see what happens before contributing what they promised. Caught in the middle are Liria and its women.

"There is a need here in Kosovo for a place for women to go for help," says Maj. Oran Roberts, a chaplain from Oroville, Calif. He's here with the California National Guard, whose troops make regular donations to Liria out of their own pockets. "I'm not in the position to make demands on the municipality. I'm here only to let them know what I've observed and to encourage them to continue providing support for these women," he says. Besides the basics like fuel oil and money to pay for electricity, Liria's building also needs repairs: broken pipes, bulging walls, and sewage backup in the basement all need attention.

"What we have refrained from doing are things that the municipality should be doing," Maj. Roberts adds. "If you're advocating for local government and providing advice and consultation, you don't jump in and do it for them."



PHOTOS BY DAMASO REYES

**RESCUED:** Liria, the sole organization in Kosovo offering shelter to abused women such as Fatmire (above), is short of funds. US soldiers stationed nearby make regular cash donations (right).



var men. "I don't think they accept change that easily." While the US has treated domestic violence as a criminal offense for more than two decades, in Kosovo it is still considered by many to be a private affair that must remain within the family.

Liria's assistant director, Shahadje Rexhepi, even goes so far as to say that "according to our unwritten laws it's not very tragic for women to be beaten by a husband or brother." Such attitudes threaten not only the lives of Kosovar women, but also the work that is being done to protect them.

"I was looking for a way to help the position of women and give them more rights," Ms. Jomuzi says, explaining why she and several other women founded Liria. "We didn't even know shelters should exist because no one dealt with this issue."

But KFOR's arrival in 1999 brought Western values and standards to Kosovo society. Women, once expected to stay home and raise children, were hired to work on American and European military bases; the Westerners treated them with respect and the local men who worked alongside them were expected to hold their female counterparts in similar esteem; women were encouraged

What does Investigative journalism  
look like?





Franco Pagetti / VII / Redux

POLITICS

# HOW WE GOT 'DEMOCRACY DIES IN DARKNESS'

And other stories from eight years running *The Washington Post*

By Martin Baron

# Poynter.

## What do we lose when newsrooms close?

**Journalists mourn the loss of newsrooms, but the more pressing question is whether and how their closures are affecting journalism itself.**



The newsroom at the New York Times on Nov. 5, 1978. (AP Photo/Ron Frehm)

**DIVERSITY SPOTLIGHT**

# Investigative teams lack diversity per NAHJ study



**2023**

The Damned Pipeline: U.S. News Industry's Broken Parity Promise

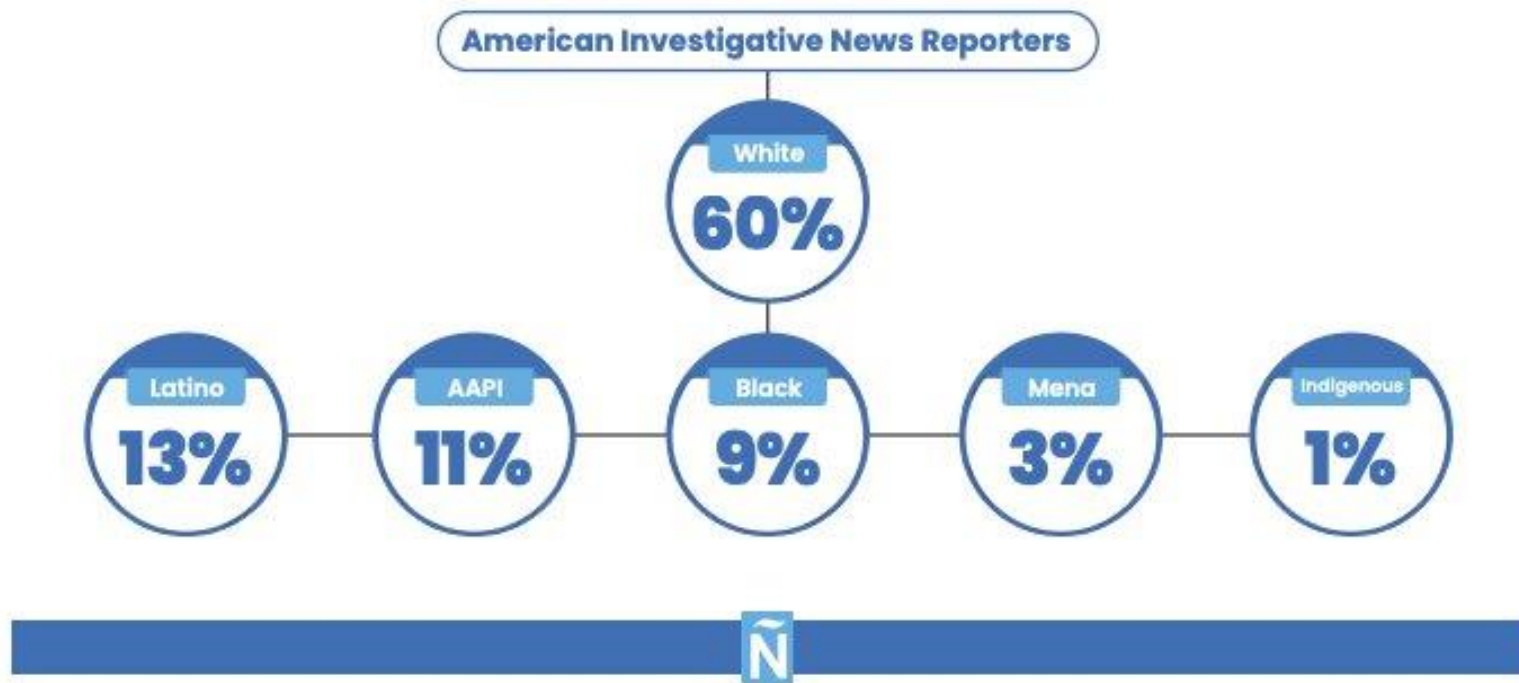
NAHJ task force survey shows investigative newsrooms don't reflect the communities they cover.

DIVERSITY SPOTLIGHT

## Investigative teams lack diversity per NAHJ study



**2023**  
The Damned Pipeline: U.S. News Industry's Broken Parity Promise



According to the study, this situation is even more dire for leadership roles in investigative units. Survey participants indicated that 75% of investigative editors were white — while only 12% of their leaders were Latino and just 5% were Black.

# Changing the Game



futuro   
UNIDAD HINGISA  
A DIVISION OF FUTURO MEDIA

**INVESTIGATIVE STORIES**



# The Heat is Killing Us: Climate change & rising temps are increasing gun violence



by Helina Selemo Blacklight Science Reporter  
August 31, 2023



# The Heat is Killing Us: Climate change & rising temps are increasing gun violence

by Helina Selemo Blacklight Science Reporter  
August 31, 2023



# Driven by fear: Why some Brooklyn youth carry guns

by SHANNON CHAFFERS Amsterdam News Staff, Report for America Corps Member  
September 28, 2023



Credit: Illustration by Brit Sigh

"All these systems are basically failing these kids."

That's how Elise White of the [Center for Justice Innovation](#) (CJI) summarizes the structural failings that underlie the high rates of gun violence in New York's historically under-supported neighborhoods.

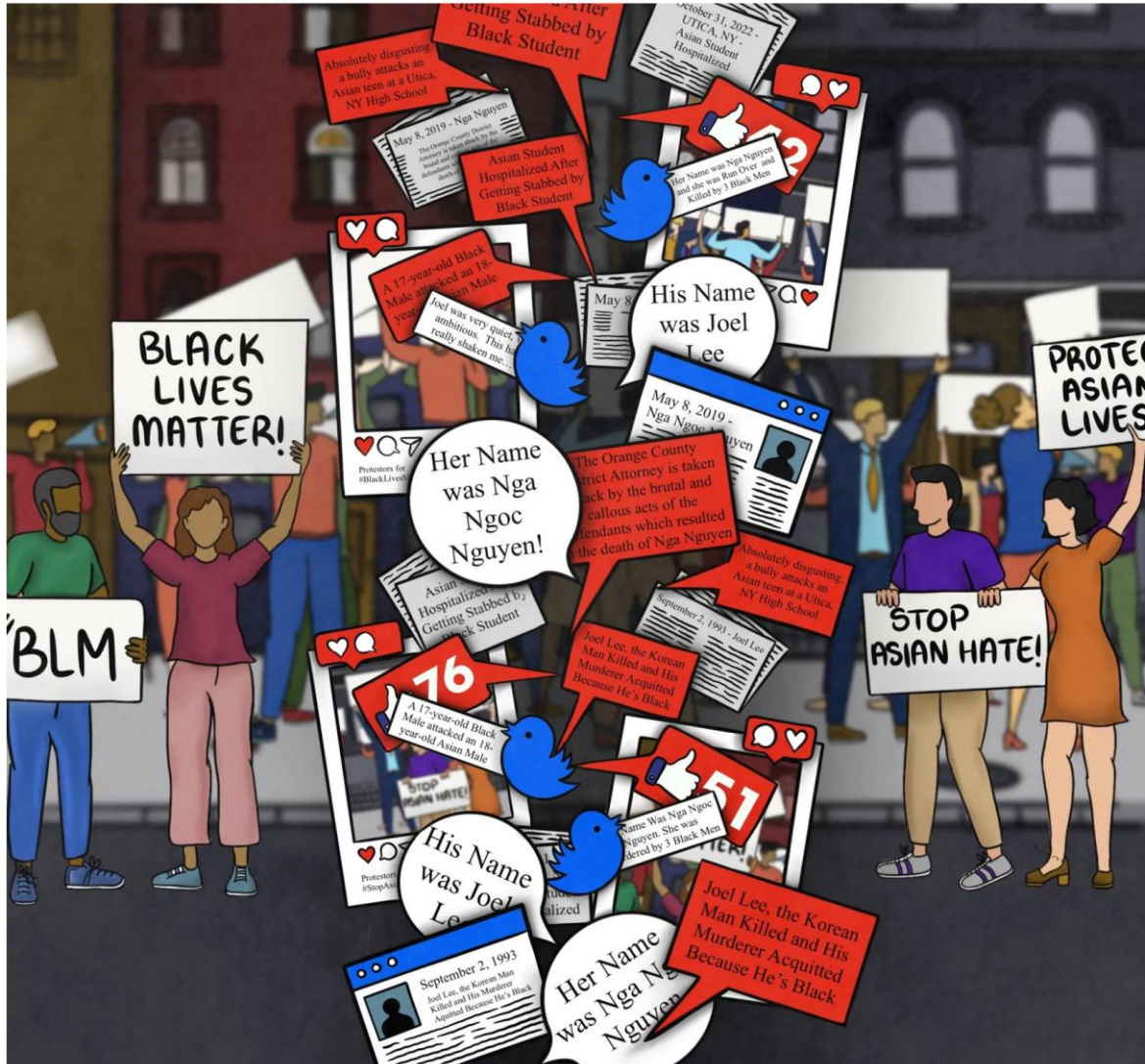
White, who is the CJI's director of action research, has become very familiar with the impact of these inequities. She and her colleagues have spent the past five years conducting research on gun-carrying practices among young people living in these neighborhoods.





# False Narratives: How social media divides Asian and Black communities

by **TANDY LAU** Amsterdam News Staff, Report for America Corps Member  
May 18, 2023



# False Narratives: How social media divides Asian and Black communities

by TANDY LAU Amsterdam News Staff, Report for America Corps Member  
May 18, 2023

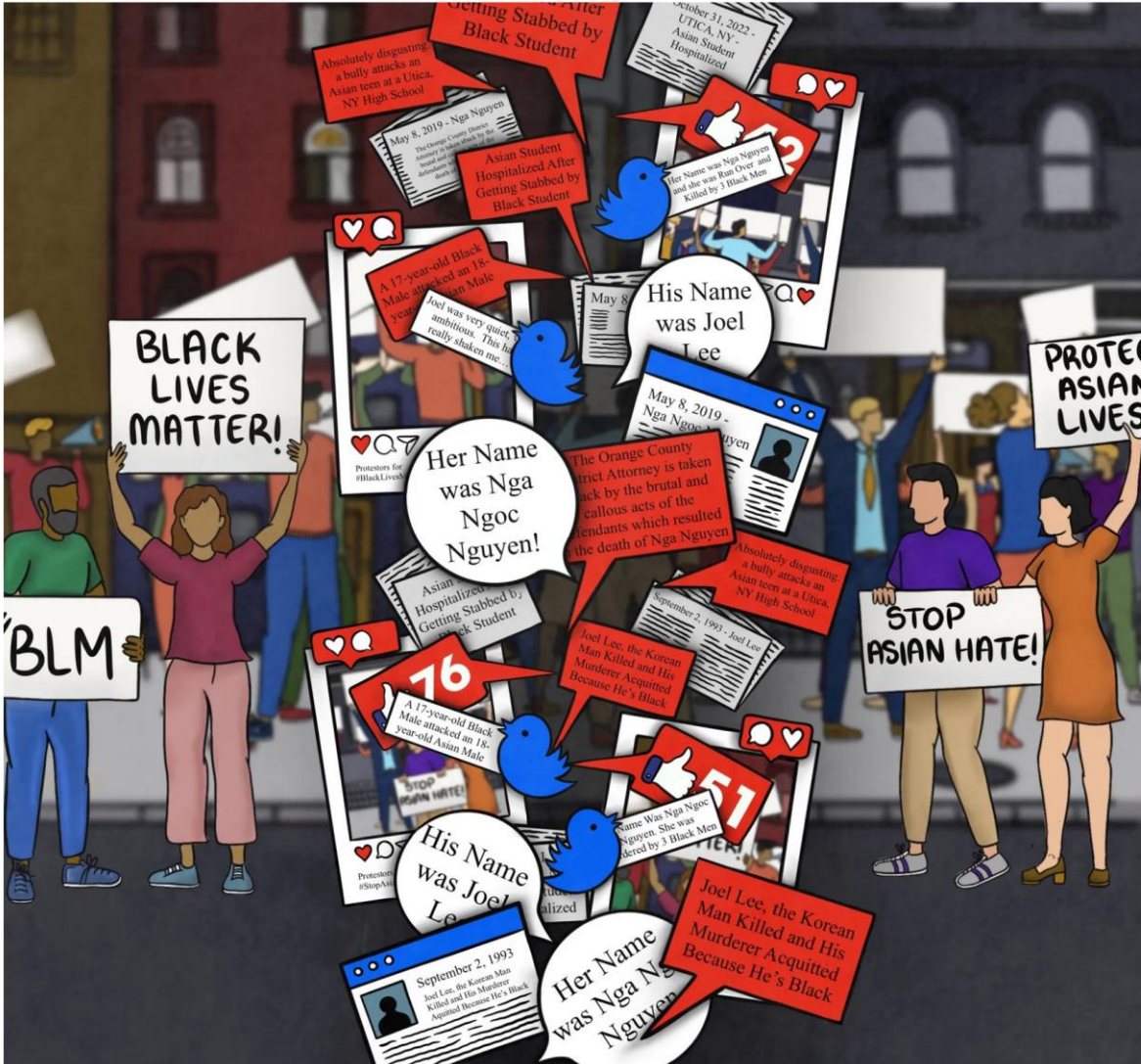


Illustration by Megan Alodie

# The fight for liberation: Modern abolitionists seek to end police and prisons

by ARIAMA C. LONG Report for America Corps Member / Amsterdam News Staff and TANDY LAU Amsterdam News Staff, Report for America Corps Member



June 15, 2023



Amanda Ulloa artwork

# WE SAY FIGHT BACK!

## How a Harlem Community Organization Helped Change the Face of NYC Construction

By DAMASO REYES  
*AmNews Investigative Editor*

In early August of 1973, a short article titled "Judge Rules Steamfitters Must Admit Minorities" ran on page six of the *Amsterdam News*. It explained that the Steamfitters Local 638 'must admit Black and Spanish-surnamed applicants exclusively for ninety days effective August 6.'" The brief story mentions that 'Fight Back, Inc., headed by Jim Haughton, is a local community-based organization that has been effective in getting construction jobs for Blacks, Spanish-surnamed, and other minorities in New York City.'

Two years earlier, we published an article titled "Black steamfitters demand equal chance to work here," which reported that the "members of Fight Back vow not to allow the Steamfitters Union to proceed on any job uptown unless the workers are integrated."

"We are tired of the discriminatory practice of the Steamfitters union and of all the trade unions which make it a practice to hire Black and Puerto Rican workers last and lay them off as soon as the work slows down," Haughton was quoted as saying.

Those two articles, which ran 18 months apart, highlight the struggles that New Yorkers of color faced in integrating the skilled and construction trades and their unions. But they also highlight just how effective Fight Back (also known as Harlem Fight Back) and its longtime leader James "Jim" Haughton, were, along with many others, in ensuring that workers of color received their fair share.

The Brooklyn-born Haughton served as an assistant to the legendary labor leader A. Philip Randolph at the Negro American Labor Council before forming the Harlem Unemployment Center, which would later become Fight Back.

"Jim's philosophy was, if we can't work here, nobody could," Lavon Chambers, a former Fight Back organizer, union organizer and currently the executive director of Pathways to Apprenticeship, told the *AmNews* in a lengthy interview.

"Jim always had a vision. He didn't really live long enough to actually see. But Jim had a vision of what would happen if the community and labor ever got together," Chambers added. Their power would be unstoppable.

"The struggle for economic improvement," Haughton wrote in a 1979 *AmNews* op-ed, 'must come from below, from the workers.'

### DECADES OF STRUGGLE

As an organizer and activist for more than 30 years, Haughton was at the forefront of the group of activists and organizations forc-

their communities. A 1977 *AmNews* profile said "Haughton and the construction workers he calls his brothers with a winning sincerity, have been on the picket lines that have sometimes deteriorated into bloody brawls at Harlem Hospital, Downstate Medical Center... and almost every other confrontation with the unions and contractors who control the industry."

Many activists and organizations played a role in the integration of New York's building and construction trades, but Haughton and Fight Back were, in many ways, the furnace that forged the growing equality that those in the skilled trades now enjoy. "As Fightback's [sic] reputation has grown," the 1977 *AMNews* profile states, "organizations modeled after its aggressive approach have sprung up in Seattle, Detroit, and Washington."

The Civil Rights Act and federal non discrimination laws and executive orders passed in the mid-20th century guaranteed, at least on paper, that people of color should be able to get work on construction sites, but the reality of de facto segregation continued, even in the "liberal" North.

"They're building highways in communities of color or new housing projects or community centers [and] you're bringing this racially exclusive white workforce into communities of color," said Dr. Trevor Griffey of UCLA in an interview.

"And people can see from their doorsteps. 'Oh, I can't even get a job in my own neighborhood,'" he added.

What was clear to Haughton and other activists in the 1960s, and became gospel in the following decades, was that without community pressure and direct action, nothing was going to change for Black workers.

But what does direct action look like? The *AmNews* interviewed two former Fight Back activists who detailed both their experiences and the impact Haughton had on them and the entire industry.

### BUILDING AN ARMY

Born and raised in Harlem, Chambers had recently come out of the Army and lost his job as a video editor when he first wandered into the offices of Harlem Fight Back on 125th Street in the early 1990s.

"When I came out of the Army, [I] didn't really know what to do with my life. But I knew I didn't want to go back to hanging with my 'friends.' A lot of them were cool, but it didn't really lead me to anything good. I inadvertently heard about an organization in my neighborhood called Harlem Fight Back," Chambers said in an interview.

## Jim Haughton, Protector Of The Exploited Workman

By Gordon Watkins

Anyone who doubts the government fails to protect the legal rights of Blacks should spend an hour with Jim Haughton in his



JAMES HAUGHTON

small cluttered office at 1 E. 125th St., Fightback's Harlem headquarters.

Haughton is the founder and director of Fightback, an organization which has fought to secure the "heavy green" construction jobs for Blacks and Hispanics since 1963. Like its founder, Fightback is an action oriented organization.

Haughton, a dynamic, articulate Black man with a penetrating voice, gestures forcefully as he points out the numerous occasions city, state and federal governments have consistently failed Black and Hispanic citizens.

Looking at the record, no one can dis-

pute the inaction of the government agencies and officials charged with enforcing the profusion of laws and executive orders created to correct the discriminatory employment practices in the construction industry. Haughton and the construction workers, he calls his brothers with a winning sincerity, have been on the picket lines that have sometimes deteriorated into bloody brawls at Harlem Hospital, Downstate Medical Center, World Trade Center, CCNY Science Building and almost every other confrontation with the unions and contractors who control the industry.

### Some Friends

They also learned that, even after a Black man gets into the union, he may not work unless he's got some friends in the hiring hall to look out for him. This led to more court battles and Fightback's expansion of its efforts to place workers through daily contacts with the contractors.

Haughton estimates he has placed over 10,000 Black and Hispanic workers on jobs in the industry since 1964. As Fightback's reputation has grown, organizations modeled after its aggressive approach have sprung up in Seattle, Detroit and Washington.

### Concrete steps

Haughton was incensed by the recent Court of Appeals ruling which undermined an earlier decision requiring Locals 14 and 15 of the operating engineers to take concrete steps to integrate.

Haughton says angrily, "There is a continuing attack on New York's weak affirmative action program. Governor Carey issued an executive order (no. 45), but provided no funds to make enforcement possible. Without the necessary monies, and a sincere commitment from

to read, including "The Miseducation of the Negro." Chambers warmly recalled the first few weeks he spent in those offices listening to the organization's leaders and members talk about politics "as opposed to standing on the corner, talking to people who are selling drugs, or committing acts of violence."

Chambers quickly learned, however, that Haughton and his colleagues were more than just talk.

"One day, they're talking, 'Hey, Lavon, you want to come with us on the Shape?' I'm like, 'What's the Shape?'" he recalled. They told him, "'There's this job over here. And they won't hire people from the community. And

going to shut it down [using] civil disobedience.' And I thought these people were foolish. "They're talking about, 'You're gonna go to the site, where all these white folks [are] there, and you're gonna shut your site down. I thought it was foolishness. But I went."

And that day would change his life just as it had for so many others. Chambers described getting in one of several vans that transported Fight Back members to a nearby construction site.

The van pulled up and "we all ran in the building. And there wasn't any violence. We just went in there," Chambers recalled. "It was coordinated, like a tactical mili-

Illustration by Thals Silva



munity-based organization which advocates for those impacted by mass incarceration among other issues. Over 15 years ago, he experienced the impact of pretrial detention in New York first hand.

"I lost my son Isaiah to the foster care system as a result of [my] 2007 arrest for an alleged drug sale and criminal possession of a controlled substance ... while I was a single parent," he told the *AmNews*. He could not afford the bail that was set and as a result lost custody of his son.

If bail reform had been in place at the time, he said, "I would have been able to care for my son and make arrangements to place him with his family in Chicago while my criminal case was pending in Manhattan."

The impact of his pretrial detention, and how it fosters crime, is now multigenerational, continuing to impact his son.

"Well, to my knowledge, he's now in a gang. He doesn't want anything to do with me. He believes that his

foster parent ... brainwashed my son to believe that his family didn't love him. And the system helped with that," Collins said, holding back tears.

Eileen Maher spent more than a year on Rikers Island in pretrial detention because she could not afford bail. She ended up losing her dog-walking business as well as her apartment while in custody.

"I knew that if I had gotten out on bail that I would have had a better chance of fighting my case," she said, describing her time at Rikers as "absolutely dehumanizing... The longer I was there, the more I felt I was gonna become unhinged soon. I really did need to go home. And no one was helping me. So the only way I could get out of that situation was to take a plea and get home myself."

That plea agreement and the criminal record that follows her continue to impact her life. After finding a job, she said she was let go after just a year when she says her employer learned of her time in jail

record. When I explained to them what happened, that I had been a criminalized survivor of domestic violence, that I had been stuck on the island ... they said, 'Innocent people don't go to prison. They don't take pleas, if you really didn't do it, you wouldn't have pled guilty.'"

### Without a Chance

"If you are locked up awaiting trial, you have much less access to your attorney, you are dealing with the horrors of prison life, you often have medical problems that are not being addressed. It makes you very cynical about the whole system," said Jed Rakoff, a sitting U.S. district judge in the Southern District of New York.

"Of the 2 million people [held across America in detention], several hundred thousand are people who are awaiting trial. And almost all of them are going to wind up pleading guilty, even those that are innocent. So [while] bail is an aspect of that, the bigger problem is mass incarceration," he added.

## Revolt Ends On Rikers Island; Grant Amnesty

BY TEX HARRIS

Inmates in the House of Detention for Men on Rikers Island seized control of their cell area protesting the inhuman treatment received at the correction facility.

As the 17-hour revolt came to an end, 200 correction officers staged a "wildcat strike" which lasted nearly four hours.

Both the inmates and guards agree that conditions at HDM are unbearable. Guards do not carry firearms while on duty for fear that prisoners might take them and use them.

Overcrowding, poor living conditions and treatment touched off the uprising among the 1,816 inmates. Overwork and understaffing caused the guards to stage their protest.

Negotiations began Sunday night about 1 a.m. with Federal Court Judge Morris Lasker — inmates requested that he take part in the negotiations.

Bronx District Attorney Mario Merola, Corrections Commissioner Benjamin Malcom Peter Tufo, chair-

man of the city's Board of Correction and Herman Swartz, chairman of the State Board, also participated in the negotiations.

### Hostages Released

Officer Richard Sealey was the first of the two hostages released about 8 a.m. Monday. Thomas Rivera followed immediately.

But it was not until inmates had been promised amnesty and taken part in a press conference with newsmen Tex Harris of the *Amsterdam News*, Bert Wilson, radio station WOR; Milton Lewis, WABC Channel 7 and Boliva Arellano, *El Diario La Presna* that the remaining three hostages — Louis Wright, George Johnson and James Maloney were set free.

### Amnesty Agreement

The agreement signed by all negotiators said that: Inmates would be granted full amnesty by District Attorney Merola who has jurisdiction over Rikers Island if all hostages

(Please turn to Page C-9)

### Rikers Revolt



Negotiations between inmates and city officials were held intermittently during most of the 17-hour seize. Key figures in the negotiations were (from left) Robert Hooks, inmate attorney Warden Buono, Peter Tufo, chairman of City Board of Correction, Commissioner Benjamin Malcolm, Barry Hill (Jacko), Milton Lewis, Channel 7, Wilbur Kirby, City Corrections Board, and Charles "Kasim" Stephenson (seated center), spokesman for the inmates.

### Dismal Conditions

In December of 1975 the *Amsterdam News* covered a revolt at Rikers Island by inmates in which guards also held a wildcat strike to protest conditions at the jail. For decades the conditions on Rikers Island have been the subject of scrutiny.



**Because of bail reform tens of thousands of mostly Black and Brown New Yorkers, who had not yet been convicted of a crime, have avoided the horrors of places like Rikers Island.**

