

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
GRADUATE STUDENT
Advocate

Volume 5, No. 6

December 1993

Free

Organized Student Support for Yomi Falters

By Michael Weinstein-Mohammed
and Christina Pretto
OF THE ADVOCATE STAFF

While several student groups have rallied behind Michael Yomi, a second level economics student who has refused to take the department's first exam on grounds of racial bias, their momentum appears to have lost steam as Yomi has yet to offer a solution to the administration.

Over the summer, Yomi was notified that he was being terminated from the program because he had not taken the first exam. Before being terminated, Yomi had negotiated with then-Dean of Students Floyd Moreland for acceptable conditions under which he could take the exam, including a deal where Yomi would submit lists of professors with whom he was comfortable or of whom he had no opinion. The department's executive officer would then compile an exam committee from the lists to grade Yomi's exam. Yomi did not act promptly on this special arrangement, and it was withdrawn after roughly one month.

Instead, Yomi has accused Professor Michael Grossman, chairman of the economics department and the Graduate Center of racial discrimination and unfair academic practices. Specifically, Yomi says Grossman and the department cannot be trusted to either grade his exam fairly, or create a situation of unbiased grading.

Yomi bases his charge on the fact that Grossman refused to admit him to the program in 1989 because

his GRE score was substandard, and told him to get a second master's degree in economics. After Yomi received a master's degree from City College, Grossman admitted him to the program.

Grossman has denied Yomi's charges of racism in the department, and said that once Yomi was admitted to the program, he was "treated like any other student."

Many groups at the graduate center have rallied to Yomi's support. As early as September, the Doctoral Students Council, while citing no specific examples of racist behavior, passed a resolution calling for an investigation concerning complaints that Yomi and other minority students in the economic department have been given "unequal" treatment.

Following the DSC resolution, a coalition of groups including the Latin and Latin American Students Association, the Korean Students Association, and the Democratic Socialists of America signed a memo to GSUC President-Frances Degan Horowitz and Grossman calling for an investigation into the case. The coalition "requested" that Yomi be "advanced to level III pending investigation by an independent committee." Secondly, they called for an investigation into "Yomi's serious charges of unequal treatment of black and Hispanic students in the department of economics."

The International Socialist Organization has also been active in the case, although they did not sign the memos to the administration. According to one ISO

See YOMI, back page

History Program Hires Caribbeanist Palmer

By Michael Weinstein-Mohammed
OF THE ADVOCATE STAFF

Colin Palmer, a black scholar from Jamaica, has been hired by the history program in the capacity of distinguished professor. The hiring marks the first "central line" appointment of a black scholar in the 25-year history of the program. His appointment may begin a process of potential institutional change, as many professors approach retirement eligibility.

The appointment of Palmer indicates that the program and the administration are serious about promoting diversity in the ethnic and social makeup of program's professional staff. Three years ago it seemed doubtful whether the university was interested in a candidate. Palmer was selected as a search finalist, but little motion occurred in the case. This can be attributed to the offer that the school made Palmer and various personal reasons on Palmer's behalf.

Recently, the school aggressively courted Palmer. Whether this impetus came from the President's office or the history program is unclear. What is important is that the school is ready to make a serious economic commitment of resources to attract professional staff in previously marginalized areas. Distinguished professors cost the school between \$60,000-\$100,000 per year.

Academic diversity is served by the Palmer hiring. Palmer has distinguished himself in the field of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. The issue of African slavery has been his main interest. Receiving his Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin under the direction Phil Curtin, a key player in discussions on the Atlantic slave trade, Palmer went on to publish two

key works: *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico: 1570-1650* in 1976 and *Human Cargoes: British Slave Trade to Spanish America* in 1981. The works are regarded as "first rate" research by the program's most nitpicking Latin Americanists.

Palmer's teaching record extends broadly into the field of Latin America and the Caribbean. He has taught many courses, including comparative slavery, slave resistance, and Latin American colonial history. Student reports from the University of North Carolina, where Palmer last taught, indicate that as a professor, he has been "supportive and helpful in terms of student research," one student said.

Palmer arrives at the Graduate Center this fall as he pursues a new field of academic inquiry. Leaving the field of Caribbean history, Palmer is now preparing to embark into the field of Afro-American history in the United States. One of his three forthcoming books on the topic will deal with the Afro-American experience specifically, entitled, *Passageways: A History of Black America to 1865*. While Palmer is not presently known in the North American literature in terms of publishing, this will come soon. Some students believe that it is an "extra boon" to work with professors that "come to the table with fresh directions and approaches to the field".

Which courses Palmer will teach in the fall of 1994 has not been disclosed. Palmer has been hired primarily to work with students in the Afro-American field. "Whether this will exclude the Caribbean or Latin America is up to Palmer," said Stuart Prall, executive officer of the history program.



Michael Yomi

photo by Michael Weinstein-Mohammed

Computer Center Attempts Comeback

By Michael Weinstein-Mohammed
OF THE ADVOCATE STAFF

It has been the concern of graduate center students that the Computer Center has been lax in meeting student needs. Frequently cited complaints run the gambit from incompetent technical help to inadequate equipment. Under the leadership of Sanford Fleisher, director of the center, there has been an attempt to improve the center's image.

To better serve the needs of students, the center is improving its human resources. This semester, the consultant staff has received extra training in statistical packages, such as SPSS, which social science students frequently have trouble operating because of lack of familiarity and training. Moreover, extra staff has been hired to meet the needs of students during peak times of 2 to 7 p.m.

Students have complained that the technical staff has not been helpful in the past. "Students make unreasonable demands on the technical staff," said one consultant who wished to be unidentified. The student added that "it is the expectation of students that the consultants should be de-bugging complex assignments for them." The consultant views this as "unrealistic and unethical" in terms of staff expectations.

It is clear that the computer center and students will benefit from new funding for much needed computer equipment, improved human resources, and extended lab hours.

DECEMBER in the NEWS

Reynolds Not Nice, But Efficient, Says Chronicle

CUNY Chancellor W. Ann Reynolds is the subject of the cover story in this week's *Chronicle of Higher Education*. (December 1) "Controversial Chancellor" by writer Kit Lively profiles Reynolds' time at City University, with an emphasis on her personal style over the substance of her policy initiatives. Various members of the CUNY community are asked to comment on their impression of her style of governance in relation to the controversy that her actions have generated.

Rita Rodin, spokesperson for the Chancellor's Office, said that Reynolds did not have any particular comment on the Chronicle's profile and felt that the article spoke for itself.

By Pam Donovan

CSI's President Volpe Reinstated

The CUNY Board of Trustees voted on November 22 to reinstate Dr. Edmond Volpe as president of the College of Staten Island. This past fall, Volpe had been dismissed after a dispute developed between Volpe and the board over whether he had made an informal agreement to resign.

The Board then authorized a search for a successor on October 25. Volpe will continue to serve until January and will then take a study leave until June. Dr. Felix Cardagna, who currently serves as provost, will begin as acting president on February 1. Dr. Volpe has been a vocal critic of the Chancellor's Report on Academic Planning (the Goldstein Report) and an internal memo leaked to the New York City daily newspapers in July indicated that Volpe would be replaced. Volpe was traveling in Japan at the time and said he had no plans to resign.

By Pam Donovan

Blank Named Hunter's President

Blanche D. Blank, a vice chancellor and political science professor at Yeshiva University, has been named acting president of Hunter College to replace Paul LeClerc, who left Hunter to become president of the New York Public Library.

From 1972 to 1977, Blank served as dean of social sciences at Hunter, and was on the faculty since 1953. She received her bachelor's degree from Hunter, her master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University, and her Ph.D. from Columbia University.

She is a member of the board of directors of the Fund for Peace and of the American Civil Liberties Union's Free Speech/Association Committee. In the 1970s Blank served on the CUNY chancellor's committee on the status of women.

By Christina Pretto

*Make Popcorn Balls, not Shopping Trips
Happy Holidays from the Advocate*

THE GRADUATE STUDENT ADVOCATE -
Volume 5, No. 6
33 West 42 Street
New York, New York 10036
(212) 642-5852

Editor-in-Chief
Associate Editor
Associate Editor

Christina Pretto
Pam Donovan
Michael Weinstein-Mohammed

The Graduate Student Advocate is published monthly at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York during the regular academic year. It receives operating funds allocated by the Doctoral Students Council and through advertising.

The Graduate Student Advocate accepts advertising representing a wide range of views. However, the acceptance does not imply agreement with the views expressed. At the same time, The Graduate Student Advocate reserves the right to reject certain advertisements judged sexist or racist because of offensive imagery and/or wording.

No parties are entitled to republish contents of this issue without the express written consent of the Editor-in-Chief.

©1993 by The Graduate Student Advocate

LIBERAL REDUX, OR, JUST SAY YES

*But O, young beauty of the woods,
Whom Nature courts with fruit and flowers,
Gather the flowers but spare the buds,
Lest Flora, angry at thy crime
To kill her infants in their prime,
Do quickly make th' example yours;
And ere we see,
Nip in the blossom all our hopes and thee.*

— Andrew Marvell, "The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers"

Whenever one questions aspects of what passes for liberal thought these days, one gets sucked up in an emotional bog, along with Ronald Reagan and racism and other evils of the universe with which one has become implicated by not believing in the liberal narrative. The narrative is as rigid and deterministic in its eschatology as that of bible thumpers. Such were my thoughts on reading Tom Smith's last *Advocate* column, which concerned my "conservatism." (Liberals also lack a sense of humor.)

Most interesting to me was the opening of Tom's column, the lines from Shelley's "Ode to Liberty." The bringing together of a Platonist (Shelley) and a materialist (i.e., socialist) is not such an odd conjoining, and it made me think how much trouble the twentieth century might have been spared (its great and devastating flirtation with socialism) had Plato been able to put his republic into operation.

Wonderful visions underlie socialism and Plato's thought (and Shelley's "Ode to Liberty"), but they should give everyone pause by now. One of the premises of my article was that history and common sense show that the human condition is imperfect and that we must accept this underlay of imperfectibility. (Beauty, you may recall from the *Phaedrus*, is the only divine thing that walks around on two legs.)

Creating perfect worlds, *ab nihilo*, is what mathematicians do, and theoretical physicists, and it's not an accident that liberal thinking — especially its belief in the perfectibility of the world — arose in tandem with the great revolutions in mathematical thought (Leibniz, Newton). (It's also not an accident

that mathematicians these days are spinning something called chaos theory.) The first conquests of disease in the eighteenth century must have produced a heady feeling among the practitioners of medicine and among enlightened men at large. Changing certain material conditions, however, has little effect on the human species as such. People survive smallpox in order to fall victim to new diseases.

In the same way, while some people are gamely fighting the struggle to put still another law into effect that will improve the next endangered group, the earth placidly rotates 180 degrees and, *gadzooks!* another group of oppressed people, like Topsy, has just growed up. No one gets ahead in this game; we're lucky if we stay even. (Just ask working people with children.) More important, do such achievements produce authentic changes in human nature?

POWER PLAYS

By Elizabeth Powers

"Progressives" like to think so. They imagine a linear, progressive human development, with people becoming more tolerant, free, whatever. Just in case you haven't noticed, however, progressive values are not something laid down in the arteries like proteins or cholesterol. Some people nowadays, for instance, claim that men are becoming less like men, understanding women better (they "get it," you might say); but just because men of a certain age now watch what they say when they are around women, it doesn't follow that males have become "different" or that in 150 years (or in 15) they will react the same way around women as PC men today do. In 150 years the world is just as likely to look like the year 800 all over again. Maybe the year 1993 will look like the year 800 in 150 years. Until the day comes when we're rewired (like in Stallone's new movie, *Demolition Man*), we will remain the same old human stuff as the Sumerians.

Many of the achievements of the past two centuries
See REDUX, page 11

Ceremony Held for African Burial Ground

By Diana Agosta
OF THE ADVOCATE STAFF

On November 4, a ceremony was held to commemorate the temporary removal to Howard University of the remains of Africans interred in the African Burial Ground. Between 500 and 1,000 people heard performances by the Women of the Calabash, Odetta, and Noel Pointer and witnessed the pouring of libation, and African religious ritual, at the site of the burial ground.

The ceremony was followed by a candlelight procession to the historic Mariner's Temple Baptist Church to hear and participate in prayers and presentations by scholars, religious and political leaders including Rev. Carolyn Holloway, Mayor David Dinkins, Dr. Abd'Allah Adesanya, and Dr. Howard Dodson.

At Howard, physical anthropologist Dr. Michael Blakely will direct research on the living conditions of the 18th century/colonial era African community in New York City. The remains will be re-interred following a large ceremony after the research is completed.

More than 400 graves were rediscovered and excavated in 1991-92 amid much controversy during the construction of a federal office building by the General Services Administration. The African Burial Ground is now estimated to contain more than 20,000 graves and to extend north of

City Hall and east of Broadway for several acres.

Widespread community concern about the excavation and the proper treatment of the remains and the site spurred the creation of a federal steering committee, composed of historians, anthropologists, museum professionals, architects, clergy, government officials, and community leaders to represent the interests of the African-American community and make formal recommendations to Congress and the General Services Administration.

The committee's recommendations, released in August 1993, include the establishment of a museum

See AFRICAN, page 11

