

# ADVOCATE

## Columbia Adjuncts Strike as Admin Sticks to Hard Line



photos courtesy Columbia GSEU

ANDREW KENNIS

Long ago, graduate students could reasonably expect to have a good job with decent pay and summers off to work on their research. That day is long gone, however, and the exploitation of graduate students has sharply increased as universities have come to depend upon them as a source of flexible labor. Unsurprisingly then, for years now graduate students all across the

country have waged labor struggles for union recognition and contracts.

The wave of graduate student unionization has reached even the ivy towers of the most elite private schools, including Yale, U Penn, and New York University, which has been the sole successful campaign at a private university so far. At Columbia University, the wave culminated in a strike launched on April 20.

see *Columbia Strike*, page 3

**WBAI's Amy Goodman  
Releases First Book**

**Report from Zapatista-  
Controlled Chiapas**

**John Kerry's Politics of  
Personal Growth**

**Debate on Israeli  
Assassinations**

**Thomas C. Brune  
9/11 Commission**

**Lots of reviews: books,  
culture, art and more!**

## Horowitz to Step Down as GC President

JAMES TRIMARCO

In a memorandum to the GC Community dated April 21, President Horowitz announced that she plans to step down as President of the CUNY Graduate Center at the end of the 2004-2005 academic year. She will have served for a total of fourteen years at the time of her retirement, and will continue her service to the GC as President Emeritus.

In the letter, Horowitz stressed the importance of continuing her fundraising activities during the search for a successor and the subsequent transfer of office. As she wrote in her memo, "We will lose no momentum in our continuing efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of our doctoral programs, to increase the level of support for doctoral students, and to raise needed funds for the extra margins of excellence to supplement our tax-levy resources in support of students, faculty, and the Graduate Center."

After her retirement, Horowitz plans to dedicate her time to fundraising for the GC, contributing to a book on "the gifted," and working on a number of other personal writing projects. She says that she will remain committed to students here and that she "won't be going anywhere."

The retirement of such an important figure at the Graduate Center—a person who is involved in constant discussions and negotiations on behalf of student and institutional finances—is an important event for students and particularly for the Doctoral Students Council. In particular, students will want to be included in the selection process in order to make sure that Horowitz's successor will bring energy and a passion for student interests to the task of dealing with the CUNY Board of Trustees. Anything less would endanger even the scarce resources that currently exist within this institution.

see *Frances Horowitz*, page 15

## Regime Change at Hunter College

JAMES TRIMARCO

Some students at the Graduate Center may be surprised to learn how politicized Hunter College student elections can be—not only are the elections fiercely contested, but students run as members of political parties. The most recent elections, with polls open from April 26 to 29, saw a massive overturn in political power.

SLAM, an activist group that has dominated Hunter College student government for eight years, was defeated by a newly formed party called Hunter United. Candidates associated with Hunter United won every student government position out of about 30 that were up for election. The large margins by which these positions were won increased the level of political drama even further. Eija Ayravainen, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Hunter has described the election as a turning point. "It was the largest turnout in over 15 years, 40% higher than last year and 150% higher than the average of the last four years," said Ayravainen.

SLAM is known throughout CUNY as a stalwart Leftist group that regularly sends

large contingents to demonstrations on topics such as tuition hikes, women's issues, students' issues and US-led wars. The group received a CUNY Union award from the PSC in 2003 for its service to the University and also offers services such as free printing and copying for students in its offices.

However, members of the new Hunter United group are dissatisfied with SLAM's handling of student government. They feel that some of SLAM's key positions—particularly in regard to Israel and Palestine—are offensive to certain ethnic and religious groups within the Hunter student community. They also object to what they describe as excessive spending on "retreats" for members of student government affiliated with SLAM and expressed general unhappiness with the way that SLAM handles its financial resources, which Hunter United feels were not distributed evenly among students.

*This story includes facts compiled from an article posted to the Interactivist website by Taylor Peck.*

# Editorial

## Let's Register Every CUNY Student to Vote!

The coming election in November could be the most crucial test of democracy since the era of World War II. The prospect of regime change in the United States is especially tantalizing right now, because the fate of so many fiercely contested issues depends on the outcome. The PATRIOT Act, abortion rights, the war in Iraq and the future of the massive Bush tax cuts are just a few of the issues that we can expect to pan out differently if the next four years belong to a Kerry Administration instead of a Bush. On the local level, democratic governors, state legislators and particularly city officials promise to be much friendlier to public institutions of higher learning in general and CUNY in particular.

This is why it is of utmost importance that CUNY get registered to vote. In fact, the sociology and political science department's own Frances Fox Piven thought of this a long time ago. She spent 15 years working to put laws on the books that would mandate voter registration in public agencies of all kinds, especially welfare offices, DMVs and public universities like CUNY. After countless frustrating attempts to block the legislation—which came from both Republican and Democratic politicians—Piven and her fellow organizers finally found success when Clinton signed the Voter Registration Act in 1993 (the so-called

Motor Voter Act).

That act encourages public institutions of many kinds to offer voter registration services to the people who use them. But it leaves out some of the specifics—especially regarding the question of whether institutions are actually *mandated* or simply *allowed* to offer registration to their clients. Here's what New York State's partner legislation says about CUNY:

*While City University of New York (CUNY) has not been designated as participating agency, and is not required to conduct registration activities beyond distribution of voter registration forms specifically mandated in CJS Elec § 5-211(1), CUNY is not prohibited from implementing more comprehensive voter registration program, including providing assistance in completion of forms, and collecting and transmitting completed forms to Board of Elections.*

So CUNY is left out. But they won't stop us from starting up something more comprehensive of our own initiative, and it looks like that's what we're going to have to do.

Let me be very clear: we want every CUNY student registered to vote—and we'd especially like them registered with the special CUNY registration forms, with the letter "D" printed in the corner—that way politicians can see CUNY as the powerful voting bloc that it is and should be. So make sure you pick up a voter registration form when you register for classes. You might even suggest to the office person that helps you that he or she actively ask other students to vote.

Once you have yourself covered, it's time to register your students. You can pick up the stacks of CUNY voter registration forms in the office of Matt Schoengood, located in room 7301. You might want to call there (x 7400) and make sure they have the forms in stock before you go. Once you've got the forms filled out you can just return them to room 7301.

You probably shouldn't propagandize your students as you're handing them out, but make it clear that the desperate straights CUNY finds itself in right now are linked to the government's spending priorities. Electing new career politicians won't turn a turd into gold, but it will put us in a better strategic position when we bargain with these people—especially if we are all registered to vote.

*Feel free to contact the Advocate if you have questions about registering your students to vote or if you need registration forms.*

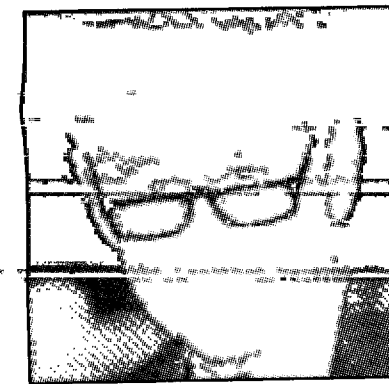
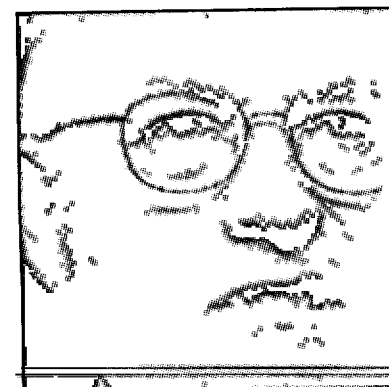
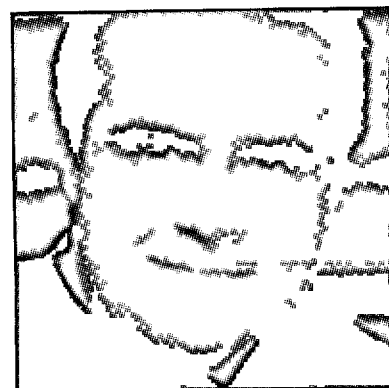
## Correction

In last month's issue, the front page story by Andrew Kennis quoted Heather Guatney as having "referred to an incident in which CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein publicly threatened faculty who were engaged in organizing against the occupation in Iraq." This was incorrect—Guatney affirms that Goldstein "never threatened them, he just said they were making lame excuses for [activist group] S11 at the City College Teach-In."

# Short Takes

## Scalia-Cheney-Bush: The Year in Review (so far)

*"People  
never lie  
so much  
as after  
a hunt,  
during a  
war or  
before an  
election."*



- Otto von Bismarck

## Letters

Dear Editor:

Of all the editorials that I've seen in *The Advocate*, none are more truthful than "Nonsense Slogans have got to go." It highlights the reasons why many of the serious activists have stayed home, instead of joining the large protest crowds which share their ideas.

Why is it when we go to rallies, all we hear are the same nursery rhymes of "One, two three, four..." or "hey hey, ho ho?" The banners at these rallies portray a false sense of unity among the demonstrators.

Just because I am opposed to the occupation of Iraq doesn't mean I'm opposed to the occupation of Gaza, as the banners "Free Iraq and Palestine" suggest.

Instead of confronting Bush with intelligent dialog, what do we see? Puppetry and effigy statues. If we want the world to take our anti-war message seriously, we must appear serious and determined. Costumes and puppets are a delightful sight, but they're distracting attention away from the real message behind the rallies.

Sergio Kadinsky,  
CUNY City College

*The Advocate replies: We both agree that the demonstrations should retain their focus on the events at hand—on the war in Iraq, instead of broad invectives against policies which certain groups may perceive as being part of some larger "imperialist" package. But we certainly have nothing against costumes and puppets! Far from distracting attention from the "real message," they are a vibrant and effective way of drawing attention TO these issues. It's naive to believe that Republicans or middle America will take us seriously, if we only don sweaters and march in straight lines.*

## ADVOCATE

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## WBAI's "Exception to the Rulers" Tour Kicks Off in NYC

PAUL MCBREEN

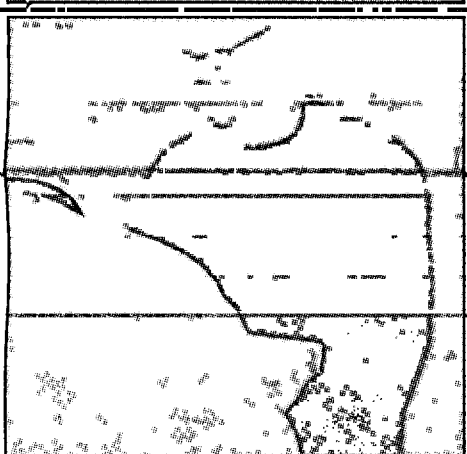
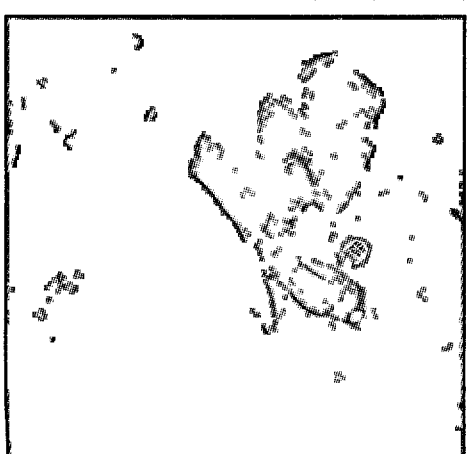
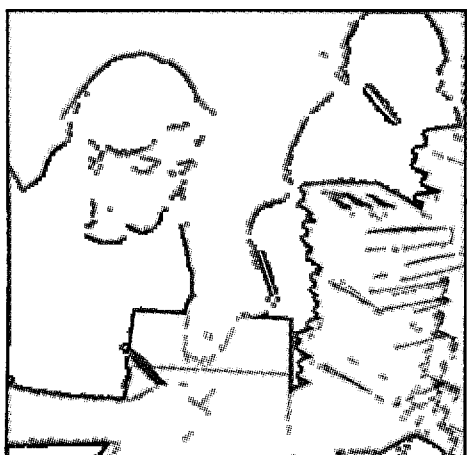
On Tuesday, April 13, supporters of alternative media filled the Cooper Union auditorium beyond capacity for the release of a new book by Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now! The book, entitled *The Exception to the Rulers*, is Goodman's first and was co-authored with her brother, David. According to its subtitle, the book exposes "oily politicians, war profiteers and the media that loves them." Frequent listeners of her show (9 a.m. on 99.5 FM in New York and online at [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org)) will already appreciate the highly informative, non-commercial news style that characterizes the book.

The book tour, which will visit seventy cities, is a celebration of independent media across the country. The event at Cooper Union brought in other WBAI journalists, as well as actor/activist Tim Robbins and Palestinian activist Farouk Abdel Muhti. Muhti was freed just the day before after being detained for two-years without being charged with any crime. He was detained following immigration sweeps in the months after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but due to that fact that he is a stateless Palestinian, there are legal questions as to whether (and to where) he could be deported. During his imprisonment, Muhti was sometimes kept in solitary confinement, and was also moved from one location to another in order to make contact with his lawyer difficult. Stories such as Muhti's are commonly heard on WBAI and Goodman's show.

*Exception to the Rulers* probes behind the scenes to tell the real stories of the players involved in the contemporary war industry. For instance, a May 2003 bombing that took place in a residential area in Saudi Arabia and killed 34 people was described simplistically by the Bush administration and mass media: a senseless, incomprehensible slaughter of innocent people. Goodman instead reveals the precise political target behind the bombing, which went completely ignored elsewhere: an American security firm, Vinnell Corporation, a recipient of military contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan worth \$48 million in 2002 and 2003. This company also trains the mercenary forces of the Saudi Arabian National Guard. Dissident Arabs are not confused about Vinnell's role—they see it as an American corporation keeping the despotic Saudi regime in power. Now owned by Northrop Grumman, Vinnell was formerly a property of President Bush Sr.'s Carlyle Group.

Goodman lists the names of these war-profiteering corporations, their chief executives and campaign contributions. Billions of dollars of US taxpayer money are now being awarded to these companies, often via no-bid, no-competition contracts. It gives one an uncomfortable feeling to see the names of these war profiteers in print, and to see how their narrow social-political-financial circles are conjoined.

*Exception* also aims criticism at the slavish corporate media, which have served as the cheerleader-in-chief for Coach W's big tournament in Iraq:



Top: Amy and David Goodman sign their new book; Middle: Farouk Abdel Muhti receives applause as he approaches the stage; Bottom: Tim Robbins makes an appearance to support the cause.

*To understand how the media shape the message, look at who the messengers are. The media watch group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) did a study of the "experts" who appeared on-camera on the major network news shows during the critical week before and week after February 5, 2003—the day Secretary of State Colin Powell made his case to the UN Security Council for invading Iraq. This was at a time when 61 percent of Americans supported more time for diplomacy and inspections. The FAIR study found only 3 of 393 sources—fewer than 1 percent—were affiliated with antiwar activism. Three out of almost 40 interviews. And that was on the "respectable" evening news shows of CBS, NBC, ABC and PBS. (8-9)*

According to Goodman, "We must build a trickle-up media that reflects the true character of this country and its people—a democratic media serving a democratic society."

This book is a must-read for citizens who consider themselves informed. One can only gain from the truth.

## Columbia Strike (con't from 1)

The Graduate Students Employees Union (affiliated with Local 2110 of the United Auto Workers) has raised eyebrows with its decision to strike, but this move is best seen as part of an ongoing struggle. Columbia's graduate students voted for union representation two years ago, with about 75 percent voting in favor out of some 2000 votes. However, the Columbia administration appealed the vote to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and the process is moving quite slowly. Rather than wait out the appeals process—which the university is not rushing at all the GSEU started up a campaign to use union cards to sign up students directly into the union. At this point, the members held a vote on whether to strike, in which 80 percent voted in favor.

Now officially on strike, graduate students set up a feisty picket line, complete with a giant inflatable rat symbolizing the lowliness of the administration's refusal to recognize the union. The picket line is staffed by striking students, but is only active 25 hours a week. "We want to avoid burnout," explained Felicity Palmer, an Australian student in the English graduate department who is on the organizing committee and has been involved in Columbia organizing efforts for three years.

The picket line, however, is only one of many activities that the union is taking on. Over a thousand people marched in support of the strike on April 28, attracting a diverse crowd including support staff, graduate and undergraduate students and service and maintenance workers in addi-

tion to those on strike. The following day, Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir performed for a crowd of supporters. More than 100 faculty members have signed a letter addressed to Columbia's President, Lee Bollinger, supporting the strike. Finally, on May 6 a one-day sympathy strike was staged by the Columbia clerical workers who, like the GSEU, are incorporated in the United Auto Workers Local 2110. The clerical workers were docked a day's pay.

Nathan Larsen, a strike organizer from the Religion department explained that community support has lent strength to the strike. "It's really been amazing just how much attention and support we have received." An example of this support was displayed on April 21, as undergraduate students staged a massive one-day walkout.

Indeed, the strike has caught the attention of influential publications like *The New Yorker* (which featured a story on the walkout) and also in a number of radio news programs on the NPR and Pacifica networks. Furthermore, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and city council members such as Jose Serrano spoke at the biggest rally that has occurred during the strike (April 28), lending their support to the cause. Serrano was one of the co-authors of a letter to President Bollinger asking him to resolve the strike in a fair and just manner.

Andrew Kennis is a student in the PhD program in Politics.

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# Thoughts on the September 11 Commission

DAN SKINNER & GERASIMOS KARAVITIS

In light of the President's peculiar stance toward the September 11 Commission, we wish to put forth a small collection of hypotheses and questions about the content of the controversial August 6 Presidential Daily Briefing (PDB), the meaning of the president's refusal to testify under oath, and the standards of "precision" that the president has employed in addressing issues of national security. We believe that if the September 11 Commission is fully committed to executing its putative tasks, it will in time demonstrate that—among other things—it has thoroughly explored the following avenues of inquiry.

## What is the purpose of a PDB? How does it function?

One would assume that the method of constructing important briefing memos such as the August 6 PDB is not left entirely to the literary and semantic preferences of their authors. It seems reasonable, that is, to assume that there is an instituted method for the construction of such memos, a method whose end is to minimize the possibility of miscommunication between their authors and their intended reader—i.e. the President. Moreover, if this method is to achieve its end, it must be predicated upon—at least—the following two, related parameters. First, it must require that PDBs are authored with two specific standards in mind: a standard of consistency (whereby the same word does not have different meanings at different instances), and a standard of specificity (whereby the meaning of words is not arbitrary within a single interpretative moment). Secondly, in order for these standards to be met consistently by the authors of the PDBs, the structure and word choices involved in the construction of each PDB must in some way be codified—if not in a separate text exclusively dedicated to their codification (i.e. a manual of some sort), then through their repeated use. Summarily, it seems reasonable to suppose that the normally subjective aspects of spoken language are highly circumscribed in intelligence reports in order to ensure a reliable basis upon which expectations of meaning could be formed.

Moreover, if one were to assume that these hypotheses are verifiable, one would inevitably develop a particular expectation. Specifically, one would come to expect that when a phrase like "Bin Ladin (sic) Determined to Strike in-US" appears on a document that only the president is directly authorized to read, the phrase must have a different meaning and directive weight for the president than it would for an ordinary citizen replicating the phrase in an everyday conversation. If, in other words, a communicative code does in fact exist between the authors of PDBs and the president, then we must conclude that the authors of the PDBs choose their words and phrases with a knowledge of the possible meanings that these words and phrases have and, consequently, that the president (as reader of the PDBs) is obliged to apprehend these words and phrases in the context of their assigned possible meanings.

And it is reasonable, we contend, to hold our hypotheses as verifiable. For the process of communicating with a figure of supreme political authority—such as the president of the US—through official documents may safely be understood as a distinct professional discipline, and, just as each professional discipline has its own instituted vocabulary and set of inveterate discursive practices through which its communicative domain is demarcated and animated, so the discipline of communicating with a president through official documents must have its own instituted vocabulary and set of inveterate discursive practices.

Consequently, we are inclined to ask: how can our president claim that he did not act more decisively on the August 6 PDB because its contents (phrases like "determined to strike America" and "patterns of suspicious activity") were not "specific" enough? The communicative institutions by which his reading of the PDBs is conditioned function to prevent the possibility that he reads and understands these phrases as would an ordinary citizen. And even if the president did read and understand the crucial phrases on the August 6 memo as an ordinary citizen *would*, then he did not read and understand them as a president *should*. Thus, his explanation of why he remained passive after reading the August 6 memo seems quite untenable.

## Why did the President refuse to testify under oath?

How can we understand the President's refusal to testify under oath? If the President has nothing to hide, then the whole question of testifying under oath would be irrelevant: he would simply testify under oath. To take an oath is to commit to some variation of the conjunction "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The refusal to testify under oath implies, then, a commitment to the negation of the conjunction, or a commitment to the sentence: "I do not swear to tell the truth, nor do I swear to tell the whole true, nor do I swear to *not* say something that might *not* be the truth." Essentially, then, the choice of not testifying under oath is a choice which disjoins honesty from testament and, by extension, truth from justice. The refusal to testify under oath can only be interpreted as the choice made by one who fears incriminating him- or herself by the things he or she might say.

Given the premise that the President indeed has something to hide, we may proceed to consider his possible choices, the likely consequences of each, and the logic behind his decision to not testify under oath. Prior to the moment of his choosing to not testify under oath, the president had two options. The first was to testify under oath and not tell the truth (i.e. the information that he wants to conceal, which might either be a euphemistic variation of "I didn't feel a sense of urgency" or something more specific and cacopho-

nous). The second option was to not testify under oath and to not tell the truth. The first option could have, in theory, yielded higher rewards, but it was also riskier. The political benefit that could have accrued from choosing it would be in assuring people that the president is not afraid of the truth. However, its inherent risk was that, if it were to be discovered at some point in the near future that the president's responses were untruthful, he and the ensemble he leads could not avoid accusations of perjury as the nation enters pre-electoral high season.

Being that they are conservatives, it comes at no surprise then that the President's advisors chose to reason conservatively—to risk less in case the truth should come out—and choose option two. This decision allows the president to retain his faith in a November victory even in the event that things do go awry during his testimony to the September 11 Commission. (Incidentally, if Clinton had reasoned conservatively when first asked about the Lewinski affair and admitted that he engaged in sexual activity with her—instead of attempting to evade all political costs through an acrobatic deception—his trial and the negative implications that his trial had on the institution of the American presidency would not have ensued.)

## The logic of security and the problem of specificity

The pretense for invading Iraq was that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and that—in conjunction with Hussein's inimical attitude toward the United States—this constituted a *casus belli*. Of course, at the time of their report to the United Nations, UN weapons inspectors stated that they had not found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Nonetheless, the president decided to proceed with the invasion.

When later asked about the missing WMDs, the President claimed that more precise information was not necessary to justify the invasion of Iraq. On the other hand, when asked to explain his reaction to the August 6 PDB—which warned, however tepidly in the President's eyes, of the possibility that attacks would be carried out on American soil—the President claimed that there was not enough specific information for him to take more active measures toward defending the nation from a terrorist attack in the weeks prior to September 11.

We cannot help but wonder: does the logic of security—an essentially conservative logic since it proceeds, above all, on the principle of minimizing loss—not dictate that the statesmen of a country have more reason to act on the basis of less evidence when it comes to orchestrating a defensive operation within the country than they do when orchestrating an operation outside of it, regardless of whether the latter is defensive or offensive in its nature?

Gerasimos Karavitis is a MA student in the Politics department.



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# Reflections on a Visit to Chiapas

HEIDI REIJM

After reading about the Zapatista political movement in Southern Mexico for several years, I wanted to see for myself what was happening there. This winter break, I traveled to Chiapas to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Zapatista National Liberation Army insurrection.

## A Little Zapatista Background

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was formed clandestinely in Chiapas in the mid-1980s. While it received a kick-start from radical intellectuals from northern Mexico, the EZLN is led by, reflective of, and strongly rooted in 500 years of grassroots indigenous resistance. Indigenous leaders created the EZLN as a response to the social and economic repression of local people that began with Spanish colonialism and has continued to this day in the form of neoliberalism. Throughout this time, the indigenous peoples of Chiapas have continually been forced off their land, stripped of their livelihoods and deprived of the economic, educational, and health-related resources that have gone to other, more developed areas of Mexico.

The EZLN appeared on the world stage on January 1, 1994, when it conducted its first open and armed rebellion. Timed to coincide with the signing of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the Zapatistas led an uprising and presented the Mexican government with a list of demands including land reform, education, access to markets, women's rights, health care, nutrition, and full participation in the Mexican government.

The Zapatistas were right to think that NAFTA would create problems in their lives. The introduction of US-subsidized farm products to Mexican markets has been devastating for Mexican farmers and has damaged the traditional identification Chiapas has had with Mayan cul-

ture. For instance, corn plays a crucial role in Mayan indigenous culture, mythology and history. The Corn Mother is seen as one of the great creators, and corn is an important staple in Chiapas. The Mexican government and global neo-liberal policies have systematically taken that corn heritage away.

Over the last ten years, the region has seen recurring periods of government repression followed by resistance from the EZLN. Mexican military and paramilitary forces have ruled with brute force, resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries among the indigenous people, the razing of villages, and constant harassment. Up until very recently, military bases and checkpoints regulated all EZLN-controlled territory.

In 1996, after two years of negotiations, the Zapatistas and the Mexican government signed the San Andreas Accords. The signatories hoped to address some of the discrepancies with regard to the right of indigenous people to govern their own areas and gain representation in the national government. The Mexican government, however, never followed through with the Accords and the Zapatistas subsequently refused to negotiate further until progress was made. They are still waiting for progress today.

When the current president, Vicente Fox, came to power, he took down most of the military checkpoints and eased the low-intensity warfare that was being conducted. Partly as a result of this easing, the EZLN began to implement the San Andreas Accords on its own in the summer of 2003. Five autonomous regions were established, each consisting of several municipalities. Each region is governed by its own Good Government Board (GGB) made up of representatives of those municipalities. Representatives are rotated by different members of the communities every fifteen days. The Boards assess community needs and manage their meager resources. All

decisions made within the Zapatista communities flow through these Boards. Each region has what is called, a *caracol* (literally, 'shell') which is a location where people gather, both Zapatistas and outsiders. This is where that region's Board, schools, clinics, and cooperative markets are located.

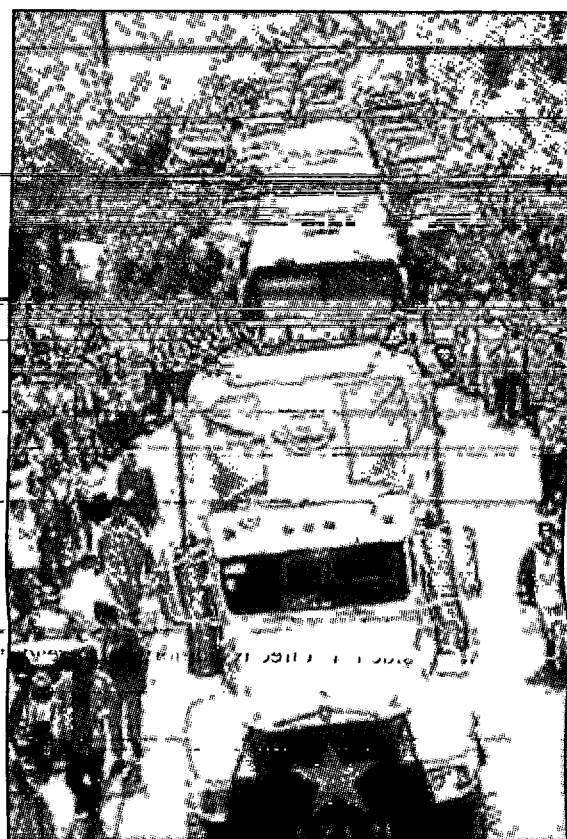
This was the setting for my trip to Chiapas. For various reasons, the EZLN is in a very different position than other insurgent groups throughout the world. Though they have been and still are on the defensive, they have also been able to build their own society—or, as the Zapatistas themselves say, a world "where all worlds fit."

## Oventic

I visited Oventic, a *caracol* located about an hour away from San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas and about eighteen hours southeast of Mexico City. This community is home to a middle and high school, a women's cooperative, a media center, a collectively run shoe and boot factory, several collective kitchens and buildings for housing, an amazing health clinic and a general store which also serves as the Zapatista check-in point. It also has the only television in the community.

The past ten years have been hard in Chiapas. Oventic does have running cold water and gravity toilets, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Many gains that have been made were in part due to the efforts of international supporters who have helped gain access to these resources. I met with some of these groups in Oventic; what follows are my impressions from these meetings.

The schools in Oventic function like boarding schools. Students travel from surrounding communities to live in Oventic. The teachers call themselves not "teachers" but "educational promoters," in order to try and break down the hierarchical divide between teacher and student. "We don't pretend to know everything and we learn from the students as much as we teach them," said one. The school in Oventic was built by the organization with which I traveled, Schools for Chiapas. Schools like this one show how the international solidarity has supported indigenous-led development in Chiapas.



EZLN caravan to Mexico City in 2001.

The health clinic in Oventic is truly incredible. Workers are continually adding to the building and, as a result, it is constantly under construction. It contains departments of optometry, gynecology, herbal medicine and general medicine. It has a laboratory, consultation rooms, patient rooms, and reception areas. Considering the situation in Oventic, the clinic is incredibly resourced—a rare asset in the Chiapas highlands. There are eight other clinics throughout the municipalities in varying stages of development, from huts with tin roofs to clinics like the one in Oventic. All are run autonomously. Previously, the only medical facilities were in major cities, like San Cristóbal, which can be anywhere from a two to twelve hour trip from indigenous communities. After the uprising, the EZLN began to collect funds for the clinics and slowly built the eight that now exist. The clinic staff told us that the organization's first priority is health, and the second is education.

All of the resources and decisions made about the clinic, like everything in the community, are funneled through the Good Government Boards. These boards, which form the fabric of government in EZLN-controlled territories, met with our group three times. The members of the Board repeatedly thanked us for being there, never asked for anything, and patiently answered our sometimes not-so-patient questions. Each meeting lasted over two hours. We asked about how their communities are run, how they govern, what they see for their future, and about their experiences of the past. They were always so busy that it seemed they didn't sleep. While one speaker was talking to us, the others would take cat naps. When the first speaker would finish, the next would wake up, and the first would sit and close his eyes.

The GGB is rigidly process-oriented. For instance, a

see *Chiapas*, page 14

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# The Impact of "Experience" In War and Politics

DAN SKINNER

## I. John Kerry's 1971 Testimony

With the 2004 US presidential election approaching, a debate is raging over Senator John Kerry's Vietnam War experience, and particularly his 1971 testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as the head of the organization Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). In his testimony, Kerry detailed atrocities committed by American soldiers, in an attempt to inject the experiences of soldiers themselves into the national debate over the war. During his testimony, Kerry summarized the tales shared by soldiers at a previous VVAW event in Detroit, in which Vietnam Veterans:

*told stories that, at times, they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Ghengis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam, in addition to the normal ravage of war and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.*

What was most striking about the political reaction to Kerry's testimony was not disagreement over his factual claims—those had already and have since been documented in dozens of news reports and books—but rather the extent to which the individual experiences of the soldiers that Kerry relied upon were delegitimized as sources of historical evidence. Recent critiques in *The National Review*, *The New York Post* and elsewhere have focused on discrediting this testimony, elevating the status of second-hand press accounts and military studies that are known to have been plagued by massive information-gathering problems. Recent critiques have blurred the important distinction between a "universal statement"—which would have implicated, for example, all military personnel—and a report of individual experiences, of Kerry himself and the men for whom he spoke. Even though Kerry did not claim that every or even most soldiers had committed these atrocities, his testimony has been refracted by the media as the work of a hero-cum-turncoat-cum-politician whose transformation has stripped him of all credibility.

The confessional nature of Kerry's testimony was lost on many of his critics, who interpreted his statements as universalistic; if they were universal, they recognized, they too would be implicated. As loyal defenders of sanctioned propaganda, much of the mainstream media reported that Kerry was accusing *all* soldiers of committing those acts. There seemed no room for the kind of first-hand, personal experience on which Kerry based his testimony. That his testimony was the culmination of prior conferences where these experiences were discussed candidly and at length was ignored by the press.

This rejection of Kerry's voice is highly ironic since the war in Vietnam is an issue on which, as a soldier, he is perhaps better qualified than any to speak. Moreover, Kerry had little to gain by implicating himself in atrocities. What was ignored by the media was the notion that Kerry's confessions demonstrate his dedication to some ideal or some belief larger than himself. Kerry had begun from a point of personal experience and attempted, much to the chagrin of his opponents, to reconsider the experience itself as though it might have something to benefit others. Instead, it was rejected as the illegitimate universalization of one man's experience.

The role of experience was especially interesting in this context since at no point was it suggested that individual responsibility for crimes was the central issue. Instead, Kerry took a route similar to that of Hannah Arendt at the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, where she argued that it was society itself—and not only Eichmann or the Nazis—that should be charged for genocide. For Kerry, the United States, including both its government and its complicit populace, was implicated in the My Lai massacre and Lt. William L. Calley Jr. served as nothing more than a scapegoat.

Kerry's was not a legal argument, and he sought neither punishment nor accountability. His goal, instead, was to prevent future atrocities. He also called for policy consideration for those who were lost in the repressive and self-propelling structures of war. Instead of condemning individual soldiers, war itself was indicted as the supreme crime that, by its very nature, forced soldiers to commit these terrible acts. Kerry argued, in an unwittingly Foucaultian fashion, that soldiers are merely the vehicles through which atrocities are carried out, given the structures in which they are forced to operate. Kerry's testimony, in short, was an example of such a vehicle refusing its role as an agent of war.

This problem of experience betrays a tendency in politics to treat personal growth as inherently suspect. Through this prism, Kerry's later decision to leave what he has described as an increasingly radicalized VVAW can be seen only as political opportunism and positioning. With "flip-flop" the catchword of the day, transformative experiences have been rendered politically impotent and inherently dubious.

Jonathan Schell, writing in *The Nation*, recently took a step toward distinguishing transformative experiences from "flip-flops." Transformative experience, he writes, is concerned primarily with a "truth" derived from one person's experience. It is valid in its own right as an experience, and is not subject to political concerns or interpretation. Transformative experiences also cannot be proved true or false, a point of intersection that they share with performative statements. The charges of "flip-flopping" that have been lodged against Kerry, on the other hand, are political charges. They can be verified by examining Kerry's words and votes, and rightly deserve a political response since they weigh greatly on the expectations voters can have towards Kerry's stated policy positions. Political positions, unlike personal transformations, must be accounted for, while transformative experiences are valid in and of themselves. Schell also notes that "truth-telling" resulting from experience is often met with skepticism instead of praise. This is truer still of anti-war positions in American politics.

Although this is not the place to analyze this phenomenon throughout American political history, some general comments should be made. Transformative experience is only considered politically valid so long as the outcome of a transformation conforms to official positions (e.g., the various myths that propel war efforts) within the acceptable bounds of a totalizing discourse. Transformative experiences that fail to do this are rejected as politically motivated "flip-flops" and fail to find resonance within the official narrative of war and acceptable transformative experiences.

Kerry's testimony met with a similar response. He countered official claims that had framed the Vietnam War as a war in defense of South Vietnam, and commented on the forces that war sets in motion in general. Yet much media today, with a special emphasis on the likely suspects—right-wing talk radio pundits—have proved unwilling to acknowledge Kerry's main points. They justify this by refuting instead an implicit claim that one man can represent a universal (when in fact a close read of the testimony shows that Kerry did not claim to represent any group beyond those individuals for whom he was authorized to speak), and misquoting and misrepresenting Kerry's words to make it appear as if he were claiming to represent all Vietnam veterans and attributing the crimes of which he spoke to every

individual soldier. Furthermore, the implication that soldiers still on the ground in Vietnam in 1971 as the hearings took place might have been committing such acts even then posed obvious problems for Nixon's insistence that the United States was in the process of achieving "peace with honor."

In *Notes on Nationalism*, George Orwell argues that an important identifying mark of a nationalist is the loss of the ability to think analogically about the actions of the nation. Specifically, through the prism of nationalism, two structurally similar situations will inevitably be seen as incomparable (we are seeing this already in the argument over whether Vietnam is in some way similar to Iraq—many Americans simply will not accept that there may be parallels).

Kerry's rejection of asymmetrical, nationalist logic was an important and controversial aspect of his testimony, but it also reveals an important lesson facilitated by the experience of war. War thrusts people into conditions that often shatter official dogma while simultaneously forcing soldiers to doubt their own judgment and moral clarity. Oftentimes, being forced into a defensive posture forces soldiers to rely on the myth of the war, perhaps by increasingly objectifying his or her enemy. But in the post-war period, when the soldier combines reflection and experience, a higher order of analogical power is possible.

Kerry's anger, and his willingness to defy official doctrine, was a response of this sort. His presentation applies effective analogical powers to the situation in Vietnam, many of which contradict the myths that made the war possible in the first place. The most striking example of this is Kerry's willingness to admit that US soldiers committed crimes, a seemingly obvious point for the non-nationalist but one that has had virtually no resonance in American political culture. What is most interesting about the response to Kerry's testimony, then, is not that Kerry's "facts" were rejected, but rather that that his statements were based on the experiences of soldiers themselves who confessed to having committed the crimes. The structure of Kerry's argument relied on soldiers coming to terms with their own actions, not on accusations leveled by other parties.

Kerry also breached an important taboo with his claim that the war in Vietnam was "the biggest nothing in history." According to the tradition of thousands of years of government doctrine, wars are always purposeful—a position taken to ensure that each death is seen as a contribution to a worthy cause. What is most interesting about this stance from the perspective of experience is that all soldiers undoubtedly find purpose in military service at one point or another—if only to justify a situation they were forced into—and yet it is inevitable that the individ-

continued on next page

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## "Experience" (con't)

ual's sense of purpose at the outset of a war will be quite changed by the end. Yet the official stated purpose of the war itself must remain consistent throughout, or else, if revised, it must be re-explained with a supplemental myth that at least falls within the framework of its previous iterations. This, as we have seen in particularly stark terms in the war in Iraq, does not require that the specific reasoning remain the same (e.g. "Weapons of Mass Destruction" vs. the "Liberation of Iraq"), but the purpose itself must be continuously present.

This relatively stable national purpose stands in stark opposition to the individual soldier's personal transformation. Individual experience, which in its most basic form is intersubjectively produced, must remain open to change. It embodies that which responds to the uncertainty of life—passively and reflectively—with an attempt to understand changing events at its center. Experience can be neither prescribed nor proscribed.

This conflict between individual experience and political rationale has potentially enormous implications. First, within the framework of politics, transformative experiences are required to conform to official positions. Kerry, for example, is not credited for his ability to develop from a soldier willing to die for his nation into a critic of unjust and criminal policies. Instead of praising the value of experience and growth, Kerry's change is branded as insincere political opportunism and even treason. Instead of being interpreted as a form of growth, it is read backwards as a betrayal of a former ideal. Kerry's testimony, and the response to it from his opponents, shows that there is no room in American political culture for the naïve, trusting young soldier to grow into the wiser, more experienced statesperson. Official myths require that he or she remain consistent, even if that means remaining undeveloped and naïve.

The treatment of Kerry's testimony is an example of the vigor with which the voice of the experienced individual can be denied its place as a legitimate source of commentary on political issues, even though it would appear that such individual accounts are in fact the best sources of intelligence. Instead, we see individuals like Richard Clarke, Paul O'Neill, Joseph Wilson, and a host of former US generals and policy planners from the Bush administration subjected to concerted character assassination in return for their candid first-hand accounts. This treatment of experienced individuals makes it difficult for lone actors to impact policy, and devalues the role of personal experience on official positions built on non-empirical abstraction.

### II. "Mistakes Were [Not] Made" or "War Changed Me"

Like every negative theoretical assertion about politics (such as that certain kinds of individual transformation are taboo), there is another side to the issue. The transformation from soldier to anti-war activist requires the capacity to admit that one was misled, and that many young people have died because of a mistake in judgment. Of course, in the case of war and Vietnam in particular, these judgments were made by thousands of soldiers on the basis of falsified pretexts, articulated most clearly in the Gulf of Tonkin

Resolution and the numerous other official myths detailed in documents like the Pentagon Papers. Those who can stare such mistakes squarely in the eye and allow that knowledge to convert them into a force for good are those qualified to promote what one might call a politics of growth.

Unfortunately, *realpolitik* political considerations have led virtually every president since Richard Nixon, and even a few who came before him, to engage in the art of deniability, which Charles Baxter has defined as "the almost complete disavowal of intention in relation to bad consequences." The history of deniability has been well-documented, but what has not been shown is the way in which this feature of the modern presidency embraces a failure to transform, and treats personal experience itself as something only to be contextualized within accepted narratives. This culture of deniability rejects experience as a guide to a politics in a changing, dynamic world. The events of September 11, 2001, and official responses to terrorism in general, illustrate this position well: one does not negotiate when one is under attack, regardless of the wisdom that may be gained or the lives saved. September 11, instead, ossified former policies, as though "bridge burning"—a politics of total commitment to extant policy positions—had become synonymous with American foreign policy itself.

More generally, a discussion of mistakes has become the mark of the tension between commitment to policy positions and transformative experiences. As Kerry noted in 1971, "Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, 'the first President to lose a war.'"

Nixon held that admitting that misguided judgment brought America into Vietnam in the first place would be more detrimental than submitting American soldiers—as vehicles of this policy—to a war of attrition. His policy on Vietnam—like the policies of Kennedy, Johnson, and as is Bush's position on Iraq today—was characterized by a willingness to trade the lives of individual soldiers for a rhetorical position that denies the positive gains that can be made from admitting mistakes.

In the final analysis, all of these administrations have relied upon the same universal "we" that Kerry has been accused of having relied upon in 1971. CIA Director George Tenet's comment on April 13, 2004, debatably speaking for the CIA, that "we made mistakes," echoes Kissinger's allowance that "...it is quite possible that mistakes were made."

The combination of the passive voice and the universal, undefined "we" has provided a firm rhetorical buffer behind which government officials can evade personal responsibility. At the same time, it denies the vehicles of its own policies the right to shape their personal experiences into a meaningful position in terms of policy. On the other hand, Kerry, as a representative of an organization and with reference to the prior accounts upon which his 1971 testimony was based, did not leave his pronouns empty. The object of Kerry's "we" was clearly defined, and his "I" was unmistakable. Kerry's boldest flouting of official doctrine was in utilizing the political shock that comes from attaching otherwise nebulous notions of atrocity to a well-defined "I," or an identifiable, repentant "we." Such a transgression forced officials to acknowledge that, in fact, their policies are not carried out by abstractions but by living, and dying human beings.



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"Gringothon" was made by Gregory Berger, a US expatriate in Mexico City. In the spring of 2003, he watched the atrocities of the invasion of Iraq through the lens of Mexican television news. His despair turned to hope when he observed some Mexico City street vendors who fight their own daily "war" for survival on the streets. Newly inspired by their tenacity, he took to the streets of Mexico's capital as the personification of all gringo stereotypes, but with a twist; he sells chewing gum and washes windows in the streets of Mexico City to raise money for a guerrilla army to take out Bush.

Other FUN films will also be featured throughout the party.



# Meeting Sheik Yassin: A Report from Gaza

JAE MYUNG KIM

The most recent bloody conflict in Israel and Palestine has lasted for more than 44 months and has cost more than four thousand lives. Of those thousands, the ratio of Palestinian to Israeli dead is 3.25:1. Since the outbreak of the second *intifada*, I have visited the Middle East three times to cover the crisis. During my stay, I visited hot spots such as Mr. Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah and the Jenin Refugee Camp in the northern part of the West Bank. I also visited Gaza, including Hamas strongholds such as the Jibalya refugee camp. During my time in the Middle East, I interviewed politicians, intellectuals, and leading activists from both sides. In particular, I interviewed Hamas' leaders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi, both of whom were recently assassinated by Israeli missile attacks.

Walking the roads of Gaza, one can easily find clashes between Palestinian stone-throwers and Israeli soldiers. Young Palestinians, including many children, pelt Israeli soldiers with rocks, and Israeli troops respond with rubber-coated metal bullets. In some cases, Palestinian armed forces and Israeli troops exchange live ammunition. Some Jewish settlers armed with rifles also join the current struggles.

In a hospital in Gaza City, I met some young Palestinian children hurt by these rubber-coated bullets. Rather than being shot by Israeli troops, they are sometimes fatal if they hit the heart, and some Palestinians are said to have been killed in this way. During my first visit to the Middle East in 2000 just after the outbreak of the *intifada*, I observed at close range two funerals in Ramallah and in Nablus; both were flash points. I was shocked to hear that the deceased were victims of rubber-coated bullets. I was overwhelmed by the emotion and deep grief shown by the mourners at these funerals. Some cried, "Allah is great, we will win someday."

## "There is no more trust"

During my visits to Israel, I contacted Israeli politicians and intellectuals to hear their opinions about the current crisis. To my surprise, some of them expressed open hostility towards the Palestinians. For example, Dore Gold, a close aide to Ariel Sharon and a former United Nations Ambassador between 1997-1999 during the Netanyahu administration, showed his ultra-right views in his refusal to recognize even the possibility of Palestinian statehood.

On the Israeli side, many citizens remain frightened of becoming victims of suicide attacks. Ephraim Kam, Deputy Head of The Jaffe Center of Strategic Studies in Tel Aviv University told me that "most Israeli intellectuals, including the moderates, share the same opinion in terms of security agenda." "There is no settlement, and therefore, it is not necessary for us Israelis to make excuses for occupying the territory," said Gerald Steinberg, a professor majoring in conflict management and negotiation at Bar Ilan University.

The war-time mood in this troubled area tends to marginalize the voices of Israeli peace groups. Some moderate

Jewish intellectuals, including Moshe Maoz, a history professor of Hebrew University, lamented the clashes. In contrast to the hard-liners, he was not opposed to Palestinian statehood. Professor Maoz told me that in the past intellectuals from both sides had issued several co-declarations calling for the cessation of hostilities. "At this moment, however," he lamented, "it is a very difficult situation for us to continue this attitude. Too many victims have already been killed. I cannot contact my Palestinian friends."

I also contacted Palestinian politicians and intellectuals. All of them showed anger and deep frustration. Ahmed Qurei, the then-Speaker of Palestinian National Council in 2001 and now Prime Minister in the Palestinian Authority (PA), asserted that "there is no more trust between the Israelis and the Palestinians." He added that "all the negotiations have become useless," showing deep anger against the Israeli government. Qurei himself was at one time a leading diplomat in the Oslo peace negotiations of 1993. He expressed doubt about the format that he had accepted for years, namely the American-brokered talks. From the general Palestinian view, the United States is the sole sponsor of Israel. Palestinians complain that "Israeli soldiers are killing us with American F-16s and tanks."

One year before his arrest in April, 2002, I met with Marwan Barghouti, a member of Palestinian National Council and top West Bank leader of *Fatah*, based in Ramallah. He is now a prisoner in an Israeli jail. Barghouti did not conceal his anger. "We are angry," he said. He complained that even though seven years had passed since the Oslo peace accords, the Israeli government continues to expand settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and still controls the roads into Palestinian areas.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, an advisor and spokesman for Yassir Arafat, argued that the real background of Ariel Sharon's aggressive policy against the Arafat regime is part of a strategy to earn more time in order to enlarge settlements inside the occupied territory. Mustafa Abdel-Nabi Natshe, Mayor of Hebron, lamented that, "only because of four hundred Jewish settlers, more than ten thousand dwellers in this city are threatened not to make a normal livelihood."

Influenced by the repeated tensions, the Israeli economy has recently hit a slump. However, in contrast to some high-tech industrial sectors of the Israeli economy which are still steady, the Palestinian economy seems on the brink of collapse. According to the *CIA World Factbook*, the Israeli per capita income is almost ten times higher than that of Palestinians. Since the current conflict began, many Palestinian people who had previously worked in Israeli factories or companies have lost their jobs. The military has blocked all roads into Israeli territory for purported security reasons.

Palestinians I spoke with did not hide their frustrations. They lamented that their very survival was in danger, mostly because of rising unemployment. I could

not forget the gloomy faces of Palestinian workers I met at an Israeli checkpoint in Bethlehem near Jerusalem. They had tried to go to Jerusalem to work, but failed. As one of them lamented, "We are like prisoners without a jail." Ghassan Khatib, Minister of Labor in the Palestinian Authority, strongly criticized the Sharon administration, arguing that "all Palestinians have been suffering collective punishment due to the Israeli blockade policy."

## Hamas Logic: Balance of Terror

These Palestinian frustrations form the political base of Hamas. Some young men I met at the Jibalya refugee camp in Gaza told me that if they failed to find jobs by the end of the year they would volunteer for Hamas.

Through the introduction of a local Hamas activist I contacted, I was able to interview Sheik Ahmed Yassin twice. As a founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, he argued that he had taught the Israeli side lessons "by successive martyrdom operations" — suicide bomb attacks. He also denied being a terrorist. "As far as I know," he said, "your country Korea was for decades a Japanese colony. What label did Koreans give to your patriotic activists? Terrorists?"

In fact, Koreans never called them terrorists. Under Japanese imperial domination during the period of 1910-1945, many Korean patriots killed Japanese rulers and officials using guns or bombs.

Yassin argued, "If our resistance is called terrorism, it might be a balance to Israeli state terrorism."

His argument reminded me of a Pakistani activist I met in Kashmir in 2002, who argued that he was not a terrorist but a freedom fighter. Yassin also pointed out that many more Palestinian civilians, including women and children, had been killed by "Israeli state terrorism" than Israeli civilians killed by Hamas bombs.

Abdul Aziz Rantissi, at that time a high-ranking leader in the political committee of Hamas and who was assassinated April 17th, argued that Hamas had no alternative left to them but suicide bombings to regain the Palestinian territory lost during the Six Day War in 1967. Like Yassin, Rantissi's definition of Hamas' tactics was a "martyrdom operation by the weak."

Surprisingly, he expressed an optimistic vision for the future of Palestinians. "Despite weak military forces, ethnics with a strong will to self-reliance will win in the end. Look at the French defeat in Algeria in 1962, the American retreat from Vietnam in 1973, the Israeli retreat from South Lebanon in 2000. Likewise, Hamas will overcome the current plight and will win someday. I believe in the progress of history."

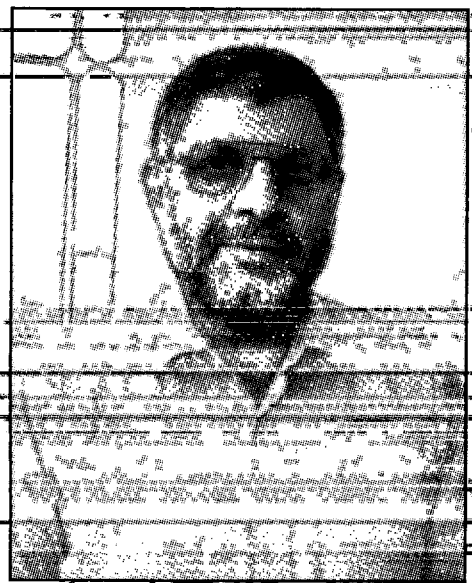
## Two Key Words

Although some leaders and intellectuals I interviewed in Jordan and in Egypt were critical of Hamas tactics, they showed strong sympathy for Palestinian causes. Shaher Bak, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in Jordan, argued for change. "Some decisive change should be made in order to stop the current bloodshed situation," he said. "That change might at first

be from the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territory, and simultaneously acknowledgement of the existence of Israeli statehood from the neighboring Arab countries." Dr. Hassan Abou Taleb, Editor-in Chief of the *Arab Strategic Report* of the Center of Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, argued that extremist tactics like suicide bomb attacks would be repeated if the current Israeli occupation continues.

Political actors on both sides of the conflict rely on their own key words to interpret the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. From the Israeli view, the key words are "history" and "religion." On the other hand, from the Palestinian view, the key words are "frustration," "anger," and, again, "history."

Although I understand the Israeli posi-



The late Abdel Aziz Rantissi (top) and a masked Hamas militant (bottom)

tion, I could not help but sympathize with the Palestinians as I stood on the streets of Gaza. The Israeli government needs to pay more regard to Palestinian human rights. One of the most basic human rights is the right to autonomous statehood.

To revive the nearly moribund Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the stronger side should be sincere with its weak and frustrated counterpart. Even though Israel and the United States object to the deployment of an international peacekeeping force or international observers, either of these options is a reasonable plan to ease the current crisis. One simple conclusion: the current foreign policy of the Bush Administration, which does not focus on the self-reliance of Palestinian people, will not decrease the violence of the Middle East.

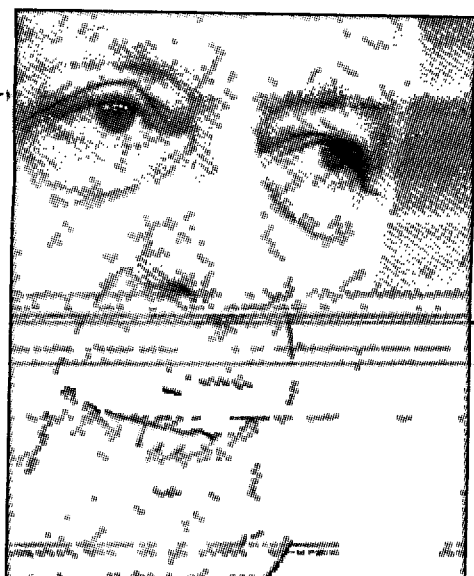
Jae Myung Kim is a PhD student in the Politics department.



# Israel's Assassinations and the Great Double Standard

WILLIAM ADLER

Amnesty International called it "a war crime." Tony Blair said, "We condemn [it] just as we condemn all terrorism." Sweden called it "illegal and disgusting." King Abdullah of Jordan said it was a "hideous crime." Ethnic slaughter and slavery in the Sudan? Another mass grave found in Iraq? The violent suppression of protests in



Sheik Ahmed Yassin, founder of Hamas (top) and Ariel Sharon, Israeli Prime Minister (bottom)

China? Sadly, no. The world pays scant attention when thousands are killed (the human mind has trouble grasping it) and those events all blur into each other. But the killing of one man—one terrorist—set off an explosion of vitriol around the world: Abdel Aziz Rantissi, the leader of Hamas.

Rantissi was assassinated less than a month after Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' founder, was similarly killed by an Israeli missile strike. Yassin's death brought about a similar international reaction. In both cases, only the United States refrained from condemning Israel, opting instead for statements recognizing "Israel's right to self-defense" but calling for "restraint." The rest of the world rained fire and brimstone on Israel. Although the US vetoed it, the UN Security Council considered a resolution condemning Israel—despite never once having condemned Hamas for its deliberate slaughter of innocent Israelis, and refusing to even mention the terrorist organization by name

in the resolution.

This newspaper last month carried an interview with a Hamas "militant," Jamal Abu Alhija. (Incidentally, were Mohammad Atta and his collaborators "militants"? ) It contained so many outright lies that I won't try to correct them. But what stood out most prominently was Alhija's seeming acceptance of a peace plan which would return Israel to its 1967 borders.

This may not sound odd to the casual reader, since this is essentially what UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 say should happen as part of a negotiated settlement; except that Hamas has never recognized Israel's right to exist. So naturally this piqued my interest, until I read a bit more closely: Alhija continued by saying "that is a preliminary phase and not a permanent solution... One day, they should return our lands" (emphasis added). To interpret, Alhija means that he can only accept an Israeli withdrawal to the '67 borders as an interim step towards his actual goal, which is the destruction of Israel altogether.

Now we've hit the nub of the issue: Hamas is an organization dedicated to the elimination of a nation; more specifically, to the eradication of all Jews from the Middle East. If you doubt Hamas' intentions, consider their covenant: "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: 'O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him'" (Article 7). Or if you prefer, listen to Rantissi himself: "By God we will not leave one Jew alive in Palestine" (shown on Al-Jazeera television, June 10, 2003).

What, precisely, is the difference between stopping someone who is about to blow himself up, and stopping another from planning that killing? Why is it acceptable for the US to target Osama bin Laden but unacceptable for Israel to target Sheikh Yassin? These rhetorical questions point to a double standard that is applied to Israel alone. African nations engage in decade-long wars, dictators indiscriminately kill their opponents by the hundreds, China occupies Tibet, Russia ravages Chechnya—and the world is silent. It is not enough to simply shake your head and agree that these too should be condemned, but political exigencies make it difficult, etc., etc. One must recognize the double standard, under which Israel is asked to be more "restrained" than any other nation would be given the same circumstances.

After Yassin's assassination, Rantissi was asked if he feared an Israeli attempt on his life, to which he replied, "We will all die one day. Nothing will change. If by Apache or by cardiac arrest, I prefer Apache." He certainly got his wish—if only the new leaders of Hamas, hiding underground, were quite so brave.

William Adler is a student in the PhD program in Politics.

# Islamophobia: A Growing Global Disease

ELVAN ZELDA ELCIN

The media—and especially the US media—is notorious for displaying Muslims burning American flags, waving rifles or shouting in chaotic streets, and for depicting children joyously waving Osama bin Laden posters. Newspaper headlines have consistently labelled Muslims as "fanatics" and made it appear that their days are spent engaging in only one activity: "jihad." For some time now, the Muslim community has argued that the media's portrayal and representation of Islam is one of the most prevalent, dangerous, and socially significant sources of Islamophobia throughout the world. While certainly not the only source of this "phobia," the important role the media plays in shaping attitudes toward Muslims merits a closer look at the images it projects.

Probably the most misguided claim waged at Islam is that it is one-dimensional. The Islamic community is portrayed as a single, monolithic unit lacking any internal differentiation, dissent or opinion. The media has created this image by ignoring the diversity and debate that exists within the American and global Islamic communities. Consequently, the media tends to attribute to all Muslims the entire constellation of extremist and negative characteristics that constitute Islamophobia.

Ahmed Rashid has eloquently relayed this message in his book *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, by stating that "Westerners are not the only people who misconstrue the idea of jihad. [...] the new fundamentalist and militant Islamic movements have distorted its greater meaning of an inner struggle to be a good and devout Muslim [...]"

Hanadi, a member of Brooklyn's Muslim community, has not only observed the media's role in shaping this phobia, but has experienced Islamophobia first-hand. "I have regularly observed the various verbal attacks and violent acts being committed against 'Muslim-looking' people," she said. She went on to explain how two Middle Eastern men were attacked in Bay-Ridge and a woman was chased by a rowdy group simply because she was wearing the *hijab*. "This sentiment towards Islam was always present, but these events became excessive after 9/11; this is when the media became unreasonably outspoken about anything relating to Islam."

She also shared her own experience: "Amidst a horde of vehicles about to enter the Verazanno Bridge, my car was conveniently pulled over by a paranoid police officer, since he heard some Arabic music a cue that I'm a terrorist." He demanded to see her license, registration and insurance, and also to know her ethnic identity.

Hanadi pointed to acts of terrorism in the US that were not committed by Muslims, but where the media assumed that Muslims had committed them before any evidence was put forth. The bombing in Oklahoma City prompted the media to report that "another 'Mohamed'" had masterminded the tragedy. A few months ago, four drunken college students made false claims that provoked immediate reports of "Muslim terrorists triggering a bomb on the bridge." The media conveniently failed to notice that they were drunk, unnecessarily obstructing traffic, and were not Muslim.

Instead of taking care to report the details of tragic events, the US media readily jumps on the blame-Muslims-first bandwagon. By reporting events in this manner, journalists fuel their audience's minds with falsehoods, which are then translated into behaviours in the context of everyday life.

For instance, issues of Islamophobia also come up in the classroom when I am teaching. The holy month of Ramadan, in which Muslims fast for a period of thirty days, created extreme controversy among my students. I was not only looked upon with disgust or stared at, but was called a "terrorist." I responded by asking my classmates whether I should remove the bomb I had in my backpack. Total silence ensued.

It is not surprising that the public remains largely unaware of what is happening to their worldview when they read words like "Islamic" or "Muslim" coupled with terms like "extremist," "fundamentalist," or "terrorist." Since it makes for a more effective story, the media tends to project the loudest voices that fit into their own agenda. This, of course, has the effect of projecting a cynical worldview in which all Muslims are the same.

This is wrong! It is imperative for the media to represent Islam as accurately as possible. If they do not, they will dehumanize and fictionalize the religion. Moreover, the media fosters Islamophobia by interpreting Islam as backwards and one-dimensional, incompatible with the West, the barbaric enemy of modernity, and a manipulative ideology used to oppress and control those who practice Islam. This causes the media to incessantly submerge itself in its own derogatory views.

In the end, Islamophobia is dangerous because it does not respect the individual. It is an indiscriminate prejudice that violates every Muslim regardless of their social, ethnic, or cultural orientation. It is even more dangerous in that it affects the motives, attitudes, and behaviour of millions of people by shaping their understanding of Islam.

Elvan Zelda Elcin is a student in the PhD program in Politics

# Like Mall-Walking for the Urbanite: A Review of the 2004 Whitney Biennial

PAIGE POLING

Forget the cultural capital bonus points you get for attending the Whitney Biennial. Never mind the intellectual stimulation, the political messages, or using art as a diversion from the real world. In the tradition of Big Apple-style multi-tasking and an anti-zen attitude in general, use this exhibit as a kind of psychedelic obstacle course. It is multi-tasking because, although I have suggested you neglect most of the reasons people go to see art, some of those will surely seep through your workout regime.

Let's get started! You will probably take public transportation (good for you!) and exit the 6 train at the 77th street stop. Go west to Madison and 75th where the large gray mass of the Whitney looms. This walk will serve as part of your warm-up: Remember to take it slow and breathe. If you have come on a busy day, do some more stretching while standing in line. Don't forget to keep your movements graceful, and try to keep a thoughtful look so as not to attract too much attention and risk confusing other attendees, who may think you are part of the exhibit.

One of the most important stretching exercises is the head tilt. Lower your head to your right shoulder and extend your left leg, keeping your foot on the ground. Many exhibit viewers try this mid-show and experience cramping. Now repeat on the other side. The more advanced athlete may try the stretching technique called The Sophisticate, which is performed by lifting the right arm from the waist as if holding a cigarette, taking a (hypothetical) puff, and exhaling, with head lifted, in a long-breath. This is combined with a look of knowing superiority mixed with an only slightly detectable amount of reverence. Don't strain.

The Whitney has the Biennial arranged so that you start at the top. For those who aren't used to a strong workout, take the elevator as directed. The rebellious mountain-climber types can take the stairs and start at whatever floor they wish.

When starting at the top, you will be confronted by a large wall text explaining the intentions of the curators. This is where the workout begins! Run past this text without reading it and proceed to the art. We wouldn't want you to be biased by people who think way too much about how to connect disparate artworks. Now, keeping up your slight jog, so as not to run into anyone, proceed from room to room. You are allowed to stop and take a breather if anything catches your eye. To vary your workout, observe the viewers and assume the pose of each person for about five seconds.

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Since this exhibit of 108 artists ("and collaborative teams") is heavy on the psychedelic colors and 60s/70s-inspired aesthetic, try to wear some appropriate workout gear, perhaps short shorts with a reflective stripe on each side. The Whitney acknowledges "Psychedelia" as one of the themes of the exhibit, so don't worry about the dress code.

If you need a mid-workout cooldown, you can get comfortable outfit in Sue de Beer's "Hans und Grete," a two-channel video installation from 2002, complete with enormous stuffed animals you can lay on, shag carpet and overwhelming pink ambience. Videos play on two screens, showing sometimes only slightly different views, and sometimes what seems like an alternate universe to the other side. Air guitar and earnest interviews mixed in with pubescent, spring-creaking sex are certainly amusing, but contain just the right amount of edge to make you feel like you aren't relaxing too much from your workout. There is a political undertone, but remember this exhibit

experience is more about your body than brain. You can experience similar effects of simultaneous tension and relaxation in Virgil Marti's installation "Grow Room", 2002, a brightly lit room covered in reflective Mylar, and printed flowers.

Although de Beer's work is supposed to fall under the "Gothic" theme the Whitney propose, don't let it or the other Gothic works slow you down. In fact, David Altmejd's were-wolf parts are so glittery and sparkly they might just perk up your workout regime.

For an artwork that will really work your neck muscles and those side-to-side flexors in your legs, check out Zak Smith's "Pictures of What Happens on each page of Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*." 2004 is the ticket.

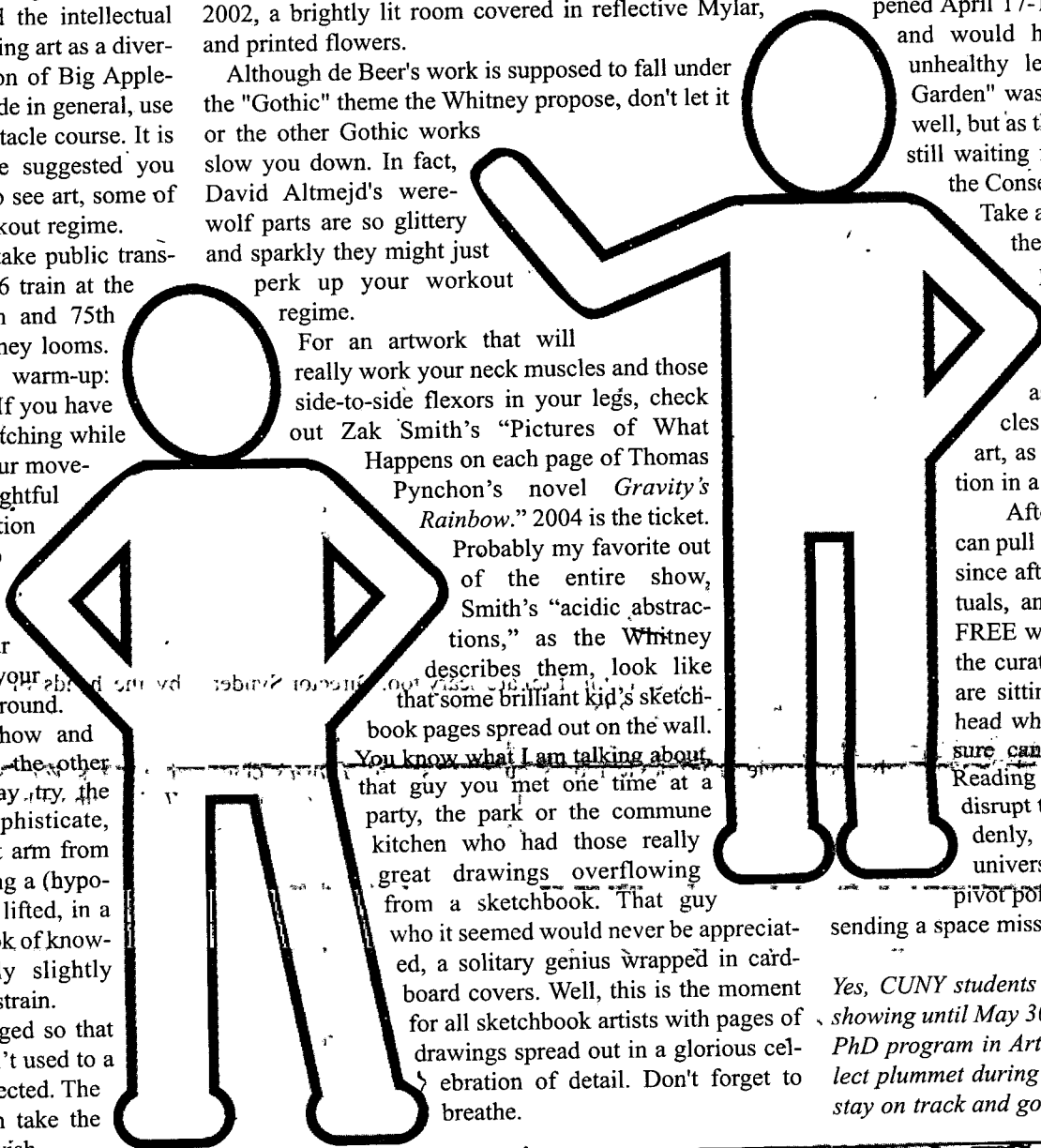
Probably my favorite out of the entire show, Smith's "acidic abstractions," as the Whitney describes them, look like that some brilliant kid's sketchbook pages spread out on the wall. You know what I am talking about, that guy you met one time at a party, the park or the commune kitchen who had those really great drawings overflowing from a sketchbook. That guy who it seemed would never be appreciated, a solitary genius wrapped in cardboard covers. Well, this is the moment for all sketchbook artists with pages of drawings spread out in a glorious celebration of detail. Don't forget to breathe.

The Biennial has also provided some off-site exhibits in Central Park for the avid art consumer/art athlete. "Three Day Weekend", 2004 by Dave Muller and others happened April 17-19th, but don't worry, it was boring and would have lowered your heart rate to unhealthy levels. Yayoi Kusama's "Narcissus Garden" was set to have opened on the 17th as well, but as the groundskeeper told me they were still waiting for the silver balls that were to fill the Conservatory waters to come from Japan. Take a run by anyway, and pay homage to the title of her work by admiring your physique in the water.

The key to a good workout at the Biennial is to remember that laughter is good medicine, as well as good exercise for the facial muscles. Feel free to chuckle at most of the art, as it is a valid response to this exhibition in a complicit rather than derisive sense.

After you are home and showered, you can pull out the catalog you probably bought, since after all graduate students are intellectuals, and as a GC student you did get in FREE with your CUNY ID. Read and enjoy the curator's articles but just make sure you are sitting down so you don't fall on your head when reading sentences like "This fissure can be understood as the pivot point." Reading a sentence that begins like that could disrupt the balance of the universe and, suddenly, we could be thrust into an alternate universe where hypothetical holes become pivot points. Day-Glo colors are exciting and sending a space mission to the moon is an amazing feat.

Yes, CUNY students get in free with ID. The Biennial is showing until May 30th. Paige Poling, is a student in the PhD program in Art History. She reminds you that intellect plummet during a leave of absence and urges you to stay on track and go for the gold!



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# The Passion of the Christ, Dawn of the Dead, and Kill Bill, Vol. 2

Reviewed by Tony Monchinski

One late night I turned on the TV and was watching Comedy Central's *Cops*-spoof *Reno 911*. For ten minutes I watched the ersatz officers serve a warrant on a poor white family in a trailer park, leading to the chase and arrest of one of the family's male members. I was laughing uproariously the whole time. Then it suddenly dawned on me: I wasn't watching *Reno 911*. I was actually watching *Cops*. Oops! I imagine the feeling that incident left me with might have been familiar to the guy sitting across the theater from me when we viewed Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. My fellow, anonymous viewer was dozing off and on throughout the film. Did he ever awake and wonder, "Hey, wait a minute? Is this the new *Dawn of the Dead* movie?" The speculation isn't as far fetched as it sounds. By the end of *The Passion*, Jesus, I mean Jim Carvziel, is in shambles and wouldn't look out of place staggering outside a Wisconsin shopping mall terrorizing a handful of human survivors holed up inside.

Mel Gibson is a man on a mission, and he takes liberties with his Jesus yarn. Obviously the historical suffering and death of Christ wasn't enough for Mad Max. Mel embellishes the sado-masochism: hey, thief on the cross next to Jesus, you want to taunt the big guy, well, here's a crow to take out your eyes! Take that! Which Gospel is that in? The Gospel of Mel, of course. Or, during the flaying with broken glass at the hands of the Romans, was it my imagination, or did Jesus lose a nipple? Which begs the question, when Jim Carvziel is resurrected at the end of the film, his lily white skin—common for a middle Eastern Jew, like Jesus, no doubt—is healed, leaving only the holes nailed through his palms; so did Jesus come back with two nipples or one? We never find out.

Okay, without further hesitation, the question everyone seems to be debating: is *The Passion* anti-Semitic? It is true that the bad Jews are bad Jews, and many of them are darker-skinned, "swarthy-looking" and I espied an oversized schnozz [nose] or two. But there are also good Jews, like Jesus himself and his disciples, or Simon, who is forced into helping Christ carry his cross, or Mary Magdalene, one-time escort (read: "professional date", i.e. whore) turned religious convert.

And just as there are bad Jews, there are also bad Romans. The way they flay Jesus or stop on the march to Calvary to open the random can of whoop ass on the poor guy - yikes! And yes, the devil is a woman: a bald woman, gaunt and without hair, looking like she's losing a battle with leukemia. Is Gibson guilty of misogyny, picking on the terminally ill, or both? But Satan also assumes the guise of children and a fantastical beast that chases a cowering Judas from beneath a bridge while the Jews toss Jesus off the top in an impromptu bungee-jump torture move—again, not in the Bible. I think a more trenchant criticism of *The Passion* is that the bad guys are really bad guys and the good guys are really pretty decent sorts, if a tad wimpy. How else do you explain watching your friend/son/religious leader get his ass kicked, crucified and killed? Final summation: *The Passion* will make a decent rental, and it might have special resonance if you're John Ashcroft or one his ilk, but don't run out and spend your ten dollars on it.

Spend them instead on director Zack Snyder's re-envisioning and thoroughly entertaining remake of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. In 1978's original *Dawn*, four human beings find themselves trapped in a Pittsburgh shopping mall while hordes of flesh-eating zombies stagger around outside. At one point in the original, when asked why the undead are drawn to the local shopping mall, a character answers with a straight face, "This must have been a very important place in their lives." All goes well for the four until the arrival of a motorcycle gang.

The remake lacks the original's motorcycles and its overt critique of consumer culture, but it also gives us six-

teen people holed up in the mall instead of four. By the end of the film, their numbers are whittled down big time. The zombies get to feast and the new *Dawn*'s FX guy, David LeRoy Anderson (whose other work includes *Men in Black*) gets to shine, turning in effects that the original film's FX man, Tom Savini, would be proud of.

*Dawn* is everything a horror movie should be: scary, gory and fun-fun-fun! The characters are likeable and we feel for them. Sarah Polley's Ana (who could, at a quick glance, pass for Uma Thurman) is forced to leave her husband after he is infected and becomes a lunatic zombie in search of his next human happy meal. As the world goes to hell around her, a fortuitous car crash teams her up with Ving Rhames's cop Kenneth. It's been a long time since



Rhames got a good acting role. Not since he was sodomized in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* has he brought such passion to a part. As a shotgun-wielding no-nonsense cop, Rhames flexes his forearms and blows zombies away. Jake Weber's Michael is also a very believable character, unassuming and equanimous in the face of a world turned upside down.

The zombies in this film are scary too. Director Snyder obviously saw *28 Days Later*, as the undead in this *Dawn* don't just move, they book, as in they run—Marion Jones' style. The movie moves quickly as well. *Dawn*'s chief failing is its brevity. Director Snyder packs a lot into an hour and forty-some minutes, which leads to sometimes choppy editing. Imagine if he had drawn his film out to two or two and a half hours, or better yet, released it in two volumes.

*Dawn of the Dead* left me with more questions than it answered. No, I'm not referring to the usual fodder of most critics: what started the infection; where did it come from, and so on. Instead, I found myself hoping that with the recent spate of successful recent zombie box office features (e.g., this *Dawn* remake, which, by the way, knocked *The Passion* out of 1st place; *Resident Evil*; *House of the Dead*; *28 Days Later*, etc.), maybe, just maybe, the godfather himself, George A. Romero, will find the financial backing necessary to bring his envisioned fourth zombie feature—*Dead Reckoning*—to the big screen. Consider, is it just a coincidence that Jesus and the Dead zombies have so much in common? In *Dawn*, people suffer gruesome deaths and come back to life as flesh-craving zombies. Jesus asks his disciples to eat his flesh (a "miracle" Catholics call transubstantiation), suffers a gruesome death, and, as Christians would have it, comes back to life.

All good cinema sees the viewer leaving the theater changed. I left *Dawn of the Dead* wondering why I felt more empathy for human beings stuck in a mall with hundreds of thousands of zombies amassed outside than I did watching Jesus Christ get tortured and killed. Furthermore, current Attorney General John Ashcroft lost his 2000 Missouri Senate seat to late Governor Mel Carnahan. At the time, Ashcroft was the incumbent and Carnahan was, well, he was dead. It was the first time a man posthumously won election to the Senate. If zombies did rise up and take over the world, would electoral politics continue as is? Things that make you go hmmm.

When Quentin Tarantino was getting started in cinema he lied on his resume and claimed he had a bit part in the original *Dawn of the Dead* as a zombie. With *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, Tarantino dispels all doubts that *Pulp Fiction* was a fluke. Tarantino's problem in a nutshell: *Reservoir Dogs* was followed by the masterpiece *Pulp Fiction*. Jackie Brown, a good film by any standards, was not in the same

league as *Pulp Fiction*—what film really is?—and led some naysayers to write Quentin off. Well, Quentin's back, and he's revisiting all his favorite things on movie audiences throughout the land.

What *The Passion*, *Dawn*, and *Kill Bill* all have in common is the self-indulgence of their directors. Just as sure as John Ashcroft thinks dancing leads to sin and wants to police pornography (which he defines as including HBO), Gibson has a religious vision which he was willing to sink millions of his own money into for all of us to see. Zack Snyder took a Romero masterpiece and reworked it, improving on it but presenting a decidedly original film. And Quentin Tarantino is serving us the equivalent of a pizza pie with everything: spaghetti western, Shaw-

Brothers Kung Fu extravaganza, blaxploitation flick, comic book homage and B-movie jubilee, all with extra dialogue. Where *Vol. I* of "Tarantino's 4th film" was heavy on action, *Vol. II* piles it on thick with the dialogue. Yes, there is action, and yes, some of it will make you do a

double take, like when Uma Thurman's Bride character tears an eyeball from an opponent's socket and grinds it under foot—barefoot, no less. But Quentin returns in *Vol. II* to what he is best at: story telling and dialogue.

For those who don't know: *Kill Bill* follows Uma Thurman's character, The Bride, a.k.a. Black Mamba, a.k.a. Beatrix Kiddo, on her trail of revenge. Left for dead by the hands of the elite assassination squad she once worked with, the Bride emerges from a coma in *Vol. I* to track down the five men and women responsible for her dire straits. *Vol. I* saw the dispatch of two of her foes. *Vol. II* picks up with the hunt for the final three.

Quentin Tarantino grew up watching TV and has single-handedly resurrected several stars from obscurity, such as John Travolta, whose success in *Pulp Fiction* is probably still paying for the one-time Welcome Back Cotter sweatshop's private plane so he can jet around the world to his Christian Science get-togethers. The *Kill Bill* films resurrect David Carradine, he of Kung Fu fame. David plays the title character, the man Uma Thurman's Bride is sworn to kill. David's real-life brother, Keith, is currently portraying Wild Bill Hickock on HBO's new series, *Deadwood*. Enjoy it before John Ashcroft gets his self-righteous greasy little hands on it. David's fictional brother in *Vol. II* is Michael Madsen, another guy who hasn't had a good role since he played cop-torturer Mr. Blonde in *Reservoir Dogs*. My favorite actor in the series is Gordon Liu, who portrays a Japanese Yakuza gangster in *Vol. I* and an ancient Chinese Kung Fu Master curmudgeon who despises Japanese, Americans and women equally in *Vol. II*.

A few words about the women of *Kill Bill*. Uma Thurman is a talented actress who works very well with Tarantino. It's good to see that she broke things off in real life with philandering husband Ethan Hawke. Hawke should be lucky Thurman can distinguish fiction from fact: what if he had awoken one night, sans genitalia, John Wayne Bobbitt style, with the Bride decked out in a tight yellow jump suit brandishing a Hattori Hanzo samurai sword? Daryl Hannah, Lucy Lui and Vivica Fox are all convincing assassins, in a comic book sense. Because that's what makes *Kill Bill* Volumes I and II so entertaining: neither film takes itself too seriously. The violence is comic bookish, with bodies spewing more blood than they can contain. Unlike the violence of Gibson's *The Passion*, Quentin Tarantino is winking at us, telling us to take his films with a grain of salt, to just sit back and enjoy. Like Gibson, Tarantino is being equally self-indulgent: he's making a movie he would like to see, and it's a movie I think you will like as well.

Tony Monchinski is a student in the PhD program in Politics.



# Getting Back on Track

## The Long Detour: The History and Future of the American Left

by James Weinstein  
(Westview Press, 2003)  
Reviewed by Jason Schulman

James Weinstein has not given up on American socialism. His admitted "pathological optimism" appears to have little diminished from the days twenty-eight years past when he founded the still-running biweekly newsmagazine *In These Times*, or even from thirty-five years ago when he founded the journal *Socialist Revolution* (later *Socialist Review*, and today *Radical Society*). He still sees the US as "tending inexorably, if fitfully, towards a more inclusive democracy." And, just as he angered some on the Left when he confirmed that Julius Rosenberg did in fact pass information to the Soviet Union, he will doubtless anger yet more with this book of history and strategic advice.

Much of the history that Weinstein covers in *The Long Detour* will be familiar territory to many leftists. Here again is the story of the Socialist Party (SP) of Eugene Debs, Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger and Big Bill Haywood, and its forerunners in utopian colonies and the Socialist Labor Party. Not much is new here—though Weinstein's representation of Marx's critique of anarchism is appreciated. Marx denigrated workers' "spontaneous" fight for the right to vote and to organize unions, to which Weinstein responds perceptively: "When the left fails to create viable movements that offer a place in which to act on the left's own behalf, anarchist ideas and groups have had a lingering appeal, especially to newly radicalized young people." Contemporary radicalism offers proof positive of this statement. Weinstein's main aim in telling the story of the SP once more is to stress that the reforms offered in the party's program eventually became part of mainstream political discourse, even as the party itself declined. Also notable is the struggle of the SP to distinguish itself from Progressive Era reformers without marginalizing itself.

In his chapters on the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, Weinstein revisits another well-documented history—one that veteran leftist readers probably already know and which newcomers may not find particularly relevant or even interesting. But even today it's worthwhile to explode Stalinism's socialist pretensions, and perhaps nothing does it better than Weinstein's example of how the Russian city of Magnitogorsk—in the 1930s the very model of a "socialist" city—was modeled after Gary, Indiana's giant US Steel plant. The USSR was, in Weinstein's words, "an amalgam of the worst aspects of feudalism, the harshest practices of capitalism, and social protections associated with socialism"—and indeed, it "put the finishing touches on the American left" by distorting socialism's very meaning, even as the Communist Party USA was just becoming a real presence in American life. He critiques the American Communist Party for, ironically, bequeathing an "aversion to universal principles" to the New Left via its operation through—and submersion into—single-issue movements.

This is a fair point. Also, he is not far off when he discusses how, in the 1970s, the post-New Left's "attacks on traditional institutions—grossly exaggerated by right-wing media—helped create a large working-class constituency of 'Reagan Democrats.'"

Weinstein goes awry, however, in his criticism of mandatory busing to achieve school integration of black and white children. He claims it accomplished nothing except segregation within schools. This may be, in fact, what happened, but his discussion fails to engage with the history of the Black Freedom Movement around public education, particular-

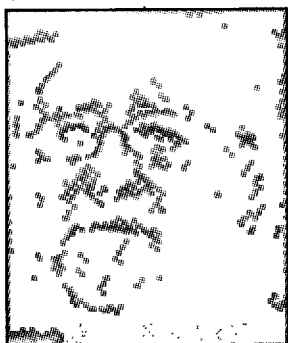
ly in Boston, where it was determined that the School Committee engaged in *intentional* segregation and hence desegregation was necessary. Weinstein makes it seem as though busing was an arbitrary decision made in the 1970s; he fails to mention that black parents were effectively agitating for it as early as 1950. That is, as Ruth Batson said at the time, black parents simply wanted to get their children "to schools where there were the best resources for education growth."

Premonitions of Weinstein's final chapter, "What Is To Be Done," appear in his discussions of populist and socialist Democrats such as Upton Sinclair, Floyd Olson and Huey Long, and particularly in his discussion of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota. Throughout the 1910s, the Socialist Party tried to organize farmers across North Dakota, and failed. In 1915, the same year that North Dakota switched to an open primary, Socialist organizer A.C. Townley founded the NPL. Since the Democratic Party was a nonentity, the NPL ran candidates as Republicans. But NPL candidates didn't join the GOP or become a part of the party structure. In 1916, it swept its way into office, taking control of the North Dakota House of Representatives and elected a governor. By 1918, it completely controlled the government of North Dakota, an accomplishment that far surpassed the Socialist Party's electoral fortunes—and yet the SP and the NPL had the very same platform.

It isn't surprising, then, that Weinstein argues against efforts to build an independent leftist party in the US and is in favor of running leftists in Democratic Party primaries; of doing to the Democrats what the Christian Coalition did to the Republicans. Of course, he is arguing for more than just electoralism; rightly, he says we should emulate the New Right in "establishing institutions devoted to winning the battle of ideas by relating to our natural bases among the American people in terms that they understand and around issues that most concern wider constituencies at any given period."

Weinstein's critique of Ralph Nader's run for president in 2000 and Green Party strategy in general will not endear him to many contemporary leftists. The problem is that there has yet to be a credible third party strategy for overcoming the barriers of our non-parliamentary, single-member-district, gerrymandered electoral system. Furthermore, given the complete absence of party discipline in the Democratic and Republican parties, it makes little sense to denounce leftists who run (or even, heaven forbid, get elected) on those ballot lines as corporate sell-outs. That said, Weinstein runs the risk of becoming the mirror image of his third-party critics. Was Bernie Sanders wrong in running for Congress as an independent? Is the Vermont Progressive Party wrong to not be a Democratic caucus? I'd hardly say so. Leftists would do

see *Back on Track*, next page



Left: James Weinstein, author of *The Long Detour*; Right: Jehane Noujaim, *Control Room* director, on the right

# Control Room: They Report, You Decide

Directed by Jehane Noujaim  
Reviewed by Charles Bottomley

Talk about being at the right place at the right time. When Operation Iraqi Freedom broke out last March, Egyptian-born filmmaker Jehane Noujaim headed right to its Qatar-based head. With camera in tow, she gained access to the US Central Command complex and its sometime nemesis, the Arab news agency Al Jazeera.

Blasted as propagandists for Saddam Hussein by Donald Rumsfeld and hated by Arab leaders for their willingness to question their totalitarian policies, the maverick news agency is paradoxically the unofficial voice of the Middle East. For those of us without the benefit of satellite or knowledge of Arabic, Noujaim's excellent documentary *Control Room* is a revelation.

The journalists of Al Jazeera's press room turn out to be as cynical a crew as any of the yellow journalists in the acidic 1929 newspaper comedy *The Front Page*. Senior producer Sameer Khader explains that Al Jazeera must produce images to counter the United States' own smoke-screen of spin. But, he admits, if Fox News offered him a job, he'd take it. "And the Arab nightmare," he shrugs, "would become the American dream."

Burly Sudanese newshound Hassan Ibrahim reserves his skepticism for the PR waffle doled out at CentCom. There reporters jostle for scoops, but have to make do with daily briefings and constant interviews with military publicists. Noujaim's most intriguing subject is a sincere flack, Lieutenant Josh Rushing, who gradually accepts the notion that there might be more to war than what's in the press release.

With journalists confined to the CentCom compound, the military keeps a tight control of the war's narrative. When the press pack sniff out that Baghdad is about to fall, they're instead fed the inspiring myth of Pvt. Jessica Lynch's liberation. Al Jazeera's footage, taken by their embedded cameramen, offers the correctives to the invaders' gloss: burned baby corpses, POWs terrorized by their Iraqi captors, and the conduct of our boys as they ransack homes and harass citizens.

The Al Jazeera staffers disparage and deconstruct the images they're fed. Amid the amazement at Hussein's speedy cave-in, the iconic demolition of his statue in Firdos Square is remorselessly pulled apart. Evidence piles up that the event was staged. Observing the crowds filing into the empty square for the cameras, the chain-smoking Khader notes, "I was born in Iraq ... and those men are not Iraqis."

Noujaim also directed the hip documentary *Startup.com*, and she's good at capturing the intimate beat of a workplace. She cavesdrops on an Al Jazeera producer berating his assistant for securing an interview with an American conspiracy nut and an interpreter throwing up his hands in despair at the hot air he has to translate from the English. A former MTV employee, Noujaim has been in the belly of these media giants herself, and knows how these offhand moments humanize the people behind the news.

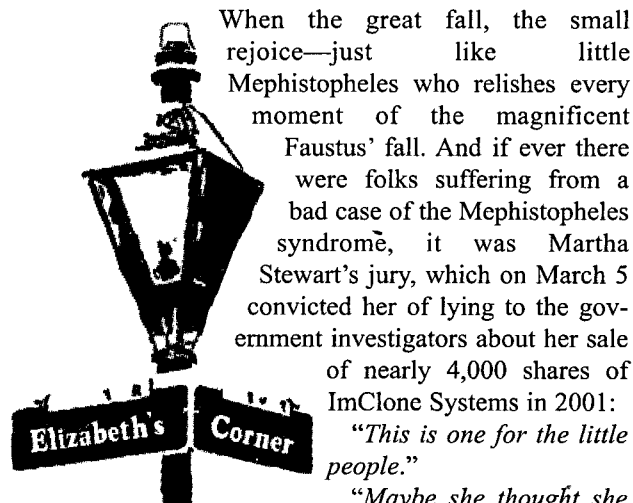
Caught up in history's whirlwind and pieced together after the fact, *Control Room* can sometimes feel a little aimless and equates objectivity with an absence of a guiding thesis. But it feels up-to-the-minute and is undeniably provocative. As the war turns out to be far from over, and the American media starts to wonder how much it led us by the nose into the Iraq chanel house, *Control Room* is an essential document.

*Control Room* opens Friday, May 21 at the Film Forum, 209 W Houston Street, between 6th & 7th Avenue.

Charles Bottomley is a freelance journalist

# Martha and the Mephistopheles Syndrome

ELIZABETH PRIMAMORE



When the great fall, the small rejoice—just like little Mephistopheles who relishes every moment of the magnificent Faustus' fall. And if ever there were folks suffering from a bad case of the Mephistopheles syndrome, it was Martha Stewart's jury, which on March 5 convicted her of lying to the government investigators about her sale of nearly 4,000 shares of ImClone Systems in 2001:

"This is one for the little people."  
"Maybe she thought she was above everything and didn't have to do things other people have to do."

"It might give the average guy a little more confidence that people can invest money in the market and everything's going to be on the up and up."

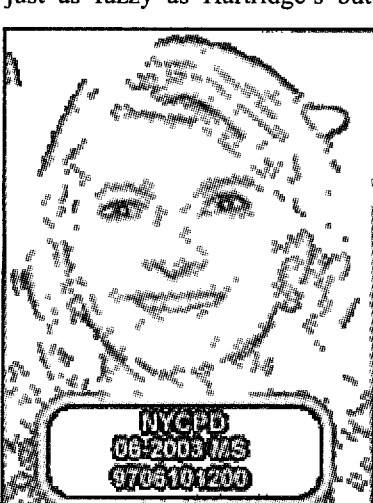
These are the words—as reported in the *New York Times*—of Chappell Hartridge, a 47 year old Medicare claims administrator from the Bronx, and the first juror to leap in front of the cameras, eager to talk about the verdict. His logic fuzzy, he doesn't realize that Martha's situation has nothing to do with the corporate arena—it has to do with a relationship between a wealthy lady and her broker:

Then there's the young assistant stock broker and failed model, Doug Fanueil, a man who calls himself "baby." Remember those photos the *NY Post* ran of Fanueil making a fist while showing off his ill-fitting red jeans, bare midriff, and fake tattoo? Perturbed by Martha's iciness to him on the phone one day at work, Fanueil snapped back. In an email he bragged to a friend, "Baby (meaning himself), put Miss Martha in her place."

And how about anchor Jane Clayson of "The Early Show" who insisted on questioning Martha about her upcoming trial while Martha was busy chopping a head of lettuce. "I want to focus on my salad," Martha insisted. And hack away she did.

And the worst offender—Martha's friend Mariana Pasternack who testified against her at the trial, and felt compelled to add this little tidbit to her testimony: While vacationing together, Martha had once told her after speaking with her broker that it was good to have brokers who "tell you these things." Did Pasternack have to say that? Remember, it came as an afterthought, not core testimony.

But most desperate of all are the prosecutors, the hungry animals who thrive on prosecuting celebrities because they crave celebrity themselves. "The case would send an important message that we will not, and frankly, cannot tolerate dishonesty and corruption," said David N. Kelley, the United States Attorney. Kelley's logic sounds just as fuzzy as Hartridge's but the difference is that Kelley is cunning, Hartridge is not.



Another innocent victim of misogynist resentment.

Kelley knows that the best way to hide his ulterior motives for fame, money, and promotion is to cloak those motives in the discourses of justice, righteousness, and good. And don't forget that when Martha was indicted her lawyers tried to cut a deal with prosecutors, but could not agree when they insisted she serve jail

# How to Loose a Student in 10 Steps

SAFINAZ SALEH

Imagine:

The new EO of a respectable graduate department calls an emergency staff meeting. As the staff members step into the room, the EO begins to explain the reason for the meeting, saying, "We have a new and original mission. We want to cleanse the department of its students. So we all need to brainstorm about the most effective ways to drive students out of the department. By so doing, we want to set a precedent among all educational institutions, and establish my reign."

The staff then starts thinking of ways to accomplish that mission. They come up with ten easy steps:

1. Disrespect students. Deal with them as though they were slaves. Never listen to them. If a student asks to see the EO, the assistant should say, "The EO cannot meet with you. She/He is too busy finding ways to kick you out." If you must meet with them face to face, make sure to be as disrespectful as possible—they won't be coming back!

2. Encroach on the privacy of students. Intrude into channels of communication designated as students-only, then claim ignorance and apologize when caught.

3. Get rid of student facilities, and don't bother informing the student body. When asked for an explanation say, "There is no budget for phones or anything else." In fact, make sure that you repeat the budget mantra as often as possible: "There is no money, no money, no money." Then, feel free to allocate available monies any way you see fit, although you might consider establishing a "committee" to put a democratic spin on it. But make sure no students have the right to vote.

4. Change policies of the old administration unilaterally. Doing this will effectively destroy students' plans. But, make sure that your new policies privilege some sections of the student body, for example the new, incoming students. To do this you'll need to build a docile support base for yourself. Make sure to cut off ALL (not just some, but ALL) financial aid to established students—they are not easily manipulated, almost on their way out and will certainly find a way to pay tuition, or quit the program. Whatever.

5. When a student sets off to form a committee for the second exam, make his/her life miserable. Cross out the faculty choices the student made. Erect obstacles every step of the way.

6. If a student applies for transfer credits, refuse - even if the university policy allows for credits to be accepted from outside the CUNY system. Just say no.

time. Jail time!

Those plagued by the Mephistopheles syndrome did their damndest to bring a great woman down. But maybe she won't fall after all. Her lawyers have started a campaign to discredit Hartridge, who forgot to mention on his jury questionnaire that he was arrested for assault and had allegedly embezzled money from a little league team. This, of course, would have ousted him from the jury pool.

Let's hope Martha gets the new trial she deserves before she's whisked away to prison by the devils of punishment, whose real fight is on the side of self-aggrandizement, not justice.

Elizabeth Primamore is a student in the PhD program in Comparative Literature.

7. But if it is to the students' disadvantage to calculate GPA by including those credits, count them. Do this even if the credits are not transferred (see point 8). This is especially handy if a student has applied for an award, because these grades will push their GPA below the cut-off point and allow us to turn them down.

8. Appear as though you want to help students by giving them jobs. Exploit the students to the max. No need to pay mere slaves. If they question you, you can always fire them. Say, "Your work is crap. Just get out." If the student demands to be paid for their time, threaten to write an official letter saying, "You are fired because you are bad worker." Try to find a way to control students' entire professional life—try to control how and where they find employment and consider making phone calls to their employer to get them fired when you deem their academic progress unsatisfactory.

9. If the prior administration gave awards to students, and informed them verbally of those awards, do not honor those decisions. Tell the administrative assistant of the old EO to hold on the award sheet and never to send out letters until the new EO starts his or her term. As an excuse for not honoring these agreements, say, "The old administration was awfully corrupt." Do not mention that you also worked for the old administration.

10. If the old administration established a summer program in a developing country that has been going on for years, cancel it. The last students to take that program, who paid for it, and did all the work load necessary for the program, can be denied the credits that were part of the deal.

The speaker continues: "If we take all those actions, we can be sure to rid our department of most students, especially poor or struggling minority students. Mission accomplished! Meeting adjourned."

As I look around me, to see if I am the only one shocked by what I am hearing, I see only that my fellow students are not there. The room is full of androids, nodding in appreciation. I saw no expressions, on their pale faces. Where was I? This was not the public school I applied for, where minority students—less economically advantaged but bright—were trying to realize their dreams through hard work, dedication and passion. This was just a farm in some spaced-out galaxy that was producing hundreds of thousands of docile, uncritical minds ready to serve and take over the planet Earth. I couldn't catch my breath... I wanted to run, but I couldn't move... I felt immobile... Then suddenly, a wave of images and energy came over me, I opened my eyes... I realized it was just a dream, just a horrendous dream. Or was it???

Safinaz Saleh is a student in the PhD program in Politics.

## Back on Track (con't from 12)

better to reject an either-or approach to electoral coalition building, focused solely on building a new party or on realignment within the Democratic Party. Where third party candidates are able to mobilize progressive coalitions of a significant size, there is no good reason to not support them.

*The Long Detour* may not be essential reading for long-time leftists. But it is essential reading for those new to the Left; no other book in recent memory packs so much history and analysis into so few pages. And it is refreshing to read an author with a sense of *realpolitik* who nevertheless understands that humanity's long-run alternatives are, indeed, socialism or barbarism.

Jason Schulman is a doctoral candidate in the PhD program in Politics. He has written for *New Politics*, *Science & Society*, *Logos*, and *Radical Society*.

## Features

# Chiapas (con't from 5)

group of great people I knew from the States was there with a "Bikes to Chiapas" project and they were meeting with the GGB in order to establish a solidarity project to promote alternative transportation. I spoke with this group about their experiences working with the Board. The Bikes group met with the Board several times while we were there, also for at least two hours at a time. During each meeting all interested parties would slowly discuss the details of how the project was going to function, how to create accountability and make sure that it met the needs of the indigenous communities. It was clear to me that, for the GGB, getting it right, in whatever they do, was at least as important to them as the project itself.

### New Years Eve 2004

I traveled to Oventic to take part in 10th anniversary New Year's celebrations. For twenty-four hours straight I absorbed the sights and sounds of bands, theatre, poetry, and a basketball tournament. I've never seen so many kids in bare feet and sandals win so many games. Since drugs and alcohol are forbidden in Zapatista communities, the evening was good clean fun.

At the strike of midnight on New Year's Eve, the joyous occasion became more sober. The whole community and its few thousand visitors crowded around. A somber, militant ceremony followed that honored both the Zapatista and the Mexican flag. An EZLN *comandante* spoke for an uncharacteristically brief time. He praised the successes of the past ten years, acknowledged the challenges, and stressed the importance of national and international support. He called for a world where all worlds fit. The *comandante's* speech was translated into two other indigenous languages and then closed with both the Zapatista and the Mexican national anthems.

This aspect - the two flags and the two anthems - was incredibly moving. The Zapatistas are not a separatist group. They are loyal to Mexico and want deeply to be a part of the country. However, they have felt shut out of it throughout history. Mexico is such an intense part of

their identity, as indigenous people and as Zapatistas, that this exclusion feels like an assault.

As my delegation left Oventic, we met with the GGB one last time. Again they thanked us for coming and participating in their celebration. They told us that our presence there brought a feeling solidarity. We sang the Zapatista anthem together and they said, "We wish you warmth, strength, and peace to your hearts." My eyes welled up.

The Zapatista struggle is one of equality - both political and economic - and has at times been violent. The struggle of Zapatistas shows that creating a new society is difficult and the results are often far from perfect. Though I do not know what it is like in other Zapatista communities, the role of women in Oventic still remains a challenge. Women are still the primary caretakers of children, even while they are working. I saw so many women teaching or working in stores, with their children strapped to their backs. Men, on the other hand, while they do seem to help with child care, only do so when they have "free time." Moreover, labor is divided along traditional gender lines and women are poorly represented in the GGB.

Women often told us that things are better now than they were before. Zapatista women now choose whom they will marry, and make their own decisions about bearing children. They have better - though decidedly not total - access to community leadership. They appear extremely patient in waiting for a true recovery from the effects of the patriarchal society they once lived. The Zapatistas themselves provide a glimpse into a possible future - in the EZLN army women are equals, even holding leadership positions.

### Continuing Violence

Shortly after I returned to the US, I learned that Mexican armed forces had attacked the Zapatista community of Nuevo San Rafael on January 20, burning down 23 homes and violently evicting the Chol indigenous

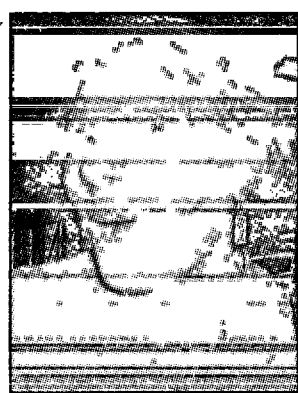
inhabitants. This area is in resource-rich Montes Azules and has long been coveted by multinational corporations for some time. As governments and multinationals press forward with other NAFTA policies, the "war of low intensity" against the thousand-plus Zapatista autonomous communities has once again erupted. At the time, the Secretary of Government in Chiapas—the "Bad Government"—promised more evictions and the army was preventing reporters and human rights observers from entering the area.

Residents have been arrested and tensions have heightened between the government and the Zapatistas. The EZLN has denounced the siege and promised to defend their communities and all that they have built. Meanwhile, the attacks on Zapatista communities continue. On April 10, an unarmed march of Zapatista supporters was ambushed by members of the Revolutionary Democratic Party in Zinacantan. Zapatista supporters were trying to get water to the community of Jech'vo, near San Cristóbal, which had been cutoff from the local water supply by the town's mayor. Residents of Jech'vo have been forced out of their community and the EZLN has called for international civil society to converge in Chiapas to help them return to their homes.

Now that I have been there myself, I find it difficult to read about repression in Chiapas. I feel much more connected to their struggle and to the individual people who are in constant danger of state and corporate violence. Often, as we hear about events on the news or read about them in books, it is hard to get a sense of how events affect real people. It is also extremely easy to forget that leaders may not always represent the people they claim to represent. Instead, it is often a multitude of grassroots and bottom-up efforts that have the greatest impact. It is important to remember the people who live the struggle day to day.

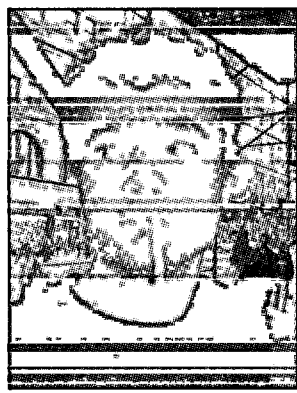
Polly Sylvia is a student in the PhD program in Sociology.

## How do you feel about the possible re-instatement of the draft?



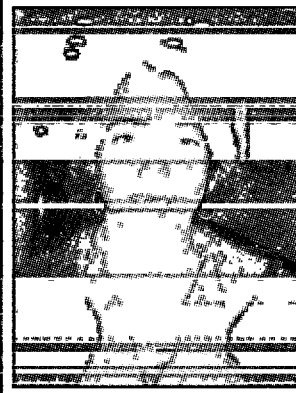
Agnieszka  
Kajrukszo,  
Politics

It's only okay if you include children under 8, kittens, hamsters, and everyone who gets drafted gets a years supply of chocolate ice cream.



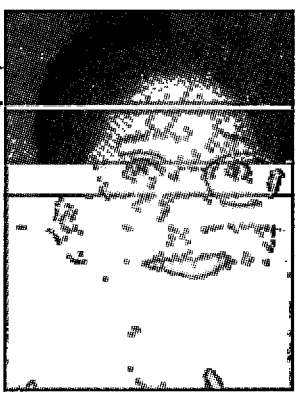
Dominic  
Wetzel,  
Sociology

It's too late - I've told! (You know - don't ask, don't tell?!) - or - Only if I serve next to Cheney and Rummy.



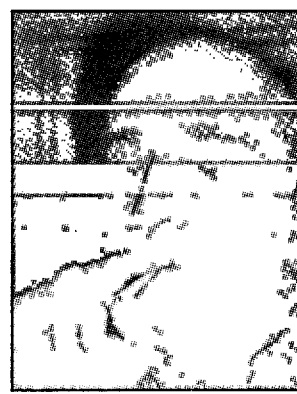
Heidi Reijm,  
Politics

I agree with Charles Rangel - it's time to get other than just poor and people of color fighting this war.



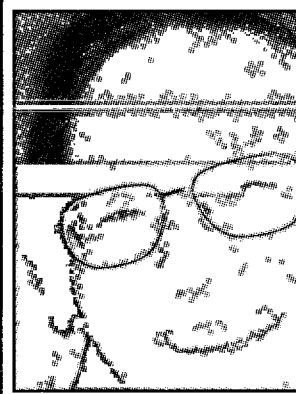
Elizabeth  
Watson,  
Art History

I'm glad I'm above drafting age. Unfortunately, I think the draft is always applied unfairly so it doesn't really address the issue of spreading the burden throughout the American public.



Eric Doviak,  
Economics

Dude! Stop smoking the peace pipe! It ain't gonna happen!



Andis Kwan,  
Computer Science

It's hard to say. I'm ambivalent about this. I'm against the war but not against the selective service.



# The Doctoral Students Council: Alive and Well

PAUL MCBREEN

The accomplishments of the Doctoral Students Council (DSC) this year indicate that activism and advocacy are alive and flourishing at the Graduate Center. The clearest sign of this is the increase in participation in DSC activities and attendance at plenary meetings.

We began the year by setting specific goals that each of us (the three co-chairs and six steering committee members) felt were realistic for two semester's time. These goals included improving the visibility of the DSC within the GC community, strengthening our ties with off-campus programs and lobbying on the matter of student health care. The DSC plenary then discussed these goals and passed a resolution regarding their execution.

Co-Chair for Student Affairs Carolyn Fisher arranged the successful and well-attended student organization fair and diligently pursued the issue of tuition remission for GC students who teach and serve the university as fellows. Her articles have appeared in several editions of *The Advocate*, and her excellent "Student Involvement Survey" has been invaluable in providing the DSC with names and contact information of students who wish to be involved, thereby widening the pool of students who participate in GC governance.

Co-Chair for Communications Paul McBreen attended press conferences to keep alive the awareness of the plight of Miguel Malo, a former Hostos student leader who is facing unwarranted charges due to CUNY cop bru-

talities while engaging in peaceful demonstration. Paul also attended the New York City Council meetings which were held on matters concerning CUNY.

Co-Chair for Business Jose Zambrana embarked upon a massive office organization project to transfer old DSC financial records to newer computers. He was diligent in aligning the budget allocations with the Constitution, and made sure that everyone got paid as close to on-time as humanly possible.

Meanwhile, steering committee members pursued many projects helpful to students. Sheryl Gordon worked on a committee that drafted the healthcare survey, recently completed by over 650 students. The data she helped gather will influence decisions regarding student health plans in the near future. Tina Lee served on a committee that studied the issue of graduate tuition remission and also aided in the planning of our Fall party. With future generations of DSC operatives in mind, Tina and Sheryl put together a binder with our collective knowledge on the subject of throwing a kick-ass party. Tina also hosted a steering committee bake-off which resulted in the vast array of cookies consumed at the first coffee hour.

Camille Tipton doubled as our web-druidess and designed an awesome website for the DSC (she's behind *The Advocate's* page as well). Camille spearheaded the Constitutional Convention, an attempt to modernize our founding document, which is printed on yellowing parchment and sometimes requires medieval experts to be understood. We all channel information to her regarding

events happening at the GC in order to provide a current "events" calendar.

Ceila Braxton researched off-campus programs in order to form a database of contact information since the DSC does not have access to a direct channel of communication to all constituents. She initiated and organized the DSC popcorn giveaway in October (thanks again to the Mathematics department's Rob Landsman for the long-term loan of the popcorn machine), a three-day event during which information on DSC was distributed as well as publicity for our Fall party. She served as the student representative on the Curriculum and Degree Requirements Committee, and she exhorts other students (that means you!) to get involved with GC committees "to make sure the concerns of students are not simply heard, but acted upon."

Brenda Jenkins is a voice of calm and wisdom at our steering committee meetings. As a night-time only GC student, her perspective is invaluable. She earned kudos for chairing last year's highly contentious "war resolution" plenary, which some remember. Moira Egan, of DSC's past and present, organized our coffee hours and assisted in party planning. Moira visited Roosevelt Island, a possible site of future student housing and contributed her opinions on the need for student accommodations at a reasonable cost.

We recommend that students fill out the Student Involvement Survey which will be arriving in their GC mailboxes soon.

## Monday, MAY 24th

### CONTRACT RALLY AT CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

**PSC-MASS**  
**CONTRACT RALLY**  
**Voice your demand for a good contract!**

**MEET AT BARUCH COLLEGE**  
**(Lexington Avenue and 24<sup>th</sup> Street)**  
**3:30pm-5:30pm**

- Salary Increases For All Our Faculty And Staff
- Welfare Fund Restorations
- Equity and Improved Working Conditions

**For more information contact call Mary Ann Carlese at  
PSC at 212-354-1252 or email mcarlese@pscmail.org**

## Frances Horowitz (con't from 1)

The following is the complete text of the President's memorandum to the Graduate Center Community:

I write to inform you that I am today giving to Chancellor Matthew Goldstein a letter indicating that I am making plans to step down from the position of President of the Graduate Center at the end of the coming academic year, 2004-05.

In summing up the accomplishments we have achieved together during my tenure as President of The Graduate Center, I realize the enormity of our collective efforts even as there is still so much more to do.

I have assured the Chancellor that in the coming year, as he moves to initiate the search to select my successor, we will lose no momentum in our continuing efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of our doctoral programs, to increase the level of support for doctoral students, and to raise needed funds for the extra margins of excellence to supplement our tax-levy resources in support of students, faculty, and The Graduate Center.

At the end of 2004-05 I will have served in the position of President for fourteen years. While there is never a "perfect" time for one to step down from a satisfying position nor for the community to deal with the leadership change that will ensue, the academic renewal that has occurred and is in progress, the commitment to increasing support for doctoral students, and the solidity and momentum of our enterprise will serve as steadying and reassuring influences for going forward.

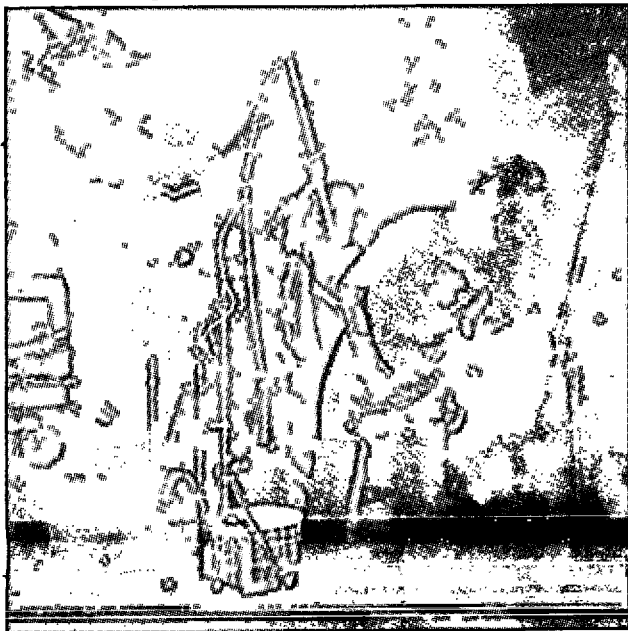
## Culture

# Bright Surroundings, Dark Beginnings: No Neck Blues Band and Sun City Girls Live at the Coral Room, NYC, 4/13/04

WILL WEIKART

Yes, Virginia, there is an outside—at least musically. It may be shifting, though, as we are now being granted something of an unveiling, a demystification.

Witness: two of the major forces in contemporary paranormal sound production shared a bill at midtown Manhattan's Coral Room on a soggy, dank Tuesday night in April. NYC shadow lurkers No Neck Blues Band (NNCK) and the touring Sun City Girls (now hailing from Seattle) are progenitors of a tradition of aural mysticism and esoterica that traverses but exceeds such historical legacies as free jazz, psychedelic rock, folk and the so-called avant-garde.



The Coral Room's live mermaids, who swim in giant tanks behind the bar, were not on hand this night—which was probably for the best because what transpired would have left them longing for a mere morsel of attention. A packed house, unanimously bearded, stood prepared to be dumbfounded. Savvy (non)patrons avoided the utter crime of four-dollar Rheingolds and instead covertly sipped smuggled-in whiskey.

It makes little sense to attempt to refer to a NNCK or SCG "sound" although each is vaguely distinct and recognizable. While there may be certain unifying aesthetic traits—the deliberate obfuscation of identity on many if not all levels being just one, but perhaps the most salient each performance, indeed each album, is a unique and irreducible moment. At its best, this "sound" achieves something beyond words. It is this non-place, this nether-land of sound and reference, which give each its uncanny force. Both rely to varying extents on an ethic of improvisation, which implies an ethic of listening, ego-submersion and close attention. But each also avoids the old "high seriousness" of so much avant-art and music production.

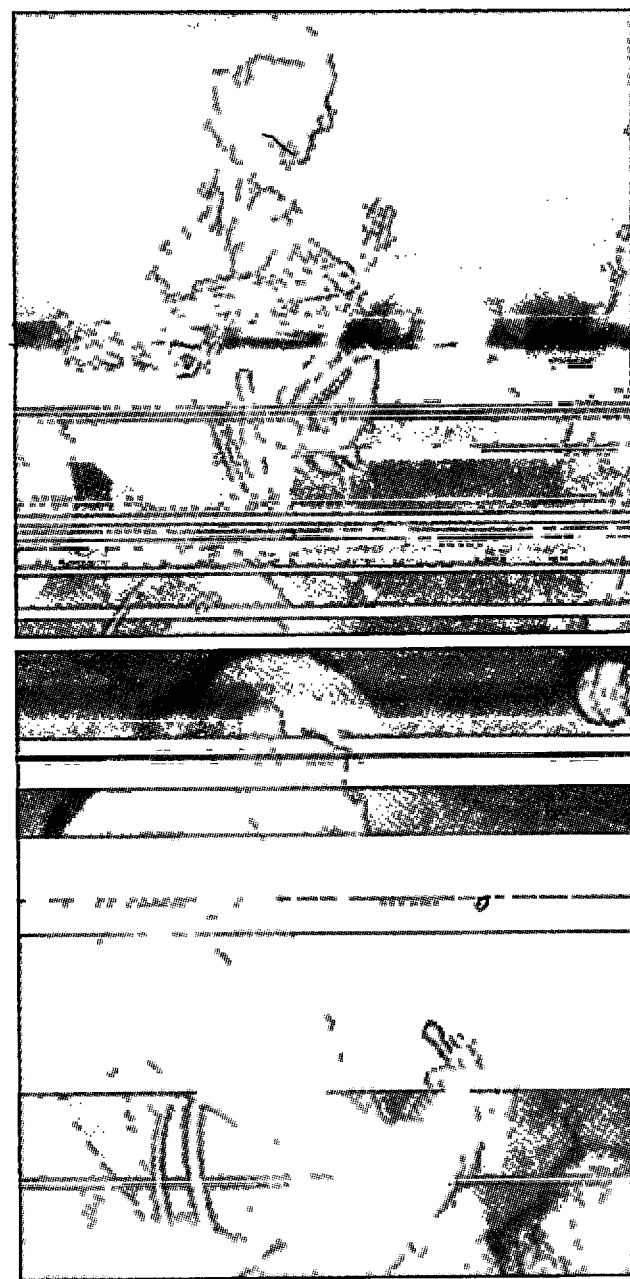
Openers NNCK have been playing frustratingly low-key shows (although recently in better-known venues) throughout NYC for probably ten years now, and they've toured in the US and Europe. The now-seven member unit typically utilizes a daunting barrage of instrumentation (most of them are multi-instrumental) often including, but not limited to: upright bass, alto sax, voices, melodica, acoustic and electric stringed instruments, synths/keyboards, thumb piano (*mbira*), various electronics, a plethora of percussion and random small noisemakers and debris—sometimes playing something like a tree branch. Moreover, "traditional" instruments are often subverted and played "wrongly" or "badly," adding to a rather disorienting jumble of signification/performance/spectacle.

NNCK at times approach their instruments like aliens who have never touched or seen a musical instrument, much less taken any sort of formal training or lessons. It's like they've un-learned (if they ever knew). As a result, they are often subjected to the same dismissive criticism aimed at much "modern" art: "My five-year-old could do

that!"

NNCK shows usually feature one or two long improvised pieces, ranging from quiet, minimalist, drones, gypsy jams—to loud, maximalist wooliness and cacophony, flying cymbals and howling. Part of the mystery lies in this atavistic approach, which somehow yields a musical product that almost always ultimately, inexplicably seems to "work." I'm consistently amazed at how such disparate elements can emerge, sounding awkward or even terribly out of place, but are inevitably woven into a greater, buzzing tapestry of ecstatic sound. Importantly, these elements simultaneously retain their autonomy.

This show was no exception. Every NNCK show is unique and exploratory. There are no "songs." Each performance has something new, and the highlights this time included a giant, stage-wide contraption built out of sticks joined by strings, from which bells and metals were suspended. This contraption produced a clangy percussive sound like that of a wind chime or demented gamelan. But it was used only sparingly and strategically, an ethic of



Left and Right: No Neck Blues Band  
Above: Sun City Girls

restraint that allows a potentially indulgent form of music to work.

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The Sun City Girls, a trio that formed over twenty years ago in Arizona, is notoriously elusive and has toured rarely for a band so prolific. They have released innumerable recordings and videos, many of which are self-released and/or out of print. Half-Lebanese brothers Alan and Rick Bishop play bass and guitar, respectively, and Charlie Gocher Jr. plays drums. But all three, again, are multi-instrumental and astonishingly talented. They are

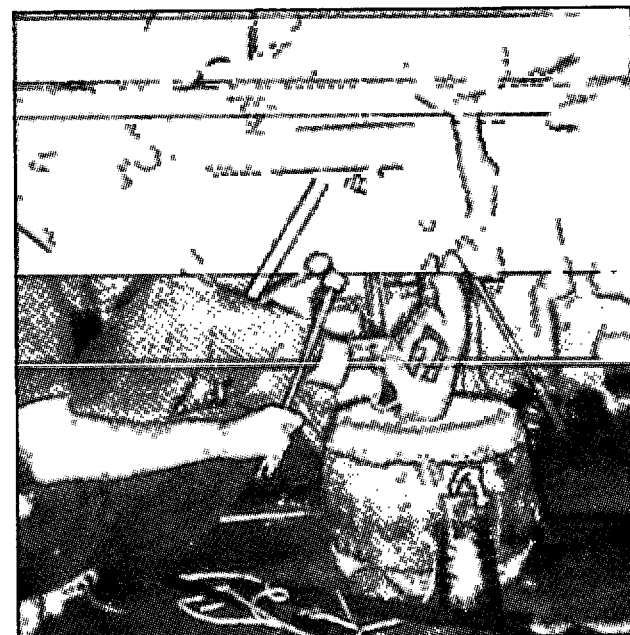
competent at range of traditional and/or "exotic" instruments, including the gamelan, a traditional Indonesian gong. Much like the clichéd sentiment that free jazz players are unskilled and have no real musical abilities, the Girls seem to always be saying, quite convincingly, "we could do that but we choose not to." Instead, they dance irreverent circles around the restrictive confines of genre, while somehow and simultaneously paying homage to them.

Which genres, you ask? The tip of the iceberg includes a repertoire intimately familiar with Middle Eastern, Latin American, and South Asian music. Within these traditions, the Girls cover terrain as disparate as pop, classical and folk.

The Girls also play scary ecstatic free-noise; cover classic rock songs and sultry soul tunes; summon the spirits of lounge and surf—and sometimes all at once. For these reasons, SCG shows are legendary and the subject of rumor, humor, fear, contempt and utter bewilderment. The trio has been known to play entire sets in masks and/or full costume; to provoke audiences; to enter into highly conceptual and/or absurdist modes; to sing in "gibberish" and/or hybrid tongues; and to fall into trance-like ritual states. They claim and seem to succeed in channeling spirits, forces, demons and the like. On this particular evening, for example, the rambling, whiskey-swilling Uncle Jim "appeared."

They didn't pull out all the stops at the Coral Room but you never know what to expect at an SCG show and they always keep their audience guessing. Their musical arsenal is so huge as to almost preclude repetition. Their new website and a barrage of newly available SCG artifacts mark another notable, partial demystification process at work. The Bishop brothers' new multimedia imprint Sublime Frequencies documents their physical travels—through field recordings and short wave radio collage, and offers insights into the smorgasbord of cultures and sounds. All of this only begins to explain the enigmatic conglomerate that is SCG.

It is arguable that, at their best, both groups approach the ideal of the deterritorialized refrain. NNCK's sound requires that we un-learn the proscribed ways of hearing, beginning with the entrenched and reified "song." It is a journey into the unconscious, into sound for sound's sake, and I can't necessarily make a convincing case as to why one should embark on it; this is a personal decision. But



there is security in letting go and the rewards are plenty. This is the music of willful obscurity and it is often content to go nowhere, even if today it is gaining marginal attention.

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