

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER Advocate

March 2007

<http://gcadvocate.org>

advocate@gc.cuny.edu



Accusing Sami Al-Arian (p. 6)

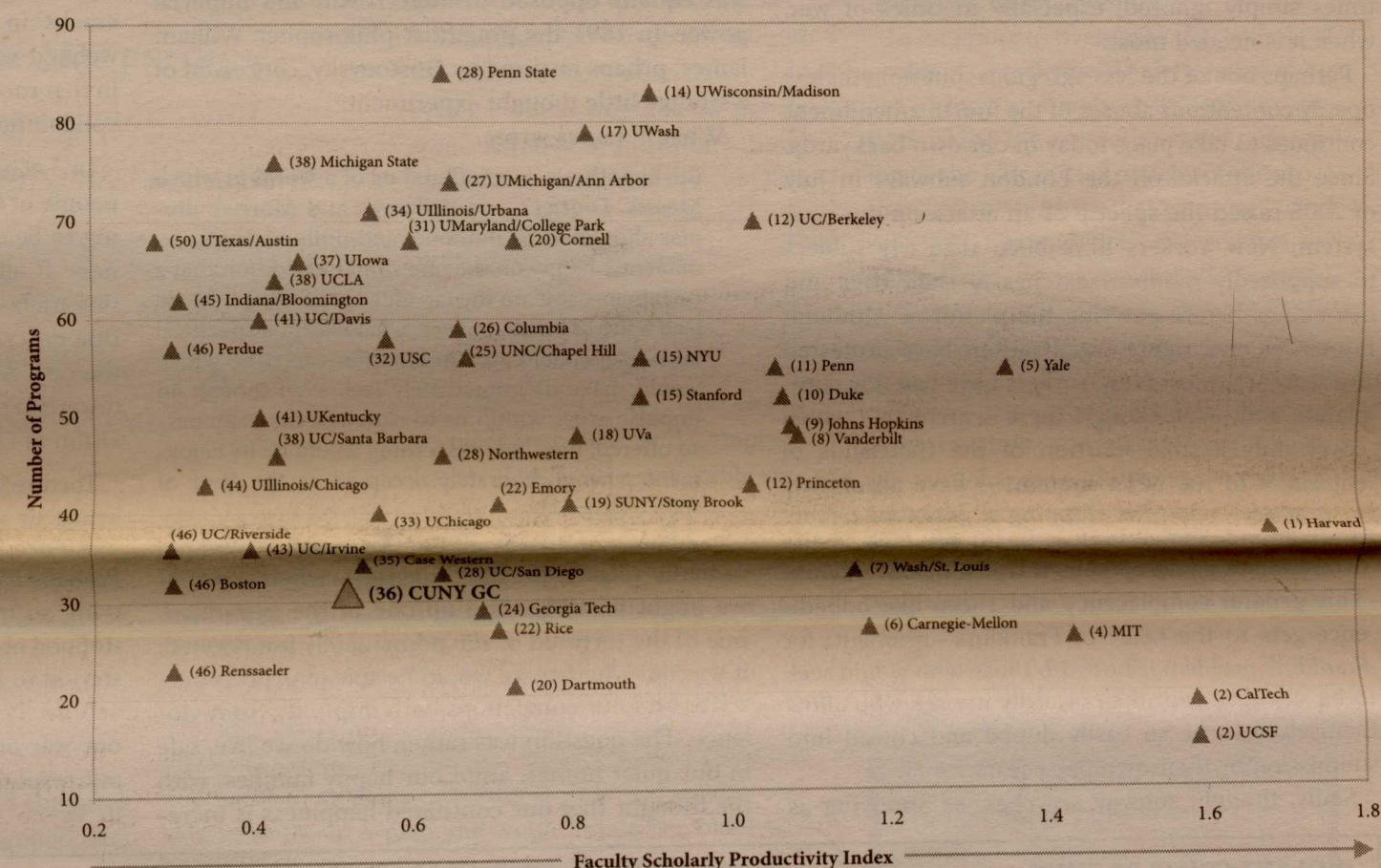
New Index Ranks GC Among Top 50 U.S. Research Universities

A new and controversial faculty productivity index has ranked the CUNY Graduate Center 36th overall among the nation's 50 leading research universities, with many programs, including Philosophy, English, and Art History ranking among the top ten in their disciplines. These new rankings are welcome news for the Graduate Center, which has worked hard to increase the standing of its various academic programs, but the controversial results have many critics and ivy-league administrators questioning the accuracy and the potential impact of the new ranking system.

The problem is that the Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index, or FSP as it's called, measures each program and each university based exclusively on the number of scholarly publications, citations, grants, and awards produced by the faculty. The index, however, does not rank student satisfaction, student to faculty ratios, the scholarly impact of faculty publications, or the quantity and quality of scholarly instruction as part of its ranking system. In addition, many critics have complained that the FSP is based in part on partial and sometimes faulty information.

These problems have not stopped many of the Graduate Center publications or programs from touting their seemingly meteoric rise in the new ranking system. The English Department, for instance, which has already placed the new information on their general web site, moved from 23rd in the U.S. News and World Report ranking to a very solid and notable 10th place in the FSP, coming in above Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania. Meanwhile the Art History department came in an impressive 9th place, and in the aggregate field of Philosophy and Religious studies, the Graduate Center came in at number one, ahead of every other major university in the nation.

The index was originally conceived by Lawrence B. Martin, the Dean of Graduate Studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, a former anthropologist who has spent



The Graduate Center was ranked 36th overall in the new Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index, with a "Z score" that is +0.52 above the national mean.

Advocate Graphic

a good portion of his career studying faculty productivity. According to Martin, the index was created to offer a more objective and rigorous criteria for measuring scholarly achievement and evaluating graduate programs. In a January 2nd online interview with The Chronicle of Higher Education, Martin said the FSP was

"designed to provide higher education with a national perspective on scholarly activity at the discipline level. It is a broad measurement containing information on books published, journal articles published, citations of journal articles, research grants awarded, fellowships, honors and awards won... It is our hope that the availability of clearly defined and transparently presented data on scholarly work will promote improvements in American universities that should result from better and more strategic decision making, informed by quantitative data."

Martin's decision to design and implement a new measurement system for ranking graduate programs

came in part out of the frustration of waiting for the new National Research Council's ranking of graduate schools and departments, which was last published over a decade ago in 1995, and a concern about the continued over reliance on the less rigorous U.S. News and World Report rankings, which the magazine publishes yearly.

The for-profit index, although funded in part by the State University of New York at Stony Brook, was designed exclusively for the company Academic Analytics, which charges academic clients as much as \$30,000 for three years of detailed analysis of university and department rankings. These rankings are achieved through a complex algorithm that measures the per capita output of faculty members based on journal and book publications, awards, government grants, and citations by other scholars and researchers. Administrations may then conceivably use this data to compare their output to other universities or departments, make decisions about

funding or reorganizing particular academic programs, hiring new faculty, or changing requirements for tenure. In fact, because the index focuses largely on publications and awards, and because rankings can be greatly affected by the number of faculty publications in any given department, the pressure to increase publication requirements for tenure or promotion, and thus, increase department rankings could be a problem if the FSP becomes the new standard in ranking graduate schools.

Besides the fact that the index focuses solely on scholarly productivity, critics complain that much of the data used to put the new index together may have been based on outdated or incomplete information. Because it must by necessity record and process each faculty member's scholarly output at a given institution, the index, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, uses a program that relies heavily on the internet and publica-

continued on page 3

Walking Away From Torture

Benjamin Franklin's oft quoted statement "those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety," has become a kind of rallying cry for civil rights groups in the post 9-11 world. Although there is scholarly disagreement about whether or not Franklin was the original author of the phrase, it was, even in its own time, widely referenced and reprinted in various forms throughout the colonies. For Franklin and the early Patriots, the phrase summed up their resistance to the pernicious and frequent abuses of power by their colonial rulers and touched upon a universal desire to live unfettered by the constant interventions of authority. Decades later Franklin's critique would become, in a sense, reified in the fourth amendment, which forbids unreasonable search and seizure and which was written largely in response to the forced quartering of British soldiers and the abuses of warrants and writs of assistance by colonial powers. But the fourth amendment from its very inception has been continually challenged, abused, and sometimes simply ignored, especially in times of war, when it is needed most.

Perhaps one of the less egregious, but nonetheless openly contentious abuses of the fourth amendment continues to take place today in our own backyards. Since the attacks on the London subways in July of 2005 raised the spectre of an attack on our own system, New Yorkers have been regularly subject to supposedly random searches of their bags and belongings before entering the platform. Although numerous civil rights organizations have protested the searches, most New Yorkers have had few complaints and, even though these searches — which cover only a small portion of the thousands of entrances to the MTA system — have absolutely no practical value for stopping a potential terrorist attack, most New Yorkers see it as a reasonable deterrent and an acceptable, if trivial inconvenience. This general complacency and sheep-like obedience gets to the heart of Franklin's argument; for Franklin's problem is not with those who would seek to be safe, but with the cowardly masses who allow themselves to be so easily duped and cowed into submission by their own petty fears.

Sadly, though, subway searches, as annoying as

FROM THE editor's desk

they may be, are the least of our problems, and Franklin's pithy declaration fails in the face of the larger dilemmas that plague our society today. For Franklin, it is cowardly to give up our liberties for safety, but what about the liberties of others? What about the liberties of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of people who have been illegally kidnapped, detained, extradited, and tortured by the American government in the name of the war on terror? What about the families imprisoned in the T. Don Hutto Residential Facility in Taylor, Texas, whose only crime was to be on the wrong airplane at the wrong time?

To better understand this ever persistent threat it might be useful to turn to another great American thinker, who, although less well known than Franklin, was equally opposed to imperialism and imperial power. In 1891 the pragmatist philosopher William James, perhaps inspired by Dostoevsky, conceived of a strange little thought experiment:

What if, James wrote,

the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier's and Bellamy's and Morris's utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture, what except a specific and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain?

For James, unlike Franklin, the question was not — in the vulgarly pragmatic sense — whether or not we might possibly wind up one of the extradited, one of the tortured or the permanently imprisoned; it was not whether we would be able to express ourselves and our convictions with impunity from violence. The question was rather, how do we live, safe in our quiet homes, amid our happy families, with the thought that our continued happiness is incre-

asingly used as an excuse for the ill treatment of others. Whether it's the abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay abroad, the rendition of Khaled El-Masri and Maher Arar, or the imprisonment of Sami Al-Arian here in the United States, our safety and comfort is increasingly being purchased at the expense of those unlucky few who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and with increasing frequency, those citizens on the fringes of our own culture and society, whose ideas have made them the potential scapegoats for the new American dream.

In 1973, Ursula LeGuin wrote a short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" in which she took up the problem as presented by James. In LeGuin's story, the people of Omelas live perfectly free, happy, fulfilling, comfortable, and satisfying lives, while beneath them, "in a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. A little light seeps in dustily between cracks in the boards, secondhand from a cob-webbed window somewhere across the cellar," and in that room a young child sits in its own excrement, condemned to spend its entire life in abject misery.

In LeGuin's story, like in our own, most of the people of Omelas simply assume that there is nothing to be done, that their happiness and the happiness of all of those that they care for depends on this trade-off. But then there are those who, as the title describes, choose to leave, to walk away from the city. According to LeGuin the world they walk toward is even more unimaginable than the utopian vision of Omelas.

Torture, extradition, murder; none of these things brings us any closer to a safer and more comfortable existence. We do not profit from our vengeance. Perhaps it's time, as a nation, that we stopped worrying so much about our own happiness, that we stopped obsessing about the ticking time bomb, and started to focus instead on the consequences of our actions. Perhaps it is time that we walked away from our war on terror and started to think more about our responsibility to the world than our safety from it. ■

VIOLENT CRIME AT CUNY

This matter is urgent!

That CUNY has lost even one student to violent crime is unacceptable. That we have lost both Romona Moore of Hunter College, and Imette St. Guillen of John Jay College, in the last few years, and have not altered our registration practice for incoming students to require mandatory personal safety training is inexcusable.

Memorials with pictures and flowers are not enough. It is incumbent on us to take appropriate action.

We have the "best" criminal justice program in the world. Surely the faculty could create a useful, effective, sensible way to teach incoming CUNY students personal safety basics, from dealing with student bullying to internet stalking to behaving safely in New York City. What we seem to forget is that many students, however street-smart and slick their veneer, come to us as children on the verge of adulthood. That we provide no serious training about dealing with danger implicates us as a university in these tragic events.

It is a matter of utmost urgency

letters

that we devise an ongoing plan of action which includes mandatory personal safety training for incoming students, and implement it, if not for this term than, at the latest, for the next term. A few notes in the student bulletin is not enough.

Both Columbia and New York University have implemented institution-wide programs in response to student suicides in recent years. The homicide of our students also demands institution-wide reform and response.

Andrea Siegel

THERE'S MORE TO THE URBAN ED STORY

This letter is in response to the recent article *A GC Refugee Finds Respect — in Canada* by Tony Monchinski. While I think Professor Kincheloe and Tony Monchinski raise important concerns about the experiences of working class students and students of color in the Urban Education program, I don't think they present the entire picture.

Specifically, Kincheloe expresses the belief that the "point" of the Urban Education program is to give an opportunity to "indigenous New York students that Columbia and NYU weren't giving them."

The express mission of the CUNY Urban Education program is that it "prepares leaders in educational research and policy analysis who have a broad understanding of the complex issues facing urban education and are well prepared to contribute to the knowledge base needed to improve educational practice." Part of understanding the complexity of urban education is that the program admits students like myself — from a Southern, working class background, but educated at Yale and Columbia. Having the cultural capital and intellectual ability to do well in the program was not my concern coming in. I was interested in being in an educational environment that had a diverse student population and that drew from a diverse range of academic traditions.

The difficulty I've experienced in the Urban Education program actually centers on (despite course descrip-

tions posted on the Urban Education site that promised readings from African-American and female theorists) the predominantly, white, male, "critical" perspective in which urban education issues are framed. I find that scholars like Kincheloe take the position of arguing for the working class and people of color, but, in the end, don't seem to have a nuanced perspective of the people they are arguing for. When I raised this issue in a section with Kincheloe, he responded adamantly, "You can't tell me that African-American women don't share the same experience!" That is exactly what I am saying. Would anyone make this assertion about white men? What exactly is involved in this African-American female experience? I anxiously await a book by a white, male scholar to find out... Sarcasm aside, in the program I've felt bombarded with "critical" images of the experiences of working class students and students of color that feel just as limiting and frankly, as racist and classist, as those of some conservatives.

Patrina Huff

IT Goes Shopping: New PCs Coming

In an effort to uphold its designation as "Best Example of CUNY Respecting Its Students: The GC IT

Turnaround," (*Advocate*, February 2007) the Office of Information Technology purchased 300 new computers to be deployed this month. Roughly two-thirds of these machines are slated for student use, and will replace the public computers on the C-level of the library, computers in all four computer classrooms, and the computers in the building's 26 "smart" classrooms. "We would like to acknowledge the very strong support from President [William] Kelly in obtaining the funds needed for this purchase," said Assistant Vice President for Information Technology Robert Campbell. The new PCs will allow IT to phase out some of the building's oldest computers. "Some older PCs — the ones that can be salvaged — will be redeployed," said Campbell, who noted that one of the primary targets for upgrading are the catalogue computers in the library.

There is more, however. Three hundred new 19-inch flat screen monitors to replace the screens in the computer classrooms and 20 new iMacs with 20-inch screens were purchased with the same funds allocated by President Kelly to IT. The iMacs will replace the older Macs that are presently in the library. "The Mac purchase is significant," said Campbell, "because it begins to lay a foundation for a more robust Mac support system at the Grad Center."

In addition to these purchases, IT ordered 50 new desktop black and white printers, 60 color printers, and 80 fax machines, most of which are to be deployed in the building's academic programs and departments. Campbell acknowledged that students should have fax-sending capabilities and said that he will "make provisions for students to send faxes on a limited basis," from two fax machines that will be located near the elevators on the library's C-level concourse.

Hardware was not the only thing in the IT's shopping basket, so, too was the beginnings of a revamped data center. Around \$100,000 was spent to order Storage Area Network (SAN) technology, including switches and a server. SAN technology supports and provides enhanced storage capacity on a given network. This move was a reaction to complaints about limited network storage abilities. "Certainly by the fall, everyone in the building will be beneficiaries of this purchase," said Campbell, who cautiously noted the possibility that the storage capabilities of the GC network will be expanded in advance of the Fall 2007 target date. The important aspect of this purchase was that it will be the foundation for any expansion required going forward. "SAN technology can be grown incrementally," Campbell said. "Once we introduce it and get it in place with a server,

gc technology

we can increase it as needed in the future."

While the SAN purchase targets one of

the major problems of the Graduate Center's network, it still does not provide a solution to the other main difficulty which is the system's snail-like speed. When asked about the cause of the slow network, Campbell blamed poor design, the way that the network is set up, and excessive traffic. "We are working on rooting out the problems and causes of the network congestion," Campbell said, "but fixing a pin prick is very different from conducting open heart surgery."

WIRELESS INTERNET ACCESS:

FINALLY, THERE IS MOVEMENT

Although the *Advocate* reported upon a plan to take the Graduate Center wireless back in September, there have been hiccups along the initial path. As of press time, IT has adopted a final design strategy that is intended to streamline the time needed to begin deployment of wireless internet access.

The old plan revolved around the construction of a new cable system, which would send signals from wireless transmitters hung from the ceilings. Between cabling and labor costs, the estimated cost for wiring each wireless transmitter was around \$1,000, excluding the cost of the transmitter itself. The new plan conforms to a theory of "cable where you have to but no more than that," said Campbell. Rather than build a new cable system,

IT will use the existing cable system that presently provides a connection to the GC's network through wall sockets. This means that costs for wiring each wireless transmitter will be cut in half, allowing for the installation of more transmitters.

Campbell recognized that there may be some aesthetic considerations and said that IT is presently trying to come up with some solutions. He also stated that some rooms, such as the theater and the library, are not conducive to the new plan and would retain the older wiring-through-the-ceiling arrangement first introduced in September.

The bottom line? Campbell projects that IT will begin to deploy wireless equipment by the end of the fiscal year (June 30th).

SOFTWARE NOTE: NO MORE SASS!

The licensing for the Standard Analysis Software System (SASS) is changing. In the past students and faculty have enjoyed free copies of SASS for their home computers. Campbell said that he did not anticipate the new changes will allow for licenses for home PCs, but that SASS will still be available on the PCs in the Graduate Center and on Citrix. ■

FSP index

from page 1

tion databases such as Scopus, a database that collects publication data for over 15,000 journals, and, surprisingly enough, Amazon.com, whose book database is reportedly exactly the same as the Catalog for the Library of Congress.

Faculty membership within the thousands of departments analyzed in the study, is similarly determined almost exclusively from online sources, leading some critics to complain that, as is often the case, some of the faculty members listed on university web sites were not necessarily employed at that particular university or in that particular department at the time of the survey. The Graduate Center English Department, for instance, continued to list Louis Menand, a highly prolific and regularly cited scholar, as a member of the English faculty even after he had left the program to take a job at Harvard University, on whose web site his name was also listed as a faculty member.

In an effort to overcome these kinds of problems Academic Analytics sent out a list of faculty members to each institution asking for corrections, but, according to the *Chronicle's* article, of the more than 250 institutions that were contacted only 133 responded to the request for corrections. This potential discrepancy, critics say, could considerably affect the rankings of various departments in the survey.

Despite its critics, however, many administrators and department chairs are very happy with the new ranking system. Our own Bill Kelley, for instance, told 365 5th that he was "delighted with these results," and that they "document, with striking clarity, the renaissance this great university has experienced across the last several years." ■

Can you draw?

Do you make people laugh?

We are looking for an experienced and/or ambitious comic artist to illustrate a regular original comic strip for the *Advocate*.

Comics should be related to graduate student life, should ideally be serial in structure, and will run six times a year.

Interested illustrators should send samples, digital or conventional to James Hoff Editor-in Chief The GC *Advocate* Room 5396 The Graduate Center 365 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016 or electronically to advocate@gc.cuny.edu.

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
Advocate

<http://gcadvocate.org>

CUNY Graduate Center
Rm. 5396
365 Fifth Avenue,
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212.817.7884

Email: advocate@gc.cuny.edu

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
James Hoff

MANAGING EDITOR
Lindsay Krasnoff

LAYOUT EDITOR
Mark Wilson

ONLINE EDITOR
Abigail Schoneboom

MEDIA BOARD CHAIR
Ericka Calton

CONTRIBUTORS

Anton Borst, Frank Episale,
Philip Fairbanks, Tim Krause,
Matt Lau, Maurice Leach,
Carl Lindskoog.

THE ADVOCATE is the student paper of the CUNY Graduate Center and is published six times a year. Publication is subsidized by Student Activities Fees and the Doctoral Student Council.

THE ADVOCATE accepts contributions of articles, illustrations, photos and letters to the editor. Please query the above email address. Articles selected for publication will be subjected to editorial revision. Writers who contribute stories of 1,000 words will be reimbursed \$50 and those who submit longer articles requiring research will receive \$75. We also pay for photos.

THE ADVOCATE is published 3 times a semester, in September, October and November; and February, March and April. Submissions should be in by the beginning of the month, and print copies will be on the stacks around the 15th.

The PSC and CUNY Resume Contract Negotiations

What Graduate Students and Adjuncts Can Expect

CARL LINDSKOOG

Students who have been at the Graduate Center for any length of time will surely remember the long, difficult contract campaign of the last few years. Thanks to CUNY's intransigence, faculty and staff went years without a contract. Despite protests, picket lines, and a huge meeting at Cooper Union, it seemed CUNY was never going to give us a decent offer.

So, many were relieved when the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) announced in the spring of 2006 that it had reached a tentative agreement with CUNY. Although the contract was severely lacking in what it offered "part-time faculty" (a category that includes both graduate students and adjuncts), the conclusion of the contract struggle and the promise of retroactive pay was appealing to many. As a result, a majority of union members voted to approve the contract settlement.

Now, just one year later, the PSC and CUNY have begun negotiations over the *next* contract; the current contract is set to expire in September of this year. As the two sides resume bargaining, what can we expect this time around? Will there be a quick settlement or another endless strug-

gle? And more importantly, once the next contract is settled, will graduate students and adjuncts have anything to show for it, or will we emerge, once again, with our basic needs unaddressed?

Recent developments suggest that this time, things could be different. To win a contract that meets key demands of part-time faculty, the whole union — from the president down to the rank-and-file full-time and part-time faculty — has to be committed to this goal. Based on the results of the recent PSC Delegate Assembly (DA) meeting, it seems we may be approaching the necessary consensus on the importance of adjunct issues.

On February 15 the Delegate Assembly, an elected representative body of the PSC, met to discuss and vote on the contract demands which the bargaining team will bring to negotiations with CUNY. The proposed demands that were distributed for the delegates' consideration included a number of long-time demands of part-timers, including health insurance for graduate students and their dependents, a seniority system for part-timers, and the university-wide extension of the paid professional

hour. Regarding salary increases, demand number one begins, "Salaries must be comprehensively lifted — for all titles and all ranks." But the same demand states that "Inequities of salary must also be addressed."

So which was it, we wondered. Was the union demanding equal, across-the-board increases, or did it intend to close the huge gulf between the pay of full-timers and that of part-timers? Michael Seitz, an adjunct from John Jay, pointed out the contradiction in this first demand, noting that a single percentage increase applied to all levels would actually enlarge, not reduce salary inequities. This contradiction was partially reconciled when the delegates unanimously voted for a proposal from the floor by Holly Clarke, another adjunct from John Jay, which committed the union to a "movement toward pay equity." A second proposal which added the demand for annual step pay increases, as opposed to the three year step system which is currently in place, was also approved. The approval of key part-timer demands is an encouraging step toward significant improvements for graduate students and adjuncts in the upcoming contract campaign.

Other aspects of the DA meet-

ing also seem to bode well for part-timer advancement. Two full-time faculty members delivered impassioned speeches about the exploitation of adjuncts and the urgent need to address the inequity of the labor system at CUNY. In addition, a statement released with the proposed contract demands reveals that a critical element of the PSC bargaining agenda will be to "tackle CUNY's abusive job system" since "the over-reliance on part-timers, paid a fraction of the full-time salary, and on other contingent positions, is abusive of the individuals in these positions and undermines salaries, job security, and academic freedom for all."

CUNY will no doubt continue denying that this university system runs on the extreme exploitation of part-time faculty, but apparently the union is no longer willing to entertain this nonsense. While part-timers may not yet be considered full partners in the union, at least the position and experience of part-timers is no longer considered a peripheral issue. All the contract demands, including those concerning adjunct equity, are being treated as university-wide issues which matter equally to all faculty and

continued on page 11

S
U
B
S



SUBWAY
Sandwiches

2 W. 35th Street
(right off 5th ave.)

CALL 212.967.1151

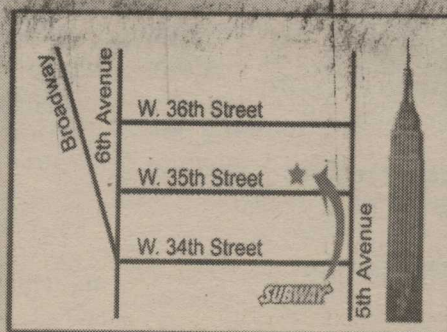
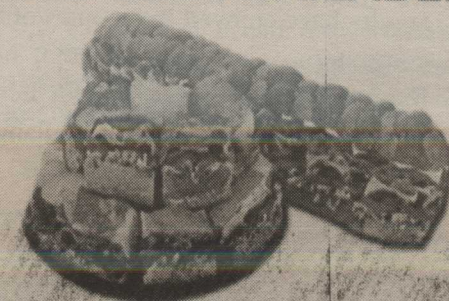
10% off for Empire State Building Tenants & Employees. Pick-up only.

CATERING AVAILABLE!

FREE DELIVERY!

eat fresh.

S
O
U
P
S

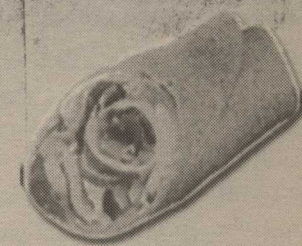


\$20 Minimum Delivery

S
A
L
A
D
S



W
R
A
P
S



History of the World, Part 28

MARK WILSON

It just wasn't possible. And yet, there it was. Twenty-eight classes; twenty-seven topics.

I had an extra day.

I'd expected the opposite. Brooklyn College had performed reconstructive surgery on its core curriculum and, in the process, changed the rules for the class I teach, *The Shaping of the Modern World*. Since time immemorial the course had embraced modern history from the 1700s up to the present. The new regimen obliged us to start considerably earlier, in 1500.

For the teaching of modern history, this revision makes tremendous sense. Even under the old system I'd spent a chunk of the first class glossing stuff like the Protestant Reformation and humanism as background for future topics. Under this new curriculum, which now embraced the modern era in its entirety, there would be an opportunity to approach the deeper themes of the modern era more holistically than before.

There would now also be, however, the need to cram two more centuries of history into fourteen weeks of instruction. The old analogy of packing five pounds of material into a three-pound bag had never seemed more apt.

I'd been unhappily pondering the ramifications of the change for months, since I'd first heard ideas for revising the curriculum being bruited. What was I going to have to leave out? Was I going to end up having to yadda-yadda the French Revolution? Would I be forced to spend the whole semester speaking entirely in bullet points? "Manifest Destiny, states' rights, Lincoln, secession, Fort Sumpter, Gettysburg, surrender, Reconstruction, impeachment, segregation, Civil Rights Act of 1964. Moving on!" *Maybe I'd just hand them a copy of Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" (b/w R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)," perhaps) on the first day and be done with it.*

And yet when I sat down to draw up my syllabus, and so started shuffling and rearranging my topics over and over like a bad Scrabble hand, I soon found that they fell naturally into an arrangement that yielded twenty-five lecture/discussion topics. That plus two midterms accounted for all but one of my available class periods.

It would have been easy to fill that class with any of a hundred subjects that were otherwise going by the boards. I wasn't exactly suffering from a dearth of material. For that matter, I could even almost sneak in a lecture on my actual area of interest (ancient Rome). Well,

perhaps not, but it was funny to think about. Or, since during my first year of teaching I had often ended the semester roughly one class behind my syllabus anyway, I could simply designate that extra day on the schedule as "This is the day I'll catch up to where we're actually supposed to be."

But concurrently with the need to accommodate the increase in scope, I had also been worrying about ways to make my class more involving and more interactive. I always try to foster some level of class discussion, but with 45 students a section and with a pressing need to cover a certain amount of ground every class, discussion can sometimes end up getting compressed. That also means you have less of a chance to try to elicit some kind of input from the 35 students who apparently are struck dumb the moment they cross the threshold into a classroom. I was already having all the students each do one brief oral presentation on the primary sources we read. But with this extra day, I started casting about

dispatches FROM THE FRONT

for something that didn't involve another round of me standing up there trying to conjure enlightenment in them like Canute commanding the waves of the sea.

I made an impulsive decision. I decided November 20th would be Debate Day. It had a nice, perky, friendly sound to it. Debate ... Day! Splendid. I typed the two words into the empty hole in the middle of my syllabus and then sent it out for copying before I could change my mind or figure out exactly what it meant.

Okay, that's a bit of an exaggeration. But the fact is I did commit to Debate Day before I really had a concrete sense of what I wanted it to be (other than Involving and Interactive) or how it would work.

I admit part of my motivation in holding tightly to this idea was personal. Because I believe that one of the mandates of this core curriculum course is to develop certain collegiate skills, and because given the rate at which we fly past 500 years of history I want them to be exposed to *something* at some level of reasonable depth, every semester I assign a 6-page, argument-driven research paper. And that means every semester, around Thanksgiving or Spring Break, I'm laden with a daunting stack of 90 amateur dissertations certain to contain numerous remarkable innovations to the grammar of the English language of the sort that would, were I an Old Testament prophet, inevitably cause me to rend my garments. Moreover, for some reason, from among the panoply of topics I make available to them a sizable minority always selects the one about unfree labor. Every semester they zero in on unfree labor like fruit flies discovering a bowl of overripe mangoes, and every semester I end up sick of reading paper after paper on slavery and serfdom, serfdom and slavery. I'm thinking of retiring

the topic, like Lou Gehrig's number, there for everyone to see but nobody to touch ever again.

Anyway Debate Day would be an alternative to the research paper — an oral research project instead of written one. (My constant harping on the need to develop a *thesis* for their papers — one that an informed reader could disagree with — led me, in fact, to the debating idea.) The more students I

could get to do the debate, frankly, the shorter my stack of essays and the less I'd have to read about serfdom, or the role of Louis XIV in the development of absolutism (another curiously overrepresented favorite). Plus I'd be easing the path of students who could do research and who knew the material but who, alas, found no joy in composition. The debaters themselves would be reinforcing key take-aways for the course; hearing them expressed in someone else's voice than mine might just (I reasoned with myself) make a few more coins drop. And for a topper, I'd be giving the students, especially the ones bored by history (or my presentation of it) an event late in the semester to look forward to. I couldn't build a costume party or a Coldplay concert into the syllabus or anything, but this might be the next best thing.

The plan that slowly coalesced, as August waned and my anxiety about the new schedule waxed correspondingly, was to use Debate Day to have the

students argue pro and con on topics spanning the whole semester. The more I thought about it, though, the more my satisfaction in having an entire class set aside for this event mutated into a mad-deningly familiar frustration: that 75 minutes is a tiny, tiny sliver of time, especially given the breadth of what we have to cover. It's like trying to pack the Sistine Chapel into your Samsonite.

For Debate Day to be useful and successful, I had in my head a sort of wish list. I wanted to touch on several topics from across the semester. I wanted to have each side present their arguments, address counterarguments, and have time for rebuttals. I wanted to be able to involve as many students as participants as possible. Most of all I wanted to have class discussion after each debate, because I figured they'd be to respond to perorations from their peers as well as or better than from someone who still remembers a time before Christina Aguilera. I wanted the whole thing to be both fun and informative — a break from the routine, but not a disconnect. Also, I wanted a million dollars to fall from the sky. (With my luck it would be in gold bars.)

Eventually I settled on a scheme of five topics, each focused on a milestone from the course — one that could be approached as much on reasoning as on the facts of the case. We'd start with whether the king (or any king) should be dethroned (from the standpoint of English citizens in 1642), then move on to the merits of federalism (1787), war guilt for Germany (1919), appeasement (1938), and globalism (today). (Notice: no serfdom.) Each side would have four minutes to present, plus a minute for informal rebuttal. If all went well, that meant that I'd have five minutes of interregnum after each topic for *very* brief reaction and commentary from the rest of the students, bringing me up to a very solidly packed 75 minutes. *It would have to do. I could have killed a topic and loosened the latticework considerably, but I just couldn't do it.*

I distributed the requirements to everyone during the first few weeks of class and then took volunteers for the pro and the con of each topic, filling ten slots and accounting for (because they could sign up as individuals or as teams on each side) about fifteen students per section out of 45. Anyone who didn't get a slot would do a paper.

Later I heard from colleagues that those who do debates tend to do them sporadically throughout the semester, rather than congealed in a lump in a single class. This resolves the problem I was facing of risking an overstuffed class period and invoking the law of diminishing returns. But I had fixed the debates in my head as research projects, done in stages like the paper: pick a topic; do preliminary research; submit an outline and draft bibliography; do focused research; submit an optional first draft and final draft. If the debates were done at the same level of effort (and they needed to be, since they'd be fulfilling the same component of the course grade), then they could only be done at more or less the same time as the deadline for the papers, in the last quarter of the semester.

This reasoning was only partial solace for the random feedback I was getting (now that it was too late to change anything). I told a professor I admire that I was having students debate five topics covering various issues of modern history. He seemed interested and so I asked if he had any advice for facilitating the event, since it was taking place the following Monday and I was a little nervous. He responded incredulously, "You mean you're doing all five debates on the same day?!" I was not heartened by this.

In the weeks leading up to Debate Day I did what I could to smooth the process. I tried to use office

continued on page 9

'We Shall Rise': the Persecution of Dr. Sami Al-Arian

PHILIP FAIRBANKS

Since the attacks of September 11th, the climate for Arab Americans and Muslims has changed dramatically. Directly following the attacks, hundreds of immigrants were held for months at a time with no charges brought against them. According to Human Rights Watch, hate crimes directly following the attacks increased by 1700% and many Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent are still being held without writ of habeas corpus in the interest of national security. According to a 2004 article in the *L.A. Times*, FBI agents have complained about physical and mental abuse of detainees as well as humiliation of prisoners. Some detainees, said the article, were draped in Israeli flags and others had lit cigarettes placed in their ears. Other atrocities, such as those at Abu-Ghraib and the killing of 24 civilians at Haditha are not a far stretch from being considered U.S. sponsored terrorism.

Our government has begun playing with semantics as the definition of torture has been retooled to fit their needs. The definitions of terrorism and terrorist have likewise been changed to suit the administration. According to a White House document, terrorism is aided by "subcultures of conspiracy and misinformation." So now even your friendly neighborhood conspiracy theorist could be accused of threatening the freedom of the nation.

Even before 9/11, many detainees were being held, often on secret evidence, classified material used as evidence that cannot be cross-examined and which is not available to either the public nor plaintiffs. This policy is, of course, counter to the Constitution that our government has been



Dr. Sami Al-Arian

charged to protect, and in troubled times such as these, activists are necessary to speak out and raise public awareness. Activism can make strange bed-fellows though.

In 2000, Dr. Sami Al-Arian, professor of Engineering and a political and social activist at the University of South Florida rallied the Muslim population behind, of all people, George W. Bush. Dr. Al-Arian had actually met with the Gore camp in regards to the continued problems of secret evidence, but was not offered support on the issue. Bush however did express interest and after meeting with Al-Arian actually brought up the issues of secret evidence and racial profiling in the presidential debates. Based on this key issue, Al-Arian used his political power to encourage the Florida Muslim population to vote for Bush. After Bush's election, Al-Arian even met with Karl Rove as a delegate of the American Muslim Council (AMC) in regards to

academic repression

UPDATE

President Bush's faith-based agenda and other social and political issues. The group was also scheduled to speak with Vice President Dick Cheney, who, not surprisingly, cancelled after Al-Arian's character was called into question by the *Jerusalem Post*, which that very morning had included a front-page article titled "Cheney to host pro-terrorist Muslim group." Al-Arian's oldest son, sometimes referred to by Bush as "Big Dude," was also politically active as a congressional intern. When he was mistakenly ejected from a White House meeting, several other Muslims walked out in solidarity.

Dr. Sami Al-Arian was born Jan. 14, 1958, in Kuwait, the son of Palestinian refugees. Sami's father, Amin Al-Arian, worked for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Gaza before moving to Kuwait. In 1966, the family was forced to move to Egypt when Al-Arian's father refused to become an informant. Here, Al-Arian dreamed of studying medicine and amassed a vast library. It was also in Egypt that Al-Arian met his wife Nahla. In 1975, at the age of 17, Al-Arian pursued his education in the U.S. In 1978, the Palestinian-American got his bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering, graduating with honors. Al-Arian obtained his Ph.D. in 1985, from North Carolina State University, and in 1986 he became a professor at the University of South Florida.

Al-Arian was heavily involved in community activism and served on the board of the Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality (HOPE), a religious organization involved in community service. HOPE included members of several churches and one mosque. Dr. Al-Arian was also key in the creation of several Arab and Muslim groups, including the Arab Muslim Youth League, Tampa's Islamic Community Center, and the Florida Islamic Academy, a private Islamic school that is still in operation under the name, American Youth Academy. He was considered one of the most active lecturers in America and at one point in time was a member of a coalition that visited Washington on a nearly weekly basis in regards to the issues of secret evidence.

Al-Arian and others met with members of Congress to argue the unconstitutionality of using classified evidence, which so clearly endangers a plaintiff's right to due process. Legislation was eventually passed through the Judiciary committee, chaired by Henry Hyde at the time. Al-Arian also held weekly seminars for Muslim youth. Speakers at these seminars would include, for instance, judges, politicians or reporters. Not just politically and socially active, Al-Arian also served as imam of his mosque, and in the Muslim community he was known for encouraging political activity. He also had his mosque's constitution changed to allow women to serve on the board and now, out of 25 members, at least five must be women.

In 1981 he was a founding member of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and also helped co-found World and Islamic Studies Enterprise (WISE) and the Islamic Committee for Palestine

(ICP). WISE and ICP held conferences, published a journal, entitled *Political Reason*, and also released several books. Both of these groups despite their legitimate political and social activities were labeled terror fronts by government investigators. ICP featured as a guest speaker, blind cleric Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman who is purported to be Bin Laden's spiritual leader and conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. WISE, which sponsored dialogue and understanding between East and West was considered a reputable source of information about Middle Eastern affairs, but was disbanded after being raided in 1995. According to Al-Arian's wife Nahla, "that's exactly what is wrong about this case. This was for the benefit of the society here and overseas and this center should have been supported by our government and our society because they didn't do anything that was wrong. It was focusing on intellectual activities and leading scholarly work. Opening up a dialogue, that was the main objective of our center."

In 1993, the College of Engineering at USF named Al-Arian Teacher of the Year. This was two years before the FBI raid on his home, which followed a series in the Tampa Tribune on possible terror ties in the Tampa community. This same year, a colleague of Dr. Al-Arian, Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, left USF for the Middle East. In 1995, the FBI listed Shallah as a wanted terrorist. FBI investigators sought him on alleged connections to PIJ. Investigators believed that Al-Arian was the financial manager and fund-raiser for PIJ and was using ICP, WISE and related Islamic charities as fronts for funding Islamic Jihad. This led to a two-year suspension with pay, but Sami's troubles with USF had only just begun.

The attack of September 11th was a turning point for Al-Arian. According to a quote from *The St. Petersburg Times*, "Whoever did this is not a Muslim, is not a religious person." He was worried that at any moment authorities would barge in the door. Another member of the Al-Arian household affected strongly by the attacks was his wife Nahla. "I remember after September 11th, we took the kids to a stadium where we took part in singing the national anthem and to participate in the mourning. A lot of kids from our school went with their teachers, my husband, me and we were all so sad at what happened. I was crying that day also because this is going to affect us forever. The whole Muslim community was very affected by it."

After the 9/11 attacks, Dr. Al-Arian was invited to be a guest on Bill O'Reilly's Fox News Channel program, "The O'Reilly Factor." O'Reilly questioned his connection to Shallah as well as Tariq Hamdi, a journalist who coordinated an ABC interview with Osama bin Laden. O'Reilly also questioned him about a speech he had given in 1988 in Cleveland that, at face value, could be construed as a call to violence: "Jihad is our path. Victory to Islam. Death to Israel. Revolution. Revolution until victory. Rolling to Jerusalem." The quotations were taken from a video of the 1988 rally. Dr. Al-Arian claims the passage was taken out of context and that he uses the term "jihad" in the same manner as Bush uses the word "crusade." According to Dr. Al-Arian, "When you say 'Death to Israel,' you mean death to occupation, death to apartheid, death to oppression." O'Reilly asked about the upcoming deportation of Al-Arian's brother-in-law who had been released after being held for three and a half years on secret evidence. Mazen al-Najjar, brother of Al-Arian's wife Nahla, was arrested for his involvement with WISE and ICP. After insisting that al-Najjar was unconnected to Shallah and the others mentioned previously, O'Reilly quipped that "...with all due respect, if I was the CIA, I'd follow you wher-

ever you went. I'd follow you 24 hours..." *The Wall Street Journal* released a story five days later entitled "Palestinian Professor Tests Limits of Liberty in U.S. During a Decade of Islamic Activism." In the article Al-Arian is quoted saying, "No other country would allow me to do what we did. In Israel I would be in jail. In Syria I would be dead. But this is America."

"The O'Reilly Factor" appearance also led to a storm of complaints and death threats following the September 26th airing of the interview. After this USF put Dr. Al-Arian on paid suspension while attorney and former president of the American Bar Association, William Reese Smith, investigated. Dr. Al-Arian was a tenured professor and his suspension provoked a considerable amount of controversy. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the United Faculty of Florida (UFF), the state's faculty union, both spoke out against the suspension of a tenured professor for his beliefs. At first USF administration claimed that his suspension was due to threats of violence and was intended for the safety of Dr. Al-Arian and others at the university. However, Al-Arian was nonetheless turned down when he offered to continue to teach via e-mail, Internet, and video-conferencing. On Dec. 19, 2001, the board of trustees held a meeting and in a 12-1 vote agreed to fire Al-Arian. The next day Governor Jeb Bush explained in a statement that "the taxpayers have no obligation to continue paying a teacher whose own actions have made it impossible for him to teach." The controversy didn't die there, however. Betty Castor, former USF president, was attacked during her Florida Senate race for not firing Dr. Al-Arian soon enough.

The UFF took part in Al-Arian's confrontation with the board of trustees in 2001, when Judy Genshaft, then president of the University of South Florida, announced that he would be terminated. According to the UFF web site they were protecting Al-Arian's freedom to believe and speak on unpop-



Al-Arian's daughter, Leena, and wife, Nahla

ular subjects. "An attack on academic freedom is in fact an attack on the public interest," according to the site. UFF also argued that USF had violated Dr. Al-Arian's contract and had violated his constitutional right to freedom of speech, even if that speech was not popular. USF was the first university to attempt to fire a professor based on actions or speech regarding September 11th. President Genshaft was candid about the reasons for the attempted dismissal of a tenured professor, "When we examine the case of Dr. Al-Arian, it is clear that academic freedom is not an issue...the issue before us is how much disruption the university must endure because of the manner in which a professor exercises his right to express political and social views that are outside the scope of his employment." Pressure came from as high as Governor Bush who, according to Richard Leiby's article in *The Washington Post*, believed the univer-

sity should fire Al-Arian. The high profile nature of the case and the involvement of the AAUP and UFF made firing Al-Arian seem like a less than prudent measure.

After an eight-year investigation from 1995 to 2003, Al-Arian and seven other men were arrested on over 50 counts of terrorism. Al-Arian was being tried as a leader of PIJ and as a fund-raiser for the group's terrorist activities. On Feb. 20, 2003, Al-Arian began a hunger strike to protest what he claimed was a case of political persecution. A week later, he was finally fired by USF, in part due to pressure after the release of the 121-page federal indictment. The indictment never names Al-Arian as actually taking part in violent activities; rather it claims that he was a financial planner and fund-raiser for PIJ.

In July, Amnesty International became involved claiming the conditions of Dr. Al-Arian's imprisonment were inhumane. Dr. Al-Arian had been chained and shackled, denied religious services and kept in 23-hour lockdown in solitary confinement. The trial itself didn't begin until 2005 and evidence included thousands of pages of documents, excerpts from hours of wiretaps ranging back from 1993 and over 80 witnesses, several from Israel. Charges against Al-Arian and the others included conspiracy to murder or maim and providing support to terrorist organizations. From March of 2003 until early 2005, Al-Arian was held in Coleman Federal Penitentiary in the Special Housing Unit, which is usually used as additional punishment for prisoners who misbehave.

While at Coleman, Dr. Al-Arian was allowed only one 15 minute phone call per month and allowed to see his family rarely and only from behind glass. According to Amnesty International and the Tampa Bay Coalition for Justice and Peace web site, jumpsuits were changed every two weeks, and undergarments only once a week. He was confined in a small

left forum 2007

FORGING A RADICAL POLITICAL FUTURE

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

hilary wainwright
michael löwy
david harvey
stanley aronowitz
frances fox piven
david graeber
cornel west
amiri baraka
adolfo gilly

gary younge
christian parenti
marion nestle
gilbert achcar
doug henwood
boaventura de souza
santos
deepa fernandes
mahmood mamdani

bill fletcher, jr.
dave zirin
bernadine dohrn
peter gowan
liza featherstone
walter benn michaels
and many more . . .



MARCH 9-11 • COOPER UNION, NYC

www.leftforum.org • leftforum@leftforum.org • myspace.com/leftforum

cell with no clock for 23 hours a day in solitary confinement. His access to doctors to treat him for his asthma and diabetes was limited, as well as access to his attorneys. He slept with no cot or pillow in extremely low temperatures and was strip-searched three times a day. This harsh form of punishment took place even before his first day in court.

After six months in court, jurors finally acquitted Al-Arian of eight of the 17 counts against him, including conspiracy to murder or maim, obstruction of justice, and providing support to a terrorist organization, the jury deadlocked, two jurors voting guilty on the remaining counts. Al-Arian then accepted a plea bargain agreement and pled guilty to one count of conspiracy. He admitted that he had provided services to people associated with PIJ, including helping with his brother-in-law's legal defense and helping a colleague obtain a visa. According to the plea bargain agreement, Al-Arian was supposed to be freed and deported from the country. The U.S. Attorney recommended, "that the defendant receive a sentence at the low end of the applicable guideline." Judge James Moody, however, sentenced Al-Arian to serve out the remainder of the maximum sentence under the plea bargain of 57 months, including time served since his arrest, stating that, "I find it interesting that here in public you praise this country, the same country that in private you refer to as the great Satan. But that's just evidence of how you operate in the face of your friends and neighbors. You are a master manipulator. The evidence is clear in this case. You were a leader of the PIJ." Supporters of the defendant stated, "There might as well have not been a jury."

Dr. Al-Arian was recently placed in contempt and his sentence could be lengthened considerably every time he refuses to testify in court against the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). If he continues to refuse to provide witness, he could eventually be charged with criminal contempt and

held nearly indefinitely. Though the juries have not returned a single guilty verdict, Dr. Al-Arian has spent years in deplorable conditions. Judge Gordon Kromberg asked the grand jury to subpoena Al-Arian. His attorney, Jack Fernandez, requested that Kromberg wait until after Ramadan to move Al-Arian, to which Kromberg replied: "If they can kill each other during Ramadan, they can appear before the grand jury, all they can't do is eat before sunset. I believe Mr. Al-Arian's request is part of the attempted Islamization of the American Justice system. I am not going to put off Dr. Al-Arian's grand jury appearance just to assist in what is becoming the Islamization of America."

Dr. Al-Arian could be held for up to 18 months for refusing to testify against think tanks and charities, some of which he has not been associated with since the 80's and early 90's. If the judge chooses, Al-Arian could then be held on criminal contempt charges and his sentence could be drawn out nearly indefinitely. In protest, Dr. Al-Arian began another hunger strike on Jan. 22, 2007, and spoke of the conditions in a phone interview with Amy Goodman on "Democracy Now!" "For two months, I had to carry my legal stuff on my back, because they would refuse to carry it, and I was handcuffed from the back, so I cannot carry it myself." In the past nine months, according to Al-Arian in the interview, he has been held in nine different prisons. According to Tampa Bay Coalition for Justice's (TBCJ) web site www.freesamialarian.com, Dr. Al-Arian is currently being held at a federal medical prison. Al-Arian collapsed on February 13th after refusing food and his diabetic medication for 23 days. Dr. Al-Arian's oldest daughter commented on "Democracy Now!" "We're very worried about his health. He's a diabetic, as was stated before. And, you know, we're just worried about how this is going to affect him, and at the same time we're trying to support him and we're fasting ourselves as much as we can. And

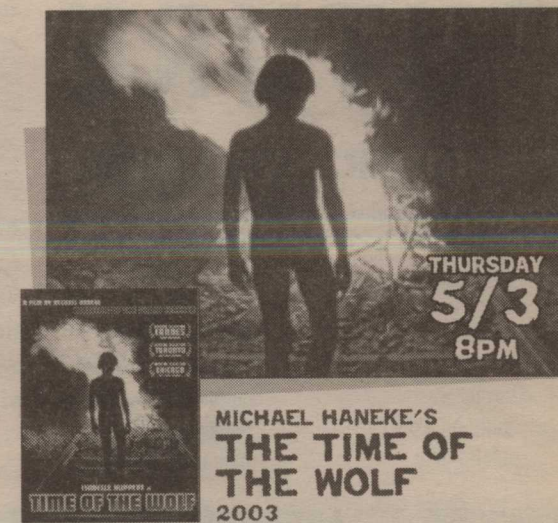
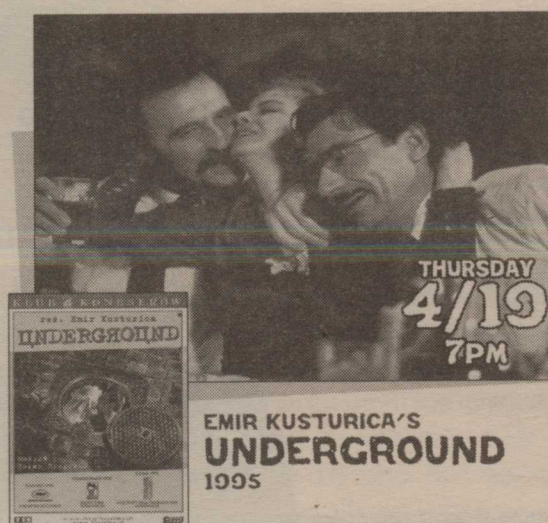
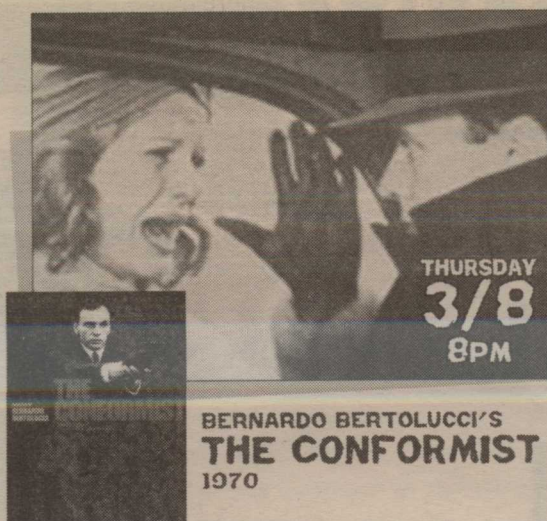
there are now 75 people around the country that are also fasting in solidarity. So, it's definitely a tough time for us."

Line Halvorsen has directed a documentary that follows the Al-Arian family closely entitled USA vs. Al-Arian. The film was shown in Oslo at the Nobel Peace Center by the Norwegian Amnesty International, followed by a speech by Dr. Al-Arian read by his wife Nahla, imploring the Norwegian people to understand the Palestinian plight. "I deeply believe that the path to enduring peace in the holy land is in the establishment of a non-sectarian, democratic, and bi-national state that is inclusive, where Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims, Christians, and Jews live in a pluralistic society that guarantees freedom, equality and justice for all." The end of the speech echoes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. "Deprived of my own freedom, and from my cell in a U.S. prison, I foresee the day when true fraternity and a bond of humanity will overcome the ugliness of exclusiveness, injustice, and occupation. When Palestinians and Israelis live side by side, celebrate their common traditions and heritage and rejoice with the peoples of the world in the spirit of universal peace and understanding." While in Norway, Al-Arian's wife Nahla also appeared on the popular Norwegian talk show "First and Last."

Through degradation and persecution, Dr. Al-Arian continues to fight for his freedom with his hunger strike. As he has said himself, his freedom is more precious to him than his life. In a poem, dedicated to Maya Angelou and written near the end of his second year of detention, titled "We Shall Rise," Al-Arian writes: "Like the dream of the slave/ You rise/ And with the scream of the brave/ I shall rise/ In honoring the memory of your ancestors/ You rise/ With my stateless brothers and sisters/ I shall rise/ Like dust in the sunlight/ You rise/ And as ashes in a fiery night/ I shall rise." ■

FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
Advocate
TOTALLY AWESOME
FILM SERIES



All screenings are in the DSC Social Lounge, Room 5414 • Free Popcorn • BYOB

FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE

Dispatches from the Front
from page 5

hours and special appointments to meet with all the debaters individually to make sure they were becoming confident with their topics and had a sense of how to use their time effectively. But, you know, any group of fifteen students will yield you five that you can't get rid of and five who'd as soon pull out their fingernails as lay eyes on you out of class. In the end I dismissed all the non-debating students fifteen minutes early one day so the participants and I could talk debating strategy and tactics. Fortunately in both classes there were students experienced in speech or debate who provided good advice to the others, and so these brief sessions were as productive as any 15 minutes could be; but I was still concerned. I was facing up to a new manifestation of a common problem: the impossibility of making a direct connection with every student.

By the time Debate Day dawned I had a Charlie Brown stomach-ache about the whole thing. I was committed to making it work and yet my confidence that I was doing the right thing had been not inconsiderably eroded. Plus I had hinted that I'd be bringing food and I'd totally spaced on actually picking anything up. At least running around Midwood trying to find open stores at 7:30 a.m., in advance of an 8 o'clock class, kinda took my mind off my other concerns. By the time I got to campus and ran into the office to copy off the agenda/feedback sheet I'd be handing out to all the students, which I'd finalized only the night before (after being torn about how and whether to elicit audience feedback), there was a *line* at the history department copier. A line! The office was always deserted at that hour, and on this day of all days I'm running behind and there are two (senior) professors ahead of me at the copier? Man, my karma sucks. (You call it advance planning. I call it karma.) If this *had* been a Peanuts strip I would have thun-

ked my big round head against the office wall and said, "I'm doomed."

At least there was a digital projector for those students using visual aids. I wheeled it into class, got it set up, and started the whole shebang five minutes late. Already my carefully balanced schedule was listing in the wind. The wind ... of my karma.

As class unfolded, I started to relax. Attendance was excellent, and given that it was an "extra" (i.e., non-lecture/discussion) day, during Thanksgiving week at that, I hadn't known what to expect on that front. (Of course, hinting in the lead-up to the big day that the debate topics were likely to resurface on the final might have helped.)

The debaters were really well prepared. Their presentations were all pretty close to the stipulated four-minute max, and most knew their material well enough to get their heads out of their notes and talk directly to the class. Use of visual aids was sporadic but good. Off-the-cuff rebuttals were often unexpectedly effective. Best of all, the students in the audience got more and more involved as the event went on, even after the cookies had run out.

During my second section something happened that surprised me.

The two young men who were doing pro and con, respectively, on the issue of appeasement had met up beforehand and taken the trouble to convert their two four-minute presentations into an eight-minute dialog as between two passionate partisans, which they delivered with great effectiveness and with only a few glances at their notes. Addressing me as Prime Minister Chamberlain [!] and the rest of the class as the British cabinet, they volleyed back and forth with verve and humor, leaving many in the class both delighted at the show and maybe, just incidentally, with a bit of a clearer idea of inter-war Europe and the complexities of what that means about the society that descended from it — our world. These two men had been all but stone-silent throughout the course, and here they were, bringing

a difficult topic to life like two junior Frankensteins. It was just one moment in many, but it stayed with me.

Debate Day was not perfect, and I know there are probably dozens of better ways pedagogically for me to have reinforced the ideas we addressed that day for the students in my classes. It did, however, unexpectedly create a connection for me. I'd been spending all this time thinking about the event, and the semester itself for that matter, in terms of forms and functions, mechanics and deliverables. I tend to think modularly like that. But I was reminded of something basic and vital, which is that every assignment, every exercise, every event contains a potentiality, a seed, for students to stretch, to strain their bonds, to shed their skin. It seems pretty obvious and right in front of you, like a song you've heard your whole life that suddenly, heard in a new way, reveals a new layer of meaning.

I walked home that day thinking that the biggest challenge of my job is not somehow "covering" five centuries of material, or grading a stack of essays, or plowing through blue books. It's making that stretching, straining, and shedding happen. It's an art, a skill, a talent. It's not taught to us — even the need to focus on this skill is not taught to us. Acquiring and perfecting it is the one goal every nascent teacher should address himself to from the day he stands in front of his first blackboard. To me, right now, it seems like a task harder than clarifying the English Civil War, harder than grading a hundred blue books, a task I know is not beyond me but which I have the blurriest idea of how to go about achieving; and for all I am on some days the gruff cynic ready to abandon the world to Hobbesian mayhem, I know that more important work there cannot be.

It's a challenge frightening and exhilarating at the same time. I am, I realize, a clumsy journeyman in a trade that molds that unfathomable thing, the human mind. I have a long way to go. In taking on this role of adjunct professor I was flung unceremoniously into the deep end of the pool, and all this time I've concentrated on staying afloat. Now, I have somewhere to swim to. ■

KATWALK NYC

ALL FUN NO DRAMA



**Unwind and relax after a long day of classes at the
Best Happy Hour in NYC!**

Monday-Friday 4-8pm

\$3 Select Domestic Drafts • \$6 Premium Wines & Champagne

\$6 Speciality Cocktails • \$3 Shots

FREE coat check during Happy Hour

FREE Hors D'oeuvres for birthday parties of 15 or more people

**Help the cause and become a Katwalk Charity Guest Bartender.
We donate 10% of the Guest Bartender's sales to a charity of their choice.**

**2 WEST 35TH STREET, MIDTOWN, NEW YORK, NY 10001
212-594-9343 • WWW.KATWALKNYC.COM**

Blaming the Victim (and the British)

MAURICE LEACH

Black Rednecks and White Liberals is the latest rehash of the culture of poverty thesis that presupposes that the black poor are trapped in a never ending cycle of bad behavior that perpetuates itself across the generations. Sowell, an economist at the conservative Hoover Institution and himself black, reviews themes more extensively covered in his previous books *Economics and Politics of Race* and *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*. *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* really doesn't introduce anything new. In fact, most of this book is a collection of essays that significantly detour from the subject of the title perhaps indicating this isn't so much a book length concept as a work of conservative propaganda. *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, with its unseemly use of racial slurs is the latest in a long, tired series of books by conservative authors bashing white liberals. The onus for the supposed failure of the black community to fully integrate is laid at the feet of white liberals and their pesky social programs creating a culture of dependency. Without those programs,

so the meme goes, blacks would excel; just look at the Jews in Germany, they excelled despite centuries of discrimination. So black Americans really have no excuse but their own cultural failings, and of course, white liberals.

The origins of the "redneck" culture were in Britain where according to Sowell it largely died out because most of the representatives of this culture migrated to the southern United States where they transplanted their dysfunctional behavior and transmitted it to black Americans. According to Sowell every dysfunctional characteristic of black inner city culture has its counterpart (and antecedent) in the white redneck culture. Due to the white "redneck" culture the South was a largely underdeveloped region exploited by Northerners prior to and after the Civil War and from which little of scientific, economic, or cultural import has originated because of it.

Some hallmarks of this dysfunctional society include: the notion of "cracker" pride, which leads to violence based on real or imagined slights from strangers, friends, or even relatives; the notion that work is not highly valued and that anyone who works hard should be looked down upon or ridiculed; and social pathologies, such as a high crime rate, a high rate of out of wedlock births, chronic high unemployment, low achievement in standard measures of education, and a propensity toward occupying low paying unskilled and semi-skilled labor occupations with little potential for future growth or ambition.

According to Sowell, that the Southern "cracker-redneck" culture is the culprit in black underachievement is proven by the fact that blacks outside the South evince little of these pathologies, especially those blacks who resided in the North prior to World War I, when the Great Migration brought millions of blacks to cities in the North and West. Sowell cites an old, yet famous IQ study that showed black Northerners scored higher than either white Southerners or black Southerners on standard measures of IQ. This is attributed to the greater influence of the white "redneck" culture among Southern blacks. It is very much the fault of modern-day inner city blacks for not changing their affinities for the "redneck" culture because doing so would end to the hold of this systemic culture of dysfunction. After all don't blacks from the

book REVIEW

• *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* by Thomas Sowell. Encounter Books, 2005 (355 pages).

West Indies achieve at higher rates than their black American counterparts? Presumably they face the same levels of discrimination but haven't allowed it to become a crutch.

At the same time Sowell points out that many, if not most, blacks don't participate in this culture which would seem to make the salience of this work to the wider presumed pattern of black American underachievement moot. Still if this was the worst one could say about *Black Rednecks* we could stop right here. But it isn't because along the way Sowell makes several rather astonishing arguments for someone expected to be so well acquainted with facts and complex analysis. For instance, he argues that slavery and its after effects aren't a major

**Black
Rednecks
and
White
Liberals**
Thomas Sowell

Sowell talks about the small enclaves of blacks in Northern cities as though they were some sort of racial utopia. He seems to be saying that racial harmony is possible only when there aren't too many blacks involved.

factor in the socio-economic difference between blacks and whites. This might be a compelling point if Sowell provided any evidence to support it. Clearly slavery is the big difference since blacks were enslaved in this country and whites weren't. Slaves did not own anything, not even their own labor. Even after emancipation, slaves were not compensated for the centuries, of free labor that helped the United States invest in its own industrialization. Ex-slaves were not given the means by which to become self-sufficient and are still waiting for their forty acres and a mule.

Maybe Sowell would better grasp the association of blacks with victimization had he incorporated that history of victimization into his analysis. After Reconstruction ended many states passed a package of laws known as the Black Codes to systematically disenfranchise black Americans. This is why the Voting and Civil Rights Acts, which Sowell doesn't think were important, were in fact, crucial. The Black Codes included such laws as the poll tax, paid by every voter regardless of race but deliberately set at a threshold that was too expensive for most ex-slaves; the Grandfather clause, which declared anyone ineligible to vote who did not vote in the election of 1860 (conveniently before the final abolition of slavery); and the literacy test, made especially difficult for the express purpose of disqualifying black voters. Because slaves were purposely left illiterate, after emancipation the ex-slaves faced a significant intellectual disadvantage compared with their white counterparts. Not surprisingly because some Southern whites were also poor and not well educated they too were affected by this racist legislation and it is just as likely that Southern elites didn't want their political participation either.

No group can overcome so many social, eco-

nomic, and political disadvantages accumulated over centuries in a single or even a few generations, particularly when a new set of disadvantages were created to purposely prevent this. After emancipation most ex-slaves went on to become sharecroppers and tenant farmers and a type of quasi-slavery status developed because the powerful, white ex-slave-holding elite never embraced emancipation and refused to accept the ex-slaves as social and political equals. Combined with the fact that most ex-slaves were poor and uneducated peasants this left them with very little political or economic leverage. Clearly this attempt to hold down the Southern black population has had a deleterious affect on the economic development prospects of the South. But rather than a "redneck" culture as the cause of this under-development, it would seem race is a major culprit.

Sowell completely omits this larger political and economic context confronting most black Americans after Reconstruction and the segregationist system that was being installed throughout the former slave-holding states. Nor does he consider the impact of "separate but equal" policies which are central to the difficulty the first and second generation descendants of slaves encountered when pursuing their own American dream. Indeed the words "segregation" and "reconstruction" do not even appear in his book.

Which leads to the next astonishing statement: Northern white racism around the early 1900s is blamed on the black migration from the South to the North. Sowell talks about the small enclaves of blacks in Northern cities pre-WWI as though they lived in some sort of racial utopia. Sowell seems to be saying that racial harmony is possible only when there aren't too many blacks involved. This is as clear a case of blaming the victim as there is in conservative literature. The following is perhaps the signature quote of *Black Rednecks* as it encapsulates how deeply in denial about institutionalized racism Sowell is:

The Ku Klux Klan was certainly a racist organization but that description cannot explain why it began to make major inroads among whites in Northern states after a mass migration of blacks from the South had moved into these states. Like the ghettoization of blacks in Northern cities, where they had once lived dispersed among the white population, the spread of the Klan's racist organizations into Northern communities had to have some causal explanation. It is hard to see these two major retrogressions in race relations as mere coincidences that just happened to occur after the migrations of Southern blacks into Northern cities (Sowell 2005, 61).

Sowell's opinion of the Voting and Civil Rights Acts continues to mystify. He simply doesn't think these laws were necessary for black Americans to succeed and fully participate in the American society, culture, and economy. When discussing declining black poverty rates from 1940-1960, when a decline of 40 percentage points occurred, he delights in pointing out that this progress predated the civil rights legislation. What he's omitting is that this progress only happened mainly because of the Great Migration of Southern blacks to the more economically favored northern and western states of New York, Michigan, California, New Jersey, and Illinois. That is, economic progress only happened when blacks escaped the socially and economically oppressive conditions in the South, and thus it was by removing oneself from the discrimination that progress happened, not in spite of it, as Sowell suggests. It should be noted this migration ended in 1970 and there has since been a return migration of blacks back to the South. It is these black migrants who can be compared with European and West

Indian immigrants, not the blacks who remained in the South. For them the benchmark for comparison remains the passage of the Voting (1964) and Civil Rights (1965) Acts. Finally, isn't the segregationist system completely immoral and oppressive? Shouldn't it have been dissolved anyway regardless of its purported irrelevance to black social progress? Sowell doesn't really argue from this place because he never explicitly acknowledges the racist system even exists.

Sowell argues that the liberal welfare state is holding back the progress of black Americans yet his own discussion of welfare programs stops curiously at 1994 thus conveniently failing to evaluate the next 12 years of welfare reform. Have the highly touted welfare reform policies actually worked as promised? It's debatable, but Sowell doesn't even bother to consider the results of the very policies he has for decades been advocating.

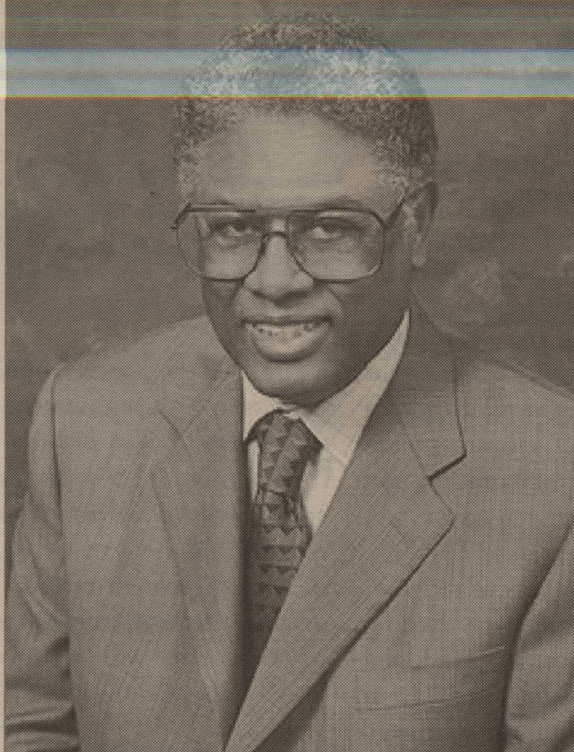
Finally, regarding the presumed relative superior performance of West Indians or other immigrant groups consider that most West Indian blacks entered the United States decades after slavery was abolished and a great many immigrated after segregation ended and settled in the more economically advantaged Northern states, not in the South where the majority of black Americans lived until about 1970. They didn't encounter the same level of institutionalized discrimination as Southern blacks. Also immigrants from the West Indies, as is true from most regions, come from the most motivated and educated segments of their society and are more prepared to succeed than those who don't immigrate making sweeping comparisons with "native" born black Americans problematic as well. Black Americans are often unfavorably compared with European ethnic immigrants as well. This is simply a specious comparison since no white ethnic group entered the United States as slaves nor endured a

period of history when generations of their descendants were held as chattel.

The liberal bashing of conservatives remains an intellectual curiosity. Liberals, of all colors, have only tried to *help* people. Perhaps they have not always succeeded, and certainly many liberal programs can use some tweaking from time to time, but we would not have Social Security, anti-poverty programs, minimum wage legislation, Medicare and Medicaid, a 40-hour work week, and retirement pensions without them. Nor will we have a national healthcare program, stem cell research, and tolerant social policies without liberals either.

There are problem segments in all ethnic and racial groups (and nations) and these problems all occur for the same reasons: lack of quality economic opportunity. It is at heart a class issue whether Sowell is discussing white rednecks in the South or in Britain, or the dysfunction of inner-city blacks and not a question of culture. However, when the subject turns to black Americans the extent of the problem, while considerable, invariably tends to be overstated and one would think that blacks are stuck in the same social, political and economic quagmire of 50 years ago. In fact the poverty rate among blacks has declined from 55% in 1959 to a

Thomas Sowell



record low of 22.5% in 2000. But because some blacks are defined by what Sowell acknowledges is only a segment of black society — all are somehow defined by it. This is ridiculous and racist.

It would seem more pertinent that past and future prospects for black economic progress are correlated with the quality and availability of opportunity to black workers. It is interesting to note that since 1960 black poverty and unemployment rates have actually declined under Democratic presidents and risen under Republican ones. This propensity toward the under-achievement of black Americans is just as easily explained by the hostility of Republican administrations to black constituents than the

dependency created by liberal Democratic social programs. As long as the signals to black inclusion and participation in all levels of this nation's society and economy continue to be positive and bear clear results progress for black Americans will continue. However, if it is not then for that reason many blacks will be discouraged from participating fully in the American economy not because of any ephemeral "redneck" culture of poverty and dysfunction.

Finally, anyone wishing to more thoroughly explore the subjects Sowell raises would be better served reading V.O. Key's classic work *Southern Politics in State and Nation* and Bensel's *Sectionalism and American Political Development: 1880-1980*. Both bring the necessary breadth of analysis and context minus the sweeping statements of propaganda. ■

Adjunct News from page 4

staff. And this effort to promote unity as well as the union's inability to marginalize part-timer concerns may lead to significant improvements for graduate students and adjuncts in the upcoming contract.

Still, if part-timers have strengthened their power and position within the union, it does not necessarily mean that the contract will meet any of our key demands. After all, CUNY is unlikely to surrender the significant power and revenue it retains by maintaining a system in which more than half of its teaching positions are staffed by low-paid, contingent labor. CUNY has revealed its determination to maintain this system in its recurrent use of the term "flexibility." Before it even had its first meeting with the PSC over contract negotiations, CUNY asserted its will to have a considerable degree of "flexibility in titles." In other words, CUNY believes it must have the power to control the academic workforce through a "flexible" system in which much of the work is done by an insecure, and thus

easily manipulated contingent workforce.

If the PSC is serious in its intention to "tackle CUNY's abusive job system," and if it intends to strongly defend part-timer demands at the bargaining table, then it must prepare for an immense struggle with CUNY. Will the union prevail, or will CUNY's commitment to "flexibility" result in the PSC scrapping part-timer demands when the going gets tough? Only time will tell. But graduate students and adjuncts can help determine the outcome by keeping pressure on the union to fight for part-timers. We can talk to people at the Graduate Center and on our campuses about the contract demands and what is at stake. We can attend bargaining sessions to ensure that we are being represented effectively. By letting both CUNY and the PSC know that we are paying attention and that we will not be satisfied with a contract that ignores key part-timer demands, we can make sure this contract yields significant improvements. Let's not let CUNY or the PSC produce another contract that ignores our needs! ■

Feeling Tortured by Writer's Block?

Not Making Progress on your Thesis, Dissertation or Book?

Get the Help you need.

Dr. Rose McAloon 212-663-6211

www.writersblocknyc.com

MAUI TACOS®

FRESH MEXICAN FOOD WITH MAUITUDE

**Burritos, Quesadillas,
Soft & Hard Tacos,
Salsa Bar & Nachos
Taco Salad**

**A FUN,
CASUAL,
UNIQUE
EATERY**

Full Service Hawaiian Tiki Bar
Beer, Wine &
Great Margaritas
Orders prepared
to your palate
**OPEN 7 DAYS
10-10**
Space Available For
Parties & Meetings

330 5th Avenue
Between 32nd & 33rd Street
212-868-9720
1/2 block from the Empire State Building
**FREE DELIVERY WITH ORDER
OF \$10.00 OR MORE**
Please place your order at least 30 minutes in advance

Holy Punks in the Fog of War

ANTON BORST

In the midst of a mid-life crisis, F. Scott Fitzgerald once suggested a connection between his nervous breakdown and his work as a screenwriter, a job that subjected his texts to the whims and profit-mongering of co-writers, producers, directors, and actors, his personality disintegrating with the corruption of his individual talent. As different as *The Great Gatsby* would have been without the guidance of editor Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald's basic points stand: Hollywood films require collaboration and compromise; work and culture reflect and affect the mind.

Some decades later, Joan Didion, too, would suggest popular film lacked artistic coherence, arguing that the few screenplays that ever get produced have chance and marketing to thank much more than merit or vision: when a deal-maker is at the right place at the right time, a film is made; individual writers at desks have very little to do with it. Film then, could be reduced to a simple equation: 1% inspiration, 2% perspiration, and 97% contingency. All this would suggest that popular film — not to mention corporatized popular music — shapes itself at several removes from the populace, its plots gestating in some inhuman cloud of industry interests and practices hovering apart from the tastes, concerns, and narratives of the individual human being living a real life.

Admittedly, I am a crank, especially during the American Entertainment Awards season. After years of disappointment, I have more or less given up hope of feeling anything other than cultural alienation at hearing Justin Timberlake win a Grammy or Paul Haggis an Oscar (though the nomination of *Little Miss Sunshine* this year gives me pause; the picture, I suspect, is not as bleak as I'd like to think). But the extent to which Hollywood continues to draw audiences indicates how much Hollywood already determines the "tastes and interests" of real, live individuals, begging the question, what is realer than film? Still, the pomp and ceremony of the Oscars leaves me quite cold, resting as it does on the pomp and ceremony already accrued by the Oscars. A tradition of glamour, wealth, and fame provides the medium with its mystique and power, vaulting it beyond any perceptible relationship to me.

But perhaps I should attend to the beam in my own eye before pointing out the motes in others'. Like any cultural form, music reviewing has its habits and rituals, rigidified into shapes outliving their original purpose. The ideal album to review must be new, by the young and beautiful, and just catching a building wave of hype. Instead, for this review, I'm going to rummage through a dust-covered corner of my personal CD library to retrieve one of the strangest and oldest items in its cata-

music REVIEW

♦ *Black Monk Time* by the Monks (Polydor 1966; Repertoire 1994).

logue: "Black Monk Time," put out in 1964 by the Monks, a little known though cult-adored quintet of GI's who began playing together while stationed in Germany. They performed tonsured and cassocked like actual monks, but with looped nooses round their necks for neckties as a blunt symbol of society's constrictions. Forerunning punk by a decade, the Monks were among the first rock bands to experiment with feedback and perhaps began to do so independently of anyone else. Tracks like "I

Hate You" and "That's My Girl" reverberate with the same kind of manic fuzz and roar of the Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray," but with greater control and restraint. Their sound is blunt and rhythmic, all drums and gut-strung banjo, trading melody for beating repetition. They sound like a jury-rigged jalopy careening down the hill of the sixties, belching a fume of feedback and angst back at the madness of the decade. "We don't like the atomic bomb," says singer and guitarist Gary

Burger on the opening track, "Monk Time"; "Stop it, stop it," he then shrieks in terror, as if staring straight at a mushroom cloud: "I don't like it . . . Stop It!" Vietnam and the nuclear age have left grown soldiers wishing for a cloister and throwing tantrums like children.

It is this kind of desperate simplicity that allows the Monks to literally beat a hole through the fog of war in "Complications." While Burger belts out

the slaughter-justifying euphemism of the title over and over again, the rest of the band respond, sneering, "People cry, / People die for you. / People kill, / People will for you," a powerful condemnation of citizen complicity in distant theaters of war, all the more potent for being snarled by the mouths of actual soldiers to the layered hammered beats of voice, drum, banjo, and guitar. With so many people oblivious to obvious horrors, the Monks take recourse to the crudest form of musical strategy: they pound the song into the listener's brain. Their insistence, directness, and urgency make them more relevant to the present moment than any rock album released in the last decade.

As insane as the external cultural landscape may be for this band, the interior hardly looks much better. On "I Hate You," Burger again enters into a dialogue with the band, singing hoarsely, "I hate you with a passion baby," while they chant the self-defeating afterthought, "But call me!" The song "Oh, How to Do Now," which begins with the pop signature of a surf-rock drum roll, extends into an increasingly frantic tempo propelled by an off-kilter organ, the lyrics likewise undercutting conventional love song pop sensibilities. Burger's desire is inarticulate, obsessive, and possessive, as he sings, "I'm going to make you you you you mine today . . . Make you mine long long time today." The lyrics on "Black Monk Time" tend to be as repetitive as the beat, signifying psyches troubled from within and without, but also battering down the complacency of convention and demanding justice and sanity in the process. Their aesthetic seems epitomized in "Higgle-Dy-Piggle-Dy," the lyrics of which — in their stark nonsensical entirety — being, "Higgle-Dy-Piggle-Dy / Higgle-Dy-Piggle-Dy / Higgle-Dy-Piggle-Dy / Way down to heaven / Yeah!" over and over again. The space opened up by this and other Monks songs disorients, peels away the familiar: what we thought was nonsense is actually the road to heaven, which is actually where we had always thought hell was. The music is ugly, weird, and discomforting, hammering away at the psychological foundations of love, God, and country, and leaving you with nothing but a bare, manic beat. But it is a beat to which you can dance, and one that makes me feel a hell of a lot more aware and alive than I ever felt watching the Grammys. ■



The Monks in Hamburg in 1966.

'54 characters, 23 scenes, 4 square meters'

FRANK EPISALE

Living in North America's preeminent theatre city, New York audiences tend to believe that they have access to, and knowledge of, the full scope and breadth of the theatrical universe. In truth, however, the early 21st century finds New Yorkers without easy access even to most foreign films, which are relatively easy to reproduce and distribute. Contemporary plays from around the world, which require translation, direction, production, and rehearsal — and which are almost certainly doomed to lose money after all is said and done — are far harder to come by. This is even truer of anything intended to play to small audiences, anything with a whiff of the intimate, the edgy, the avant-garde, or the topical.

Because theatre is ephemeral, and because the literary is only one aspect of the theatrical, these plays are infrequently translated. The dramatic text is inherently incomplete, and even fewer people read new plays than go to see them. While all of this is actually a part of what makes theatre so potentially exciting, one unfortunate result is that theatre communities separated by geographical and linguistic distance are rarely able to experience and exchange each other's work. Parallel histories of the theatre are developing in disparate cities, only intersecting when an academic journal or travel magazine publishes a review of a theatre festival, or when a graduate student and cultural foundations find the time and funds to finance a tour or translation. Too often, then, our understanding of drama and theatre from other countries and cultures is limited to the "traditional" and the "canonical," reducing a vital, living, multivalent art form into still images in history books and museums.

It is a rare and welcome opportunity, then, to have a contemporary play from Japan open in its English-language premiere in New York. Yoji Sakate's *The Attic*, translated by Leon Ingulsrud and Keiko Tsuneda, is as likely to perplex as to entertain. Still, if this exploration of disorientation and isolation is not for everyone, it is still a fascinating glimpse

theater REVIEW

• *The Attic* by Yoji Sakate. Translated by Leon Ingulsrud and Keiko Tsuneda. Directed by Ari Edelson.

most such individuals are reclusive and anti-social rather than violently sociopathic.

The sensationalism of the media coverage, which has spread from Asian outlets to reports on the BBC and in the New York Times, has left a great many questions unanswered. Is this a new phenomenon, or just newly articulated? Is it unique to Japan and South Korea or is it happening elsewhere as well? Is it a symptom of the postmodern condition or is it akin to the impulse that has moved saints, poets, and survivalists to seek isolation in the past? Is it a single condition with consistent and identifiable causes, or is it a collection of individual neuroses that have now been lumped together under an umbrella term?

Sakate and his company, Rinko-gun, have wisely avoided positing any reductive or "definitive" answers to these questions, but the emergence of *hikikomori* as a cultural phenomenon and the anxiety-saturated headlines it generated, must have seemed a natural fit for a company who, according to their web site, have tackled "a range of controversial and, at times, taboo topics, including the Japanese trial system, the Okinawa/American military base controversy, Japanese activism, the emperor system, homosexuality, the emergence and influence of religious cults, nationalism and censorship after WWII, as well as the use/actions of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces."

The topic also seems well-suited to Rinko-gun's signature aesthetic, a pastiche of media and forms meant to collide in the intimate confines of a black-box theatre. For *The Attic*, Sakate has constructed a series of thematically connected, occasionally overlapping narratives that draw from influences as diverse as the surrealism of Franz Kafka and the magic-realism of Haruki Murakami; from traditional Japanese ghost stories, to the new horror traditions of *The Ring* and *The Grudge*; from the absurdist existentialism of Samuel Beckett, to the generic excesses of Samurai films and detective stories.

Linking all of these elements is the text's central conceit: a mysterious manufacturer has been selling, at great cost, customized "attics:" hand-crafted isolation chambers with sloping ceilings that can be placed

or installed in existing rooms, on balconies, or even underground. A growing number of "confines" have made the chambers such a sought-after commodity that lesser imitations of the attics have sprung up, and can be ordered at almost any department store in the country.

The first scene of the play involves a man whose younger brother has recently committed suicide in an attic that he kept in his dorm room. In dialogue that implies his brother's isolation and subsequent suicide are all-too evocative of a general lack of communication between the siblings, the older brother sets out to find the manufacturer of the attic, unsure whether to blame them for his brother's suicide but compelled to better understand what has happened.

This quest for meaning, for understanding, is what dominates a dizzying array of scenes, all of which take place in the confined space of an attic. A dying mother worries about how her *hikikomori* son will survive when she is gone; a man kidnaps and keeps a girl for years in his attic; a teenage outcast shuts herself in only to discover, when she is visited by her teacher, how commonplace her anxieties and social phobias really are; members of an internet community discover the body of a virtual friend; travelers lost in a winter storm discover an abandoned attic-turned-shelter; etc.

Each scenario further illuminates both the desire to comprehend the isolation impulse and the futility of trying to understand anything so personal about another human being. In some scenes, the voices of the dead are heard to protest the assumptions of the living. The audience members are witness to the ghosts' protests at the ways their stories and intentions are misrepresented while the living characters, unable to hear the voices of the dead, continue to impose unwelcome narratives on the memories of those they paid too little attention to in life.

Director Ari Edelson and producers The Play Company have successfully exported Rinko-gun's aesthetic to 59E59 Theatres with a production that turns the limitation of intimate theatre into an advantage. Publicity materials for *The Attic* inventory its contents as "54 characters, 23 scenes, 4 square meters." All of this is acted out, in the current production, by eight versatile actors who change costumes, mannerisms, and performance styles with athletic precision. Michi Barall, in various roles, and Brandon Miller, as a mysterious "hunter," (identified in the program as "man with cap") are particularly impressive.

The performers are aided in their task by the flawlessly executed work of the play's technical and design teams. Most notably, award-winning lighting designer Tyler Micoleau manipulates the mood of the setting to bring variety and motion to an inherently cramped and static setting. The attic itself, a cramped, trapezoidal structure in which almost all of the play's action takes place, is also highly effective, and is presumably the work of set-designer Takeshi Kata. The lights and set are augmented by the subtle virtuosity of sound designer Bart Fasbender.

Theatre has often been theorized as an inherently communal art form, and there is a certain irony in employing it to explore an extreme manifestation of isolation. For this and other reasons, *The Attic* is not an entirely comfortable experience for the audience. The intimate space of the theatre sometimes felt even more confined given nearly two hours spent gazing into the onstage attic, while actors unable to stand or stretch acted out a variety of emotionally and physically claustrophobic scenes. For several audience members, the experience was either too much or too little; of those who seemed to be leaving for a visit to the restroom, most never returned.

For myself, I left the theatre grateful not only that I had been able to see a unique work from a playwright rarely produced in the United States, but also that my own addiction to companionship and the collaborative nature of my chosen discipline keep me from shutting out the world for too long at a time. ■

The Attic by Yoji Sakate. Translated by Leon Ingulsrud and Keiko Tsuneda. Directed by Ari Edelson. Presented by The Play Company. 59E59 Theatres, 59E59 Street (Park/Madison). Through March 25th. Tuesday through Saturday at 8:15pm; Saturday and Sunday at 3:15pm. Tickets are \$35 and can be purchased in person the theatre's box office, online at www.ticketcentral.com, or by calling 212-279-4200. Student rush tickets (\$5) are available at the box office only. Running time is 110 minutes, with no intermission. More information available at BuyTheAttic.com.

A scene from *The Attic*.



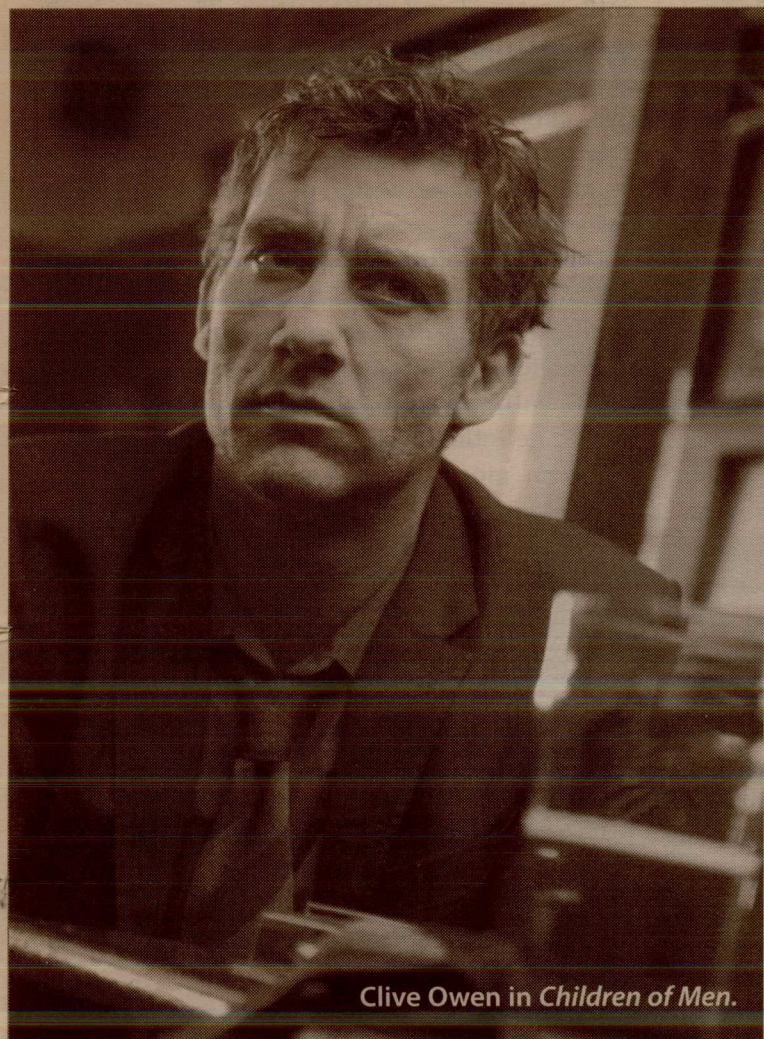
into Tokyo's equivalent of off and off-off-Broadway theatre, and to the response of one of that scene's luminaries to a troubling and darkly fascinating cultural phenomenon.

The inspiration for Sakate's play is a phenomenon called *hikikomori*, an extreme form of social withdrawal first articulated as a phenomenon by Japanese psychologist Tamaki Saito. The subject of a flurry of newspaper attention about five years ago, *hikikomori* describes the condition of as many as one million Japanese youths (though more conservative estimates place the number at closer to 100,000) who refuse to go to school, to work, or even to leave their rooms for months and years at a time. A handful of lurid stories about kidnappings, suicides, and other aberrations belie the fact that

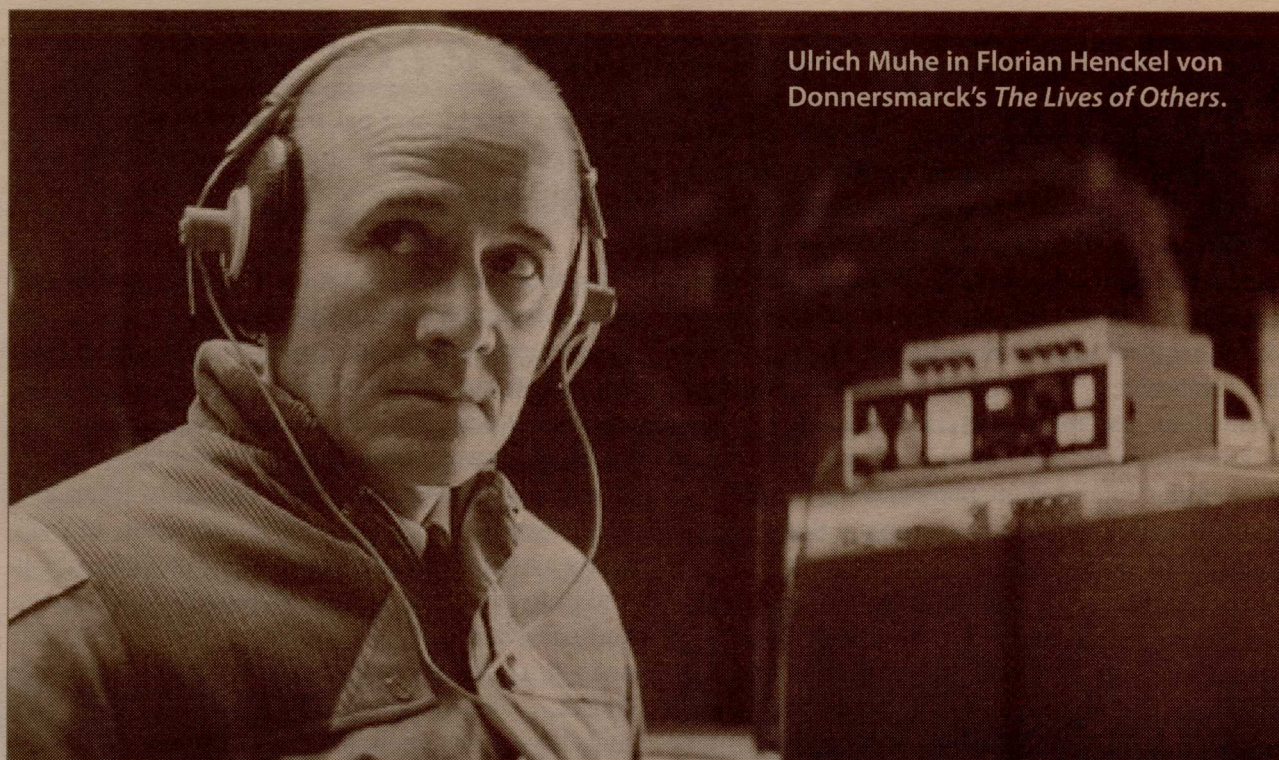
Chilling Past, Nightmare Future

TIM KRAUSE

As revolting spectacles go, this year's Academy Awards ceremony was gentler than most. To be sure, Oscar Night 2007 came replete with a cornucopia of regrettable moments, a grab-bag of philistine self-congratulation and childish acting-out as multifarious, and ultimately unnecessary, as the complementary swag gift-sets Hollywood so proudly eschewed this year. It was sad, for example, to see Martin Scorsese finally win what amounted to a default Lifetime Achievement award, his fellow '70s film-school auteurs Spielberg, Coppola, and Lucas on hand to welcome him, however belatedly, into cinema's Valhalla, all four of them looking rather long in the tooth and embarrassingly, well, valetudinarian. (From the point of view, of course, as Oscar presenters and talking-heads, not as filmmakers: I loved *The Departed*, although it's not Scorsese's best by a long shot, and the other directors remain major players, especially Spielberg, whose productivity and proficiency continue to astound.) Not that Hollywood's seemingly inexhaustible legions of younger actors did much to cheer up the scene: witness newcomer Jennifer Hudson, who coasted to a Best Supporting Actress on the wings of the pathetically slapdash *Dreamgirls* (directed by Bill Condon, who knows better), and endlessly mouthed in the weeks leading up to the ceremony the shopworn nostrum that she "followed her dream," as if it were her dreams alone — and not the whorish bloodsport that is *American Idol*, or the cynically crafted Hollywood feel-good machine (and, to be fair, some modicum of talent: that voice!) — that apotheosized her into the fire-new Diva of the Moment. When Davis Guggenheim, director of Al Gore's PowerPoint presentation-cum-jeremiad *An Inconvenient Truth*, dedicated his Best Documentary Oscar to environmental crusader Gore and his dreams, I was, frankly, shocked: not even the impending worldwide cataclysm of rapid climate change, it seems, could so much as dent the



Clive Owen in *Children of Men*.



Ulrich Muhe in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others*.

film REVIEW

- *The Lives of Others*, written and directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
- *Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón

created?

Fortunately, the Academy struck gold in what's usually a disappointing category, that of Best Foreign Film, awarding this year's Oscar to Germany's submission, the terrific new film *The Lives of Others*, written and directed by first-timer Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. *The Lives of Others* tells, with scrupulous attention to detail and an emotional economy that's completely alien to American films, the story of East German Stasi (secret police) agent Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler, played with scintillating self-possession by Ulrich Mühe. Completely committed to Communist East Germany's political regime as the film opens, Wiesler's ideological loyalties are tested by his latest assignment, which is to spy on the playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and his lover, the beautiful Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck). What appears at first to be a straightforward political case — Wiesler is told that the freethinking couple are threats to East Germany's sheltered, claustrophobic society — rapidly complicates, as Wiesler learns that Dreyman and Sieland are, in fact, not malcontents or dissidents (even by East Germany's notoriously repressive standards): rather, Wiesler's boss, Minister Bruno Hempf (the wonderfully repellent Thomas Thieme), desires Christa-Maria sexually, and needs to get Dreyman out of the way, the more ruthless the expedient the better. From this dynamic springs one of the most nuanced and probing examinations in cinema of the costs of political repression, as well as — and this is truly where the film sheds a light on contemporary issues, both in Germany and abroad, particularly in Fortress America — the costs of an individual's accommodations, moral, psychological, erotic, and spiritual, with said repression. For along

with the cloak-and-dagger twists and turns of the political procedural, there is another plot, that of Wiesler's awakening to the moral dimensions of his acts. Spying on his fellow citizens becomes no longer a simple matter of technique: Wiesler's tragic incursion into the lovers' shared life forces him to confront, finally and terribly, the ramifica-

tions of his complicity with state power, his narrow focus on the mechanics of surveillance over the human costs involved, and, finally, the awfulness of the East German state itself, to which Wiesler has been a devoted subject. Some have complained that Wiesler's recognition of the blood on his hands comes too abruptly, and is unconvincing given his previously purblind service to the government: this is a fair matter of debate. But for this viewer at least — daily obsessed, like many of my fellow citizens, of the growing impact of our nation's foreign and domestic policies, of our proper roles as caring human beings, and of the United States' terrifying embrace of an increasingly imperial, increasingly totalitarian politics — watching Wiesler's transformation from unthinking tool to a man of empathy, feeling, and, yes, guilt, was extraordinary. *The Lives of Others* is required viewing for our post-9/11 technological panopticon, and a cautionary tale to those who would ignore, like George Meredith's sentimentalist, the consequences of our actions in the face of history, the state, politics, and power.

It got snubbed for the Best Cinematography Oscar, and has largely vanished from theaters, but Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*, which debuted in 2006 and which I just got around to seeing, is possibly the best movie I've seen recently, and for a number of dazzlingly cinematic reasons: its super-long takes, including the 20 minute crescendo of violence that is the film's climax, which, by letting the camera run on without cutting away, deepen exponentially the power and pathos of the horrors they depict; its unsparing view of the nightmare future that perhaps awaits us, as well as its thinly-veiled portrayals of contemporary horrors, such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, that have already arrived; its manipulation of the conventions of the picaresque, heroes-on-the-run movie, and its deft wielding of these thriller-flick conventions to its darker, more serious political side; and, finally, its presentation (*Warning: SPOILER*) of a newborn infant screaming for breath in the midst of a warzone as a uniquely fragile, hopeful event — a tiding of rebirth and renewal that Cuarón, slyly, likens to the birth of Christ — and not as part of everyday life for millions across the globe. And even though *Children of Men* ends wretchedly, veering from its unblinking look at horror to an unearned, wholly improbable, hopeful note — I had wanted, and Cuarón and the logic of the film had promised, the end of Bergman's *Shame*, whereas we're left with something more closely resembling the treacly conclusion of *Free Willy* — this does little to ruin the film's carefully constructed, masterfully executed, journey through destruction, death, and despair. See *Children of Men*, if you haven't already, at all costs. ■

hermetically self-obsessed armor of the Hollywood elite, nor penetrate, even for a moment, the film industry's maddening lack of historical perspective. Why think of Gore's spotty environmental record as an elected official, or his lackluster star turn as presidential candidate in 2000, when a new fiction, a new glittering image, was in the process of being

News You Can Use from the DSC

CO-CHAIR FOR COMMUNICATIONS — ERICKA CALTON

Recruitment

The DSC is committed to serving students' interests and needs at the GC while fostering a sense of community between students. The new DSC Recruitment Committee will be responsible for identifying underserved programs at the GC and encouraging those students to become more involved with the DSC. If you want to participate with this project please contact me or the steering committee.

List-serv (Google Groups)

The DSC has a new list-serv that is hosted by Google Groups. All of the information that is sent to the DSC for distribution is posted on this list-serv, which can be viewed online. The students that are registered with this list-serv can configure their account so that they either receive email digests of daily posts to the list-serv or they can receive no email and visit the web site. Please contact me (efcalton@gmail.com) to register with the group.

CO-CHAIR FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS — CHONG WOJTKOWSKI

DSC Campus Outreach

One of our missions at the DSC is to maintain strong connections with off-campus students. Our goal is to see that students whose programs are based at City, Lehman, Queens, or another of CUNY's 19 college campuses are well informed of current DSC issues and ongoing projects. What a better way to do this than with free pizza and pop!

During our campus visits a group of volunteers from the DSC show up at one of the campuses with food, drink, and copies of the Advocate as well as current information about what we're up to at the DSC. We listen to off-campus students' concerns and are always ready to answer questions about student life at the GC.

A list of Campus Outreach dates will be posted on the DSC web site soon. We are always looking for volunteers! To sign up, please email Chong (cjwojo@gmail.com).

CO-CHAIR FOR BUSINESS — BRENDA VOLLMAN

Program Reps, Chartered Organizations, and Groups in need of funds!

Please take advantage of the grants and financial allocations made available by the DSC. All information is posted on our web site, and you can email or telephone any one of the Steering Committee members, or stop by our fifth floor offices at the GC (rms. 5499, 5495, 5493, 5491) for additional information.

Scholarship Development Committee

The DSC has created a Scholarship Development Committee, whose purpose is to develop a scholarship program to give cash awards (using surplus student activity fee money) to students who demonstrate academic and professional excellence as well as who perform service to their departments and to the University. Unlike other GC grants, this award does not require a research project. We will discuss parameters of the award and the application process at our next meeting on Friday, February 23rd, at 5pm in 5498. If you are interested in joining our committee, please email us (dsc.steering.committee@gmail.com) or stop by the DSC office.

OTHER DSC COMMITTEES AND EVENTS

Community Building Committee — Charles Lieberman

On February 23rd at the DSC plenary session, the community building committee chair, Charles Lieberman, successfully introduced a motion to approve the purchase of couches/sofas for rooms 5414 & 5409, which, in addition to their obvious function, could also be used for the "movie

night" which is expected to begin in March. "Movie night" will include screening films in room 5414 and will be open to all GC students. Please contact Charles Lieberman (calieberman@yahoo.com) to volunteer with Community Building projects.

DSC Weekly Coffee Hour — Patrina Huff

Every Wednesday until the end of the term I will be hosting a coffee hour from 6-7:30 PM in the Working Lounge (5409). The coffee hour is an initiative of the Doctoral Students' Council's Community Building committee, and is meant to be a space for students to relax, talk, and share. We hope to see you there! If you would like to sign up to help host the weekly coffee hour, let me know. Help is certainly appreciated! Please address inquiries to dsc.steering.committee@gmail.com

Library Issues Committee — Rob Faunce

Did your library copy bill just go up over 50%? Did you drop a Continental copy card at the library for reimbursement, wait days or weeks for it to be processed, and then get called on February 28th and told you only had hours to pick up your voucher or your money "would be forfeited"? Are you frustrated with the lack of paper and assistance on weekends in the computer centers?

Help is on the way. The DSC has convened an ad-hoc committee to bring student concerns to the library and to try and ease some of the burdens now being placed on our population by recent decisions at Mina Rees.

If you have questions or concerns, please direct them to the committee chair, Rob Faunce (rfaunce@gc.cuny.edu).

Health Issues Committee — Denise Torres

The Health Issues Committee continues to pursue issues important and

relevant to the welfare of the GC student body. Over intercession, the former HIC chair, Ericka Calton, and the new chair, Denise Torres, met with Student Affairs and the Wellness Center to discuss ideas for the Annual Health Fair. This year's Annual Health Fair, "Make health your mission" will be held May 9th (Tuesday). In addition to the Health Fair, the HIC is currently focusing on recruitment and representation. The committee will meet on March 23rd at 5:00 pm (Room 5489) to explore how to address issues of health access and insurance. We encourage interested students to participate in the committee and welcome ideas, thoughts, and concerns. Anyone interested can contact Denise Torres (denise.torres.msw@gmail.com).

University Student Senate (USS) Delegate — Rouzbeh Nazari

The USS is currently considering a plan to increase its annual budget of approximately \$450,000 to around \$900,000 by increasing the USS Student activity — assessed on every student in the university — from \$0.85 per semester to \$1.70 per semester. The additional funds would be used for, among other things, additional funding for graduate fellowships and formal examination preparation courses. To proceed, the USS must vote to recommend that the Board of Trustees increase the fee. A majority of the university's college student governments must approve the plan in order for the Board of Trustees to accept the recommendation from the USS. Any questions or comments about the plan should be addressed to the Graduate Center's delegate to the USS, Rouzbeh Nazari (Rnazari@gc.cuny.edu). ■

Contact the DSC by email at dsc.steering.committee@gmail.com or stop by our office — room 5495 on the fifth floor at the Graduate Center.

Visit our web site at <http://www.cunydc.org> and our list-serv at <http://groups.google.com/groups/cunydcsc>.

The American Studies Group and the Africana Studies Group proudly announce

"Francis Grimke and African American Prophecy"

Professor Christopher Z. Hobson
SUNY College at Old Westbury

Wednesday
March 7
7 p.m.
Room 4406

Wine and Cheese
reception to follow

Christopher Z. Hobson has published essays on Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright and is the author of *The Chained Boy: Orc and Blake's Idea of Revolution* and *Blake and Homosexuality*, as well as the co-editor of *Blake, Politics, and History*. This talk is from a book-in-progress on African American Prophecy from 1800–1950.

Faculty Bikini Carwash Generates Controversy, Revenue

MATT LAU

"This is an outrage, Brother," English Professor Jerry Watts mumbled, as he reluctantly slipped into his thong in the crisp February air. Nearby a few professors from other departments were distinguishing themselves in the most unlikely of ways. As Russell Simmons, and other NYC celebrities who supported the charity event, stood by chanting, "Put 'em on the glass!" Philosophy Professor Saul Kripke along with Professor Stanley Aronowitz of Sociology could be seen doing exactly that: rubbing their man-tits all over the windshield of Simmons' '07 Escalade.

In the final installment of its "innovative" fund-raising efforts, not only did Graduate Center officials and faculty pull out all the stops, they also took off all their clothes. "New York is full of cars, and many of those cars are incredibly dirty," explained a university official speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Our illustrious faculty are here today to lend some of their luster to the cars of average New Yorkers," said another official. "At the same time, that dirty feeling the cars had is being transferred to our faculty. I mean, is there a better way to build solidarity between people than to have them suffer the same humiliating ordeal?"

"As everyone knows," said a shivering, goose-pimpled Douglas Lackey, the Philosophy Department's Hegel scholar, "there are two types of Bikini Car Washes. On the one hand, there is the amateur variety, typically employed as a fund-raiser by students at high schools. In this case, the pretty girls hold the signs on the street corner, while their male counterparts do the work. Talk about false advertising!

"On the other hand, there is the professional Bikini Car Wash, familiar to anyone who has watched Cinemax at three in the morning. Here you *do* get to watch sexy girls wash your car, but your conscience is troubled by the fact that your money, excluding tips of course, enriches another pervert like yourself."

After losing consciousness due to hypothermia and then being revived by paramedics standing by, Professor Lackey continued, "With this project we want to synthesize the happiest aspects of both these archetypes: on the one hand, the camaraderie, the enthusiasm, and the false advertising of the amateur kind; and, on the other hand, we wanted to make money hand over foot by exploiting sex-workers and pandering to the basest desires of the consumer."

But would it work? This question was haunting university officials as the day of the first wash approached. Insiders confirmed that there was a lot of concern that the project would fail both morally and financially. "Ethics can of course be put aside from time to time," said Joan Nix of the Economics Department, who looked fetching in her neon green Borat-inspired ensemble, "but as every thugged-out middle school child in the suburbs knows, 'If it don't make dollars, it don't make sense.'"

But the plan was allowed to proceed when it became clear that many fans of the GC faculty's UFC reality show and of President Kelly's grizzly calendar would be sure to wait on line to get a revealing glimpse of their favorite local academics.

As the frigid day worn on, this intrepid reporter caught up with Professor Watts again, "It's strange, Brother; in a way this makes me nostalgic for the struggles of my people. We didn't land on this Bikini Car Wash; this Bikini Car Wash landed on us!" After pausing to squeeze soiled water from his sponge, he continued, "But then this also gives a whole new, grotesque meaning to the old spiritual, 'No more water, the fire next time.' If we don't get that fire soon, those skinny white women from Comp Lit are likely to freeze to death!" ■



An unidentified faculty member participates in the fund-raiser.

Did You Know?

The New York Police Department does not have the right to search your bags if you are stopped while entering the subway. Although you will not be allowed to enter the subway at that station, searches are on a strictly voluntary basis and you can peaceably and legally refuse to have your bags searched by the police. Just tell the police officer calmly and patiently that you do not want to have your bags searched and that you will leave the station and go to the next subway stop. Police Commissioner Raymond Kelley has said himself that you are free to "turn around and leave" the subway if you do not want to be searched. Subway stations are usually spaced out one every ten blocks, especially in Manhattan, so do yourself and your community a favor and if you are stopped by the police and asked to open your bag, gently refuse and walk the ten blocks to the next subway station. Remember, it's your fourth amendment, too.

You may already be eligible for free health care through the university? According to the PSC Web site "You have the benefit of individual health insurance beginning in your third consecutive semester of teaching if you teach six or more hours CUNY-wide in that semester and have taught one or more courses during your first two semesters; non-teaching adjuncts must work ten hours or more a week for one year on campus to be eligible. You retain this benefit as long as you teach six hours or work ten non-teaching hours. Family coverage is available at additional fees. Contact your college Human Resources Office to apply. Teaching and non-teaching adjunct work at CUNY can also be combined to secure health insurance." For more information about adjunct rights, see the PSC Adjunct Pamphlet at <http://www.psc-cuny.org/adjunctpamphlet.htm>

That all CUNY faculty, staff, and students can get free Symantec Anti-Virus software and significant discounts on mobile phones, clothing, and Microsoft and Apple software and laptop computers, through the CUNY Portal Web site? All you have to do is go to <http://portal.cuny.edu>, register for a CUNY Portal ID, click on CUNY Email and start shopping. For those of you who use Black Board your portal ID and password should be the same.