

ARE YOU A TRUE GRADUATE STUDENT?

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER Advocate

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GC Students Rally for Better Health Care



We've all heard the stories: the CUNY graduate student who, upon realizing she had probably severed a nerve in her finger, still contemplated whether or not to go to the emergency room; the CUNY graduate student who, with a broken shoulder, gave the hospital a fake name so as to avoid the exorbitant costs of an X-ray; or even worse, the CUNY graduate student who actually had to give up his fellowship in order to qualify for state funded Medicaid care because he simply had no other options. These stories, all true, reveal the desperate need for adequate and affordable health care for CUNY graduate students. Although the Graduate Center offers a number of different health care plans, students and administration alike have begun to realize that the current health insurance options provided for Graduate Center

students, including GHI and the PSC Welfare Fund, are woefully inadequate, and even worse, are often distributed unequally among students.

Although health insurance has been a perennial concern of both students and the administration at CUNY; GC students, the Doctoral Students' Council, the Adjunct Project, and the Professional Staff Congress have all recently stepped up their calls for affordable health insurance, organizing a vigorous campaign of action that has included meetings with CUNY officials and petitions, letters, and phone calls to local and state politicians, all of which culminated in a large demonstration on March 18 in front of the Graduate Center. This demonstration, organized by the Adjunct Project and the PSC, was held to coincide with a visit to the GC from Chancellor

Matthew Goldstein. Estimates from the Adjunct Project suggest that there were between 40 and 50 protestors at the March 18 rally.

Although the GC was already investigating potential solutions to the GC health care crisis, these efforts have successfully stepped up the pressure on the chancellor's office, helping to bring the struggle for decent and affordable health care directly to Albany, where many students and administrators hope to find the funding for improved health care options at CUNY.

Part of the impetus for and one of the most interesting aspects of this continuing struggle is the recent realization that The State University of New York (SUNY) provides all of their teaching graduate students with access to the New York State Health

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Whither Democracy? The Democratic Party's Dilemma in 2008

MAURICE LEACH

The 2008 presidential election campaign has highlighted a number of questionable and problematic practices of the Democratic Party. Indeed, the nomination process, it seems, has become as important as the candidates themselves and many commentators are beginning to question such things as the use of superdelegates in the nominating process, the use of caucuses to select delegates to the national convention, and the recent decision by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to punish the state parties of Florida and Michigan for re-scheduling their primary dates without permission.

Although these issues are central to any discussion of the current democratic election campaigns, many average voters still do not have a clue what much of this means, so before proceeding any further let's review some basics. First of all, what or who are superdelegates? Also known officially as unpledged delegates, superdelegates are officers in the Democratic Party who also have a vote at the national party convention. Superdelegates are generally former or current office-holders although some are members of the DNC. They hold their status by virtue of being leaders of the party and as such are not selected at state party conventions.

There are currently roughly 795 superdelegates in the Democratic Party. This number is not fixed and is subject to change for various reasons. For instance, Joseph Lieberman, a former Democratic, now Independent, Senator from Connecticut, was stripped of his superdelegate status early in the current campaign cycle; former New York governor Eliot Spitzer, who recently resigned in the midst of a scan-

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Table 1. Hypothetical general election match-ups by state (Obama-McCain versus Clinton-McCain).

General Election Match-up	RCP Average Spread (% by winner)
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	
Obama-McCain	McCain 2.2
Clinton-McCain	McCain 0.4
<i>Iowa</i>	
Obama-McCain	Obama 9.7
Clinton-McCain	McCain 8.0
<i>Ohio</i>	
Obama-McCain	McCain 7.0
Clinton-McCain	Clinton 0.3
<i>Florida</i>	
Obama-McCain	McCain 6.8
Clinton-McCain	McCain 2.8
<i>New Jersey</i>	
Obama-McCain	Obama 2.5
Clinton-McCain	Clinton 6.5

Lockdown America

"Children I want to warn ya, 'cause I've been to California" —Bow Wow Wow

"Until the racial bias and class basis of super-incarceration are attacked head-on, California's prisons will remain graveyards of human rights."
— Mike Davis, 2004

In 2004, less than six months before the humiliating defeat of then Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, the author Thomas Frank published a popular book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, in which he argued that the largely blue collar workers of the state and their families had been manipulated and duped by years of Republican propaganda into believing that the Democrats were their enemies. Although Frank's book has been widely criticized since (not least by the historian Mike Davis, who showed that the central premise of Frank's book — that the Democrats were better for labor — was fundamentally flawed) the question the book poses is still relevant. The problem is: Frank was looking at the wrong state. A better example for those of us concerned about the future of America might be: "What's the matter with California?"

Formerly known for its amusement parks and beaches, its orange groves and pristine deserts, California is becoming increasingly known for its vast and growing prison population. Currently the nation's largest state prison system, California has roughly 170,000 inmates in its 33 state prisons. That's nearly the same as the number of students enrolled in the entire University of California system, and almost twice the total prison population of New York State. Despite efforts to reduce that population, more inmates, many of them arrested for parole violations, drug charges, or some combination of the two, keep coming every day. Recent events, including the stabbing of four prison guards and a large brawl at the Chino Correctional Facility for Men, have drawn attention to both the incredible overcrowding and the inhumane treatment of prisoners, even as more and more are crammed into institutions already filled beyond capacity. According to the Associated Press, an investigative committee told Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

FROM THE editor's desk

in 2004 that the entire system could safely hold no more than 135,000 prisoners. Although California's prison population has recently declined by about 4,000 inmates, this is due in large part to the forced outsourcing of prisoners to other states, a policy that literally makes prisoners and their confinement a commodity to be traded and bartered for.

The problem, of course, is not merely one of overcrowding, and although California has aggressively and single-mindedly pursued a policy of incarceration as a solution to crime, they are not alone in this pursuit. Indeed, what's the matter with California is indicative of what's the matter with our entire nation. Although there has been little serious talk of it since its initial publication, February's report from the Pew Center on the States revealed that the total prison population of the United States has now exceeded 2.3 million prisoners. This is more than any other nation in the world, with China, whose human rights abuses have recently come under fire from western politicians, coming in a distant second at 1.5 million. However, whereas, China has a population of roughly 1.3 billion, the United States has only about 280 million. This means that while China incarcerates only 0.1 percent of its population, the United States incarcerates close to 1 in 99, nearly 10 times as many people per capita. And yet, China is not plagued by waves of crime. So what does this mean? What's wrong with America? And why have we spent so long doing nothing about it? After all, the Pew Report is really nothing new. The prison population in America, as the report makes clear, has been rising for at least the last 25 years, even as crime has continued, across the board to decrease. As the report states:

"Prison growth and higher incarceration rates do not reflect a parallel increase in crime, or a corresponding surge in the nation's population at large. Instead, more people are behind bars principally because of a wave of policy choices that are sending

more lawbreakers to prison and, through popular "three-strikes" measures and other sentencing laws, imposing longer prison stays on inmates."

These "policy choices," such as California's draconian "three strikes law" and New York's equally harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws, are despite their negative consequences, wildly popular among average middle class citizens, who see crime as a constant threat to their sometimes already tenuous hold on life. That these laws almost always disproportionately affect poor white, black, and Latino populations, whose political voice often goes unheard, is no surprise. Like California's growing fiefdoms of gated communities, surrounded by wrought iron and guarded by armed private security forces, New York City is continuing its own project of economic segregation, slowly pushing out undesirables and threatening poor and ethnic minorities through a combined process of economic black mail and incarceration.

Indeed, the United States prison system has become little more than one of a handful of tools for this increasing project of economic segregation and gentrification of America's urban centers. Whereas white flight led to the decline of urban centers across the country, the recent repopulation of these cities has resulted in a kind of reverse suburbanization, where the poor are forced to the edges of the city, as wealthy residents drive up real estate costs and quality of life in the center. Those who refuse to leave are branded troublemakers and their lifestyles, often the result of poverty and poor education, are literally criminalized through drug laws and quality of life laws, which seem almost designed to introduce and acclimate these young men to a life of institutionalization. Is it any surprise then that the Pew report also cited the staggering figure that 1 in 9 black males between the ages of 20 and 34 are behind bars at any given time? Imagine if one in every nine Tibetans were imprisoned by China? Would the world respond with greater condemnation of what is and what it already sees as a gross violation of human rights? Perhaps it is time that the world turned a spotlight on the United States. ■

"RAIDING NADER"

To the Editor:

You contend [in "What Nader's Bid Really Means," *GC Advocate*, March 2008] that opponents of Ralph Nader's most recent run for the White House are worried about his role as spoiler to any Democratic candidate, concerned with his political idealism, or scornful of third party politics. These reasons have nothing to do with his independent bid. On the contrary, Ralph Nader's candidacy poses more fundamental problems. He shouldn't bother with the presidential race because he has no substantive political agenda, no coherent vision for what his presidency would look like, and no demonstrated commitment to organized party politics.

You trumpet Nader's commitment to "a universal, comprehensive, national single-payer health care system" as proof of his superior candidacy. That's fabulous! I visited Nader's campaign site to learn more about how he proposes to institute such a system, and found the same quote you cite, but absolutely nothing else. Unfortunately, Nader's "Issues" page is little more than a flimsy menu of one-line policy prescriptions with nary a word about why they are worth supporting, nor a mention of how such programs would be implemented. This is change we can believe in? I'm not so sure.

These shortcomings, along with the disappointing absence of a stance on a woman's right to choose, are components of a larger concern. Asked

Letters

recently by a reporter why he wants to be President of the United States, Nader responded,

"We're calling our campaign an '08/'09 campaign and by that we mean that we'd like to bring together in each Congressional district about 1,000 publicly conscious citizens who will form a watchdog lobby on Congress and put before them about 10 major redirections of the country, like single-payer health insurance, etc. As a person who has worked on the Congress for over 40 years and testified and exposed it, I can't overemphasize [that] ... the Congress

can pivot the entire federal government. It's the most powerful branch of government if it chooses to use its Constitutional powers, and that's what we're aiming for."

Huh? This meandering dodge raises a host of questions, but the one that leaps from the page is "why not run for the Congress if it offers the greatest hope for meaningful change?"

One answer may be that Ralph Nader is more committed to the limelight of public attention than seriously affecting political change. If he felt it absolutely necessary to challenge the Democrat's pathetic commitment to the status quo, why wait until now to throw a hat into the ring. Where was Nader three months ago? A year ago?

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