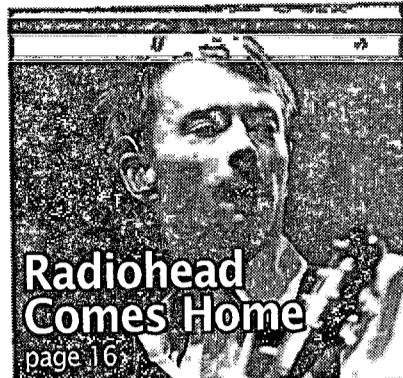


CUNY GRADUATE CENTER Advocate

January 2008

<http://gcadvocate.org>

advocate@gc.cuny.edu



Radiohead
Comes Home
page 16

Plan Colombia and the American War on Drugs in Latin America



The Sierra Nevada mountains, where coca is grown openly, and in abundance.

MICHAEL BUSCH

MICHAEL BUSCH

As my host proudly shows off his cocaine factory, deep in the mountains of Colombia's northeast department of Magdalena, I realize that I stand at a frontline in America's War on Drugs. The small lab is little more than a ramshackle shelter, constructed under layers of thick jungle canopy that block the view of spy planes flying overhead. Nevertheless, despite its size, this tiny lab is an important cog in the gigantic wheel of Colombia's cocaine industry.

Inside, filthy plastic barrels of gasoline surround an ankle-deep pit of coca leaves. The fumes are overpowering. My head starts spinning as I'm shown the process of turning fresh green coca leaves into soft white powder. It's

sickening: at each step, toxic new chemicals are added; dirty bowls, grimy containers, crusty utensils, and soiled cheesecloth are employed. This is the lowest of low-tech enterprises. Yet, what begins as murky brown liquid gradually ends up a gooey paste, which will later be cut into cocaine. "The best in the world!" boasts its creator.

This tiny outpost symbolizes America's failure in its fight against drugs. As the United States pours billions of dollars into "Plan Colombia," an anti-narcotics initiative designed to combat the production of cocaine in the Andes, hundreds, if not thousands, of these tiny workshops dot the countryside. Business is booming. According to a recent report commissioned by

the Colombian government, coca production has spiked in the past year, and yields from the plant have reached their highest levels since the program's start seven years ago. Up north, on the streets of American cities, cocaine remains available, prices are stable, and users enjoy a consistently pure product.

Originally conceived as a six-year program to eliminate drug flow into the United States, Plan Colombia has become a permanent fixture in the national budgets of both Colombia and the United States. The program kicked off in the summer of 2000 with \$1.3 billion in start-up funds from the United States, and another \$4 billion promised from Colombian coffers.

Continued page 8

Are Hunter's Graduate Students Paying to Teach?

Unpaid Assistantships Spark Controversy on Campus

The professors in the Integrated Media Arts Program at Hunter College are affectionately characterized by their students as radical, critical minded artists and scholars with a focus on creating politically and socially engaged work in their field. In fact many of these professors have written extensively and wisely on the abuses of big media and advertising and have produced and edited documentaries on the injustices of war, corporate greed, police brutality, and racism. Few of them, however, seem aware of the injustices inherent in the program's advertised practice of regularly using graduate students as unpaid teaching assistants.

Since its inception in the fall of 1997, the Integrated Media Arts M.F.A. program at Hunter College has proudly advertised what it calls its "Undergraduate Media Teaching Assistantships." Although this name may sound conspicuously like any of the thousands of paid assistantships or fellowships offered at other universities and colleges across the country, the assistantships in the IMA program do not pay for tuition or offer any kind of salary. Indeed, as some students in the program have argued, many assistants in the program actually wind up paying for the privilege to be TAs.

According to the Program, the main purpose of these assistantships is to help students create a solid teaching portfolio and to provide them with the opportunity to learn about teaching by working directly with professors in the classroom. However, in addition to the work they

do in the classroom every student that participates in the assistantship program is required to take and pay for a 3-credit studio course. At \$270 a credit, a part time student in the program would have to pay a total of \$810 to participate in the program. Non-residents would have to pay almost twice as much. Some students have reportedly avoided this cost by simply working directly and informally with professors and not taking the class, but most of the participants eventually choose to pay for the course as part of their teaching assistantship.

Because of this, some students in the department, including Benj Gerdes and Chloe Smolarski, have begun to raise concerns with the faculty about the ethical and political implications of this program. Gerdes and Smolarski have been organizing meetings and drafting petitions in an effort to get the faculty and administration thinking about ways to improve the situation of M.F.A. and M.A. students in their program and elsewhere in the university.

Although Benj Gerdes said that he is dismayed by the idea that "people are paying for these credits in order to intern" it is the "broader implications" of the program that concern him the most. Gerdes said "the idea that this is being implemented here suggests that it could be implemented anywhere, and even adjunct laborers, with their wages as low as they are, could be phased out in favor of something where people submit voluntarily to intern and teach."

Continued page 7

The Rhetoric of Demonization

"We will deliver justice to our enemies."

—George W. Bush, State of the Union Address,
January 28th, 2008

As Oscar Wilde once wisely remarked "a man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies," and President Bush's most recent state of the union address offered a frightening example, once again, of how to choose one's enemies carefully and wisely. For years now the Bush administration has rigorously and systematically pursued what can only be called an ideology of demonization, cultivating and developing a growing and menacing list of political opponents and false adversaries from the grand-standing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, to the laughable Kim Jong-il in North Korea.

Since September 11th, the US administration, with the help of the corporate media, has managed to convince the American public that it faces dire military and economic threat from no less than seven foreign nations (Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Cuba, and Venezuela), one seemingly monolithic global religion (Islam), and a handful of minor political organizations with limited regional capabilities (Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad). Whether or not these forces are actually capable or would actually seek to do harm to the United States is seemingly beside the point.

Take Hugo Chavez for example. Although not officially part of the "Axis of Evil" — no doubt Chavez was dismayed to be left out of the club in Bush's infamous 2002 State of the Union Address — the rhetoric against him the last seven years has been high and the US has consistently maligned and ridiculed the twice democratically elected leader

FROM THE editor's desk

of Venezuela for doing little more than protecting his country's interests and following the will of his people, who wish nothing more than to form a more equitable and fair economic system for themselves and their children. Although his name was not mentioned directly, Chavez received at least a brief nod in Monday's State of the Union, when the president spoke derisively of what he called "the purveyors of false populism in our hemisphere." The president likewise raised the specter of the anti-Israeli and Palestinian liberation groups Hezbollah and Hamas, neither of which is a threat to the United States, and persisted to beat the drums of war against Iran, saying "we will continue to protect our vital interests in the Persian Gulf," reiterating the false claims of a nuclear threat from Tehran — which, as it turns out is currently cooperating with the IAEA and is, as almost all experts agree, still many years away from an actual bomb if it even really wants one. Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani, a member of the Iranian Assembly of Experts, has actually said that nuclear weapons are against Islamic law.

It is clear that this kind of blustering only drives and furthers conflict, but that is exactly what this administration wants. Despite the vacuity of his statements there is nothing stupid or ignorant about this policy, at least not from the skewed perspective of the Bush team. Like all good despots, including Osama Bin Laden, Bush realizes that his power, and in part the power of his ideological brethren comes

in large measure from the amount of fear that he is capable of generating in the hearts and minds of his own people. Like Orwell's Oceania, which was forever at war with Eurasia and/or Eastasia, American political life under Bush is fueled and supported by an abstract and floating, ever shifting foreign threat. That the source of that threat is depicted as coming from a largely misunderstood religion only makes it that much more powerful. The fact that none of the countries Bush mentioned in his address or any of the members of the "axis of evil" are actually capable of doing the United States real harm, is a moot point. What matters for the Bush administration is maintaining power, control, and quiescent support for its radical political agenda both at home and abroad.

Although this was thankfully this president's last State of the Union Address, and Bush will be out of office within a year, the damage that has already been done is incalculable. Any future president, regardless of their political affiliation, is going to be faced with an overabundance of foreign policy knots to untie, but I wouldn't hold out for any immediate or significant changes in policy.

US interests run too deep and the hysteria of demonization benefits not only the Republicans, but provides shelter and cover for the ineffectual Democrats as well. Significant change can only come from a radical nationwide reevaluation of the role and function of US foreign policy. This would require at the very least a significant purge of the Democratic Party, if not a completely new Left party with some actual teeth. One can always dream, but in the meantime, I wouldn't be planning any spring breaks in Tehran or Damascus. ■

Editor's Note: Adem Carroll's article, "Jeffery Wiesenfeld, Islamophobia, and the Madrassa," was published with the November 2007 *Advocate* web-only content and is reprinted in this issue on page 11.

DEFENDING WIESENFELD

That you would allow such slander and defamation of a person without even giving the credentials of Adem Carroll. It is obvious from the way this article was permitted to be published that Carroll reflects the bias of the *GC Advocate* which should at least have shown some level of journalistic integrity. It is because of this behavior that I have refused to support CCNY since it is clear that you and many other professors in no way represent what those of us in the real world are feeling. What is truly a shame is that the people that get hurt the most are your constituents — your students. This article proves to me that in no way are they getting a view of the world that would constitute truth. It is most definitely one sided and just reflects what you feel the truth should be.

Irene Alter
Retired teacher

I have just read Adem Carroll's screed entitled "Jeffery Wiesenfeld,

Islamophobia, and the Madrassa," and I don't know where to begin in pointing out its faults.

Mr. Carroll graciously acknowledges that "some threat most certainly exists" from pro-Islamic radicals, but he then proceeds to minimize the threat by attacking Jeffrey Wiesenfeld. How Wiesenfeld's alleged sins disprove the Islamist threat is never made clear. Carroll's attempt to make the connection fails miserably, and he does no more than prove that he is intellectually challenged. Furthermore, Carroll attempts to defame Wiesenfeld by bringing up false accusations that were leveled by the disgraced Alan Hevesi. Carroll's dishonesty is demonstrated by his failure to mention that Wiesenfeld was overwhelmingly confirmed as trustee by both liberals and conservatives after Hevesi made his accusations. If this is the best that Carroll can do, Wiesenfeld has nothing to fear.

As to Carroll's claims concerning the Khalil Gibran International Academy, he fails to refute any of our concerns. We have still received no response to our requests to see the textbooks that are being used at the Gibran school. Nor have we received curricula, teacher lists, handouts, or any of the other teaching materials which should be

letters

available to any member of the public. Moreover, Dabah Almontaser did in fact try to justify the word "intifada," she did in fact refuse to acknowledge that Hamas and Hizbollah are terrorist groups; she did in fact claim in 2002 that 9/11 was the responsibility of the US and Israel instead of the Islamist fascists who flew those planes into the towers. No amount of casuistry, no matter how skillful, can avoid those facts — and Carroll is a decidedly un-gifted polemicist.

One more thing, I think that it is shameful that you failed to identify Mr. Carroll, who was identified by *USA Today* as a "community activist with the the Islamic Circle of North America," which describes itself on its website (<http://www.icna.org/>) "as a leading grass roots organization which seeks to obtain the pleasure of Allah (SWT) through working for the establishment of Islam in all spheres of life." In other words, Mr. Carroll has a dog in this fight.

His failure (and yours) to mention his connection to radical Islamists is the height of irresponsibility, and proves that he (and you) are unworthy

of being taken seriously.

Stuart Kaufman
President

Citizens for American Values in
Public Education/Stop the Madrassa

Adem Carroll Responds:

As I review the letters, I note that they contain expressions of displeasure (which I understand) but they do not include any refutation of the substance of my article. The aim of writing the article was to raise questions regarding the judgment of CUNY Trustee Wiesenfeld. Those questions remain.

I will focus on the letter written by Stuart Kaufman, whom we note is Mr. Wiesenfeld's associate at Stop the Madrassa. Referring to so-called "pro-Islamic Radicals," Mr. Kaufman claims that I "minimize the threat by attacking Jeffrey Wiesenfeld." Wait a minute — how does such criticism minimize the threat of terrorism? Of course it is not my intention to show that "Wiesenfeld's alleged sins disprove the Islamist threat." It is an old rhetorical trick to claim that I fail to prove something it is not my intention to claim.

Moreover, Kaufman asserts that I attempt "to defame Wiesenfeld by bringing up false accusations that were leveled by the disgraced Alan Hevesi." In this way Kaufman apparently

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minimizes the challenge by attacking Hevesi, whose so-called political disgrace is not clearly relevant to the substance of his earlier allegations against Wiesenfeld. I have not found any information that disproves his allegations, and interestingly, Mr. Kaufman does not supply this information.

It is more to my point about Mr. Wiesenfeld's ideological blinders that he and other Stop the Madrasa supporters utterly fail to distinguish between active New York Muslims (who might happen to wear a headscarf and dare to advocate for community concerns) and those few who truly are a threat. Mr. Wiesenfeld and those who follow neo-conservative scare mongering confuse and therefore increase the threat by attacking the wrong people and institutions entirely, weakening civic institutions and severely damaging the moderating influence of politically and socially active American Muslims like Debbie Almontaser, the founding Principal of the Khalil International Academy (KGIA).

The KGIA curriculum was closely vetted and conforms to DOE standards – I cannot imagine any radicalism surviving that scrutiny, even the Stop the Madrasa brand of radicalism. Regarding the FOIL requests to see the KGIA textbooks, this is a bureaucratic Department of Education decision and community groups should try the courts – like others, my community also supports greater transparency and informed parental involvement.

Debbie Almontaser defended a girls' group from tabloid attack and did not hesitate to deplore Intifada violence. Any perceived failure to jump on the tabloid bandwagon to fully denounce the Intifada or Hamas and Hezbollah must be seen in the light of how insulting and inappropriate it is to expect a city employee to pass such a political litmus test – especially given a record of peace and interfaith dialogue work which speaks for itself. Nor is it correct to impute to Debbie any 9/11 Truth style conspiracy theories.

I can say all this with confidence because I know Debbie Almontaser and admire her public service. She did not deserve such shameful treatment at the brutal hands of Mr. Wiesenfeld or Mr. Kaufman and their tabloid cronies. I had hoped to make that personal connection clear in the original publication of the article and welcome the opportunity to do so now.

I should point out that though I am proud of my humanitarian work at ICNA Relief, I left over two years ago. I am a Muslim American. However, I am not, nor have I ever been, an Islamist. So help me God! There, how's that?

In this political climate of religion-baiting, it is apparently acceptable for Stop the Madrasa to defame long-time educator Debbie Almontaser and a range of other supporters, including myself, wrongly claiming radical Islamist leanings and proclaiming guilt by association, but it is not OK for me to raise questions about the powerful Trustee of CUNY.

Adem Carroll
Community Advocate and member,
CISKIA (Communities in Support of
Khalil Gibran International Academy)

Windows Live Email Move on Hold

HOLD-OFF ON STUDENT E-MAIL SERVER SWITCH.

The impending switch of Graduate Center student emails to Windows Live accounts that caused a stir late last fall has been halted for the time being. Since the *GC Advocate* last went to press in November, the DSC leadership delivered a position paper to the Information Technology department on Windows Live and the problems associated with its use for student emails, according to Assistant Vice President of Information Technology Bob Campbell. "The feedback from the students was great," he said.

As a result of the continued dialogue between IT and the DSC, Campbell has notified the 57th Street Office [CUNY CIS] that the conversion to Windows Live for Graduate Center students will be deferred and asked to be taken off of CUNY Central's implementation list.

"We're really pleased that Bob Campbell has decided to put a halt to implementing Windows Live for students, and looking forward to working with him on an alternate solution," said Rob Faunce, the DSC's Co-Chair for Communications. "Greg Donovan, the DSC Co-Chair for Student Affairs and the technical architect of the new DSC website, is going to participate in a working group made up of student and IT members that is going to generate a solution that meets the unique and important needs of our graduate students."

A DSC student task force is being formed that will meet with IT to discuss what types of email configurations will be best for student needs. "If the result is contrary to CUNY guidelines, then we will seek an exception," said Campbell.

MAC LAB: A WORK IN PROGRESS

Following on the heels of increased interest in the idea of creating a Mac lab for student use in the library, the first steps are underway towards realizing the goal. Campbell confirmed that a space on the C-level of the library (room C196.01, which is presently the video conference facility) is now the dedicated site of the future Mac lab. "We're going to do it," he said of inaugurating the GC's first Mac lab, "we just need the money to buy the equipment."

Money to procure the equipment will most likely come from a variety of sources, and the Student Tech Fee committee, meeting in February, may be able to allocate some funds towards purchase of the proposed 10-12 new computers. How soon students can expect to be able to use the Mac lab depends upon the source of funding. According to Elaine Montilla, Director of User Services, if the money is obtained relatively soon, the Mac lab could be up and running as early as the summer. Otherwise, procurement will most likely occur over the summer, with the lab in place by the start of Fall 2008.

There is also the possibility that within the Mac lab there may be several Linux computers. Montilla said

GRADUATE CENTER technology

that the IT department has been testing two Linux machines. If the tests go well, then Montilla said that Linux machines would be installed in the Math department and other areas, including the Mac lab.

Additionally, the Audio/Visual department is in the midst of deploying 10 new Macbooks on presentation carts for use within the building. Each Macbook is equipped with Leopard and Parallels so that users can run Windows on the machines. In order to accommodate the increased support that the addition of so many new Mac machines over the past year requires, Montilla said that some of the Help Desk staff members are being cross-trained in order to provide more technical assistance for Mac-related problems.

INTERNET PRINTING AND CITRIX

While the GC's wireless internet network has enabled students to make use of their laptops within the building's wired areas, one of the problems that still remain is the lack of any form of internet printing. As of now, a student can work off of their laptop in the library, for example, but will still have to log on to a desktop in order to print their work. Given the fact that boot times for students can last several minutes, this process often results in much lost time. Matt Liston, Director of Enterprise, Networks, and Systems for the Information Technology department, said that implementing internet printing to eradicate this problem is in the works.

One of the options that the IT department invested in when it purchased the student printing management software this past year was an option for internet printing. The problem in implementing this feature is that "the vendor has problems with the software," said Liston. While the kinks are being worked out, there is a back-up option in place that would make much greater use of the GC's Citrix network. "We are experimenting with Citrix," to solve the IP predicament, said Liston, "but we have not had the opportunity to fully test it." Realistically, he said, students should not expect to have the issue resolved until September.

In the meantime, the Citrix infrastructure is being upgraded. "People often think of Citrix as a remote access entryway," said Campbell, "but we can take advantage of it internally," for example, in using it to solve the IP problem. Liston said that the GC recently replaced two of the building's six servers that run Citrix, both of which are loaded with the new, updated Citrix software. These new servers are much more powerful, so that the building's users can now stream applications directly to one's desktop.

Rather than the older Citrix tech-

Networks Down on February Holidays

Due to network maintenance and improvement, students should not plan to use computer resources at the Graduate Center on Tuesday, February 12th and Monday, February 18th (both days that the GC will be closed).

nology, which allowed off-campus users to access the server but was slow in that it had to move graphics back and forth between the system and one's desktop, the new Citrix software moves program pieces to the individual computer, so that programs are actually run locally without having to install the software.

HELP DESK TO MOVE

The Help Desk will be moving from its present location in the back of the C-level computer lab in the library to its former home, in the open space just by the staircase and elevator bank on the same floor. While this will place Help Desk personnel more prominently on the floor, the IT staff are aware that the move may cause some disruption to students. "We have a concern," said Campbell, "that in the new Help Desk area there's going to be noise," and that this may disrupt some students working in the C-level computer lab. The noise referred to is the volume of telephone traffic that the Help Desk fields in filing and fixing technology-related problems. IT said that they are sensitive to the potential disruption and that they have voiced this concern to the building facilities department.

Students can chat online with a Help Desk technician via Windows Live chat account at gchelpdesk@hotmail.com.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Effective February 28th the dial-up modem pool will be unplugged and discontinued. The decision to stop using this feature was announced in the fall, as the equipment that the GC owns is no longer supported by the manufacturer, and to invest in new equipment for the declining number of dial-up modem users would require thousands of dollars.

All of the PhD suites are now wired for wireless internet, completing the second phase of wi-fi deployment. The next wave will focus on the building's research centers and institutes, as intricate electric wiring in the walls and ceilings will not be necessary to accomplish deployment. This is in contrast to wiring the classrooms for wireless internet service, which *does* require wiring in the walls and ceilings.

As classrooms are converted into Smartrooms, they are automatically being wired for wireless internet, said Campbell. IT presently has a proposal. In for a \$1 million grant to install wireless internet service in all of the building's classrooms. ■

In the Classroom of the Critical Mind

LYNNE DESILVA-JOHNSON

"Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education... For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other men – not other men themselves. The oppressors are the ones who act upon men to indoctrinate them and adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched."

– Paulo Freire, from
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

"The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities, that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable, that removes the sense that there is an outside."

– Allan Bloom, from
The Closing of the American Mind

The controversial, enormously popular 1981 study by Harvard paleontologist Steven Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, puts forth a thesis of an educational system still largely predicated on antiquated notions of biological determinism – if no longer directly at work, its long fingers reach deep into the functional deployment of our curriculae to young people. It is a discussion at length about intelligence as a concept – one that draws into quick relief the continued prevalence of a notion of innate inferiority. In a parallel institutionalization to our social adoptions, we see in Gould what he refers to as the "fallacy of reification" (not dissimilar to Althusser or even Durkheimian adoptions of collective consensus) in the translation of abstract notions like IQ and other ability-gauging means into data collection on which policy can be built. This misuse and reliance upon questionable data is behind much of what troubles our schools – but what of the individual teachers? Is there no room, no hope?

How does this link up with the rhetoric of race and economic disadvantages? According to Jonathan Kozol, white parents are loathe to allow their sons and daughters to attend the same schools as the disadvantaged black children – in a story that reads like the fear of leprosy's spread, *Savage Inequalities* posits these parents' assumption of Gould's predicate in their pockets, which are necessary to the upkeep of their own schools in their own districts, and that the school boards and so forth are paralyzed without their support. While the text's oversimplification of the issue is duly noted, Kozol is in fact seconding Gould's thesis, in so far as it is so widespread as to have reached the parents of other children in more well off homes. What is not covered is the loophole wherein the system does little to correct this mistake, an initiative which finds considerable scientific ground (as is desirable) in Gould's analysis to counter this error. Kozol's take on the situation depicts a beleaguered Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance in a vain and desperate attempt to convince these hard headed parents otherwise, to no avail. He describes a situation in which these [read: evil!] white parents refuse to see the truth, so deep-seated is their innate discrimination. As he bemoans, "the truth is that few middle-class parents in Chicago, or in any other city, honestly believe this. They see the poorer children as a tide of mediocrity that threatens to engulf them. They are prepared to see those children get their schooling in a metal prefab in a junkyard rather than admit them to the beautiful new school erected for their own kids."

From the Foundation and Center for Critical Thinking, a nonprofit predicated on this notion, we find the useful concepts of "egocentricity" and "sociocentricity," which are, basically, other ways

dispatches

FROM THE FRONT

to explain to the lay person the processes by which he or she, even as a child, has begun to unwittingly (and perhaps unwillingly!) appropriate the hegemonic ideologies of his or her society. In my classroom, I have seen again and again the process of critical thinking bring my students around, of their own accord, to a new relationship with the "reality" of which they were so recently certain.

Because discussions are run on the grounds of open dialogue and ultimately subjective theory, the students are encouraged to counter any of my suggestions or beliefs as well as their own, and thereby in the process discover the flexibility of narrative, definition, and rhetoric. As they begin to recognize their own ability to manipulate this information they become increasingly cognizant of the tendency of the definitions with which they engage on a daily basis to shift for the functionality of various governing bodies, structures, laws, and individuals. Crucial to this are an above the board negotiation with our egocentric and sociocentric modes, which can often be a difficult process.

An engagement with critical discourse is one that releases the student from the processes by means of granting them the ability to recognize them. Of course this is not posed as the be-all-end-all solution to the issues as herein stated, and surely many of players in the thorough integration of these tendencies in our ideological self-narration are in fact critical thinkers, as well, but herein is posed merely a tool towards change. I contend that these slight adjustments in outlook have the potential to, in widespread application, trickle up as effectively as the other trickles down.

FREING THE DISCURSIVE VOICE: STORIES AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM

I've been developing and teaching a course over the past five semesters that focuses on critical reading and writing approaches – I refer to both the class and the process as "writing to learn" – and so it is. To serve as a little background, the majority of these students are in the sciences, and come from more countries and backgrounds than you can imagine. They come in with enormously different skill levels and attitudes, academic ideas, intentions, etc. And they demonstrate a healthy, at times near boiling level of indignation at their lot.

What the majority of these students share is a tendency towards hostility in the form of complacency regarding the education system they find themselves in. Some find the issues they are currently facing are the continuation of those they have come to expect in primary and secondary public education in New York. Those not from the U.S. are contending with racial and class stereotypes both in their social, academic, and otherwise everyday lives that are often at odds with differences as experienced in their home countries. The level of education received in many of these countries (and the degrees of formality therein) are sometimes radically different than ours, in particular in our public system.

What I have come to recognize in this complacency is in large part a negation of the self; or, in the very least, a negation of an empowered self-image

of the Student as Scholar. Scholarship has become the least of many of my students' concerns – a usually accidental occurrence. Most of these students are fiercely committed to making good grades and being successful – but unfortunately they have been conditioned to differentiate between this and actually "learning" the material.

Many have become accustomed to classes in which they expect to learn nothing, and go home and teach themselves (memorization style, forgotten soon after) ... quite linked to this is the curricular reality in which there is little to no writing in many of these classes, despite much evidence that the act of writing in order to cement and explore concepts significantly increases both deeper understanding and retention of material, irregardless of discipline.

However, with increased focus on success and GPA (both for material/practical purposes such as future employment and maintenance of scholar-

ships) the nose stays close to the grindstone, despite deep-seated resentment and feelings of impotence regarding the situation. Many of these students end up with the conception that they are individually less skilled, or that they "dislike" the act of scholarship, but without exception I have found that this is because few to none have been given the opportunity to reconceptualize the process, or to apply themselves to the task of thinking critically.

It often comes down to that.

They are shocked, later, when we've broken down many of their barriers and misconceptions, to realize how little they were thinking – both in class as well as in their daily lives. Skills for reading and writing critically, (my secret goal all along) it turns out are powerful tools for empowerment in every avenue of their lives.

We do an exercise in which they are to think about complaints they have in the administration, curriculum, physical plant, etc. at CCNY. The point is that the constant aggravation of "it is always cold in the library" or "there is no WiFi in all of the NAC [bldg]" can lead to "WHY is it..." and that in response to this that they had critical, implementable ideas, that could be fielded to appropriate authorities and effect change.

In addition to this the students are given critical readings such as "What is a nation?" wherein culture, race, and nationality are put in perspective as social constructs necessary for bureaucracies and power to function, as well as those addressing contemporary education practices. We also read the *New York Times*, which less than 1% ever felt capable of previously. These new ways of thinking and new ideas cannot help but seep into their daily lives.

The students come to me explaining how their perceptions of other students, words, books, and themselves changes as a result. Rules for "technical" and other formal writing (the supposed point of the class) I argue can only follow: In the beginning there is resistance – at the end, with rare exception, hearty agreement.

A FEW ANECDOTES:

A Dominican student reports having watched a Spanish-language debate for the upcoming Presidential election with his family. After running up to me in the hallway to relate his revelation, he explains breathlessly: "And then! Professor, I considered our methods for critically evaluating what we hear..." This was a story of how, suddenly the

retorical manipulation of the political speeches (another mid-semester discussion) became clear. He at once recognized this, realized what the group with which he had watched this event was consuming unquestionably, and saw: the illusion of words vs. intentions.

"I could understand what they wanted us to think they were saying, and realized what was being left out, and why they were focusing on these things. My family was getting excited and I stopped them and asked these critical questions and it totally changed everyone's way of hearing the politicians. I can't believe how many people must be hearing it the other way!"

A student from Trinidad explained how she was helping her young cousins with their schoolwork and taught them the critical-writing "steps" I developed and teach the students to demystify long passages that seem difficult or complicated — even the youngest (a five year old) was listening, who, later told his mother, reading the paper, to "cull and gather" in order to understand. [steps to setting aside main points and differentiating from factual bases].

Another student, from Yemen, employed the tripartite system I teach for visual presentations in another class — he felt so confident in the method that he included a poem he'd written both in Arabic and in translation, and presented and spoke the

verses in front of a large audience. Earlier in the semester he would look at the floor and speak quietly.

Finding their voices is empowering beyond what they thought this class could do, and I am happy beyond my wildest dreams, to be the conduit to these strong selves. Small victories! You need not change world hunger, as much as you might like to. But it is in these small steps, in the reality of immediate connection, in the fact of being there, that we can live in parallel to the superstructure, somehow not as contained by it in our ability to see its pulleys and gears. ■

Wanted: Wealthy Patron(s) to Fund My Last Year of Dissertation Work

LINDSAY SARAH KRASNOFF

No one ever said that being a doctoral student was easy, especially at the Graduate Center. GC students lack the financial support that private institutions with large endowments, such as New York University or Columbia University, generally provide to their doctoral students to complete their graduate work. Some people say that this disadvantage actually works in our favor as we are forced to become go-getters who push ourselves to the limits. I have been told that taking on multiple jobs in teaching, communications, office work — anything to survive, pay the rent, and invest in a few libations to sustain myself through the darkest hours of graduate school — in the end makes me more attractive on the job market. This is all well and good but it certainly does not help me reach my end goal: finishing the damned dissertation.

One solution is to apply for funding: funding for research, funding for travel, funding to allow you to spend most of your week writing rather than running around from campus to campus. For those of us in the social "soft" sciences, there is a natural disadvantage to the grant/fellowship application process in that each year there are thousands of applicants against whom we compete to win the few coveted fellowship or grant opportunities available in our respective fields. Moreover, for most of us, there are very few large fellowships on offer (defined as those of \$16,000 or more), so too often we are competing with *everyone* in the social sciences. Word on the street is that within the "hard" sciences funding is much easier to obtain and not as cut-throat a process.

If you must travel overseas for your research, then funding applications take on a much greater importance. This is an added factor of stress because with the way that the dollar is behaving, it will now require greater sums of money to fund that research trip to the archives and libraries abroad. Best case scenario: even if you were selected to receive a \$2,000 research grant, your purchasing power just went down the drain. Let's be realistic — with the dollar's exchange rate at 2£ or 1.5€ — your \$2,000 grant just became 1,362£. It is no longer only 30 cents for each photocopy you're making at the National Library, but now 45 cents. This adds up when you have to make tons of copies because you do not have the luxury of a two-month long research trip as the funding you have received will barely cover three or four weeks abroad. Anyhow, I digress...

The procedure of applying for funding is long and convoluted. The first step is to identify fellowship or grant opportunities that seem like they *might* fall within the parameters of your dissertation work. There are programs that are a God-given fit with your work and then there are those that require creative ingenuity in rewording your dissertation proposal to meet their guidelines. One of the best

grad life

ways to start finding funding sources is to check with your department, as oftentimes announcements of competitions and fellowships are sent to the Program Assistants. My department — History — has a terrific Program Assistant who forwards all funding opportunities the department receives to our email listserv. Another avenue of inquiry is the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, which has several resources for students seeking to identify funding: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/orup/funding.html>. Professional associations and societies that you may belong to will also generally have some form of funding for doctoral student members or be able to point you in the right direction, and lastly, never under-estimate your advisers, who generally have a good idea as to the main sources of funding within their disciplines.

To say that the process of applying to these financial sources is mind-numbing is an understatement. Once you have identified a host of fellowships or grants to which you wish to apply, you have to get organized. Each application differs from the others, quite often times in the most nuanced of ways. Take for example, three of the major fellowships to which I applied for this year: one required a two-page proposal, one wanted five pages, the third sought a 10-page proposal — and of course each institution wanted the documents formatted differently! This is just the tip of the iceberg, however, not only are page lengths and formats different from application to application, but so, too, are the supporting documents that you are required to submit. Some desire one letter of recommendation, others two or three; some wish to see official transcripts of every institution of higher learning that you attended while others are content merely with graduate school transcripts. Lucky is the applicant who encounters an application that does *not* require a graduate transcript. Look, I understand the merits of showing the selection committee my grades and what types of coursework I have completed over the years; but I nearly had to take out a loan to pay for each \$7 official Graduate Center transcript I was required to send. In an application year where I have sent off over 10 funding applications, that \$7-per official transcript really adds up. Fiscally counterproductive to what I'm trying to accomplish, yes?

Thus, it helps to be overly-efficient in your organization; the long and colorful spreadsheets of due dates and necessary application materials could impress even the biggest honcho on Wall Street. It is even better if you have a combination of excellent advisor(s) and recommenders who earnestly believe in you and recognize the odds of the system that you are daring to take head-on; those who are willing to write one letter of recommendation after another

— even when there is a very small turn-around time as you just discovered a great funding opportunity five days before the deadline!

One word on deadlines: application submission season opens in late August and ends in January and February, so again, being organized and cognizant of which deadlines are rapidly approaching is important. Don't let a funding opportunity pass you by because you "forgot" about a deadline!

Writing the proposal is the next significant step (after procrastinating), which can be even more painstaking than all of the preparatory work. As I have yet to win any major funding competitions, I am perhaps not the best authority as to what constitutes a good proposal. I can tell you, however, that concise, to the point, introductions that strongly state your topic and why it is important are vital. Be sure that you read over that specific application's guidelines as quite often they state exactly what it is that they want you to tell them. Oftentimes you may spend hours writing and rewriting the same paragraph over and over, trying to get it just 'right.' At other times, usually just prior to a submission deadline, you will frantically edit and re-edit a paragraph to make your proposal fit within the two-, five-, or 10-page limit.

But, suppose you apply to all funding sources by the stipulated deadlines — what happens next? Essentially, you embark upon a four- to six-month waiting game. Regardless of how valiant you are in nobly trying to forget about your applications, every single well-meaning person you know will ask if you have heard back yet. This results in some or all of the following:

- Anxiety
- Neuroses
- Disillusionment
- Learning how to tell people variations of: "No, I still have not received a letter/email that will decide my fate for the next several months."
- Wishing that some catastrophe will occur to the nation's other social sciences applicants, thereby significantly improving your odds of winning said-funding
- Waiting on pins and needles to figure out just what exactly you will be doing next fall; any planning you may undertake so easily shaped by the wills (ill or good) of some unnamed and scary selection committee

Starting last week, the mailman began to usher in a slow trickle of responses and so far, I have no good news. This is not unexpected as I have preferred to take the path of "it is better to be pleasantly surprised than bitterly disappointed," but a bit disheartening. I continue to apply to the smaller travel grants that are due in the upcoming several weeks and to keep my chin up. However, if you happen to know of a wealthy patron who is willing to grant a fellowship or travel grant to a poor graduate student, please send them my way! ■

The Adjunct Project: Who Are We, What Are We Doing, and How Can You Help?

CARL LINDSKOOG

WHO IS THE ADJUNCT PROJECT?

*Kate Griffiths,
Anthropology Program:*

I'm getting involved with the Adjunct Project and the PSC contract fight because I've seen that when union members take that role seriously and get involved in our unions, exciting things can happen and problems can get solved. I also particularly want to help build relationships with our undergraduate students, because that can have a big impact on a contract fight and it can be great learning opportunity for students.

When I was an undergrad, I helped out on a contract fight for clerical workers at my university. Student support helped win one of the best contracts the union had ever negotiated, despite lots of pressure from the administration. At the time I was patting myself on my back for my altruistic student activism, but by the end of the five year contract, my partner was a full-time clerical worker and union member. The raise I'd helped

win ended up in my bank account! I wouldn't mind having that happen again.

*Nichole Stanford,
English Program:*

I had an inkling that universities' increasing reliance on the adjunct system was unjust, so I got involved with the Adjunct Project to learn more and find out how I could help change things. Attending the Friday meetings, I learned that it was much worse than I thought: adjuncts comprise 60-65% of the teaching force at CUNY, but make less than half of the salary of full professors (salary for a full professor at CUNY ranges from \$56,664-\$102,235, while an adjunct teaching full time [four courses/semester] receives a starting annual income of \$24,644).

Through the Adjunct Project, I had a chance to work together with a group of volunteers to undermine the adjunctification of CUNY by creating "Equity Curricula," an in-class presentation designed to make students aware of the politics going on in their education - and we made sure

adjuncting

Chancellor Goldstein knew we were doing it too.

I plan to continue working with the Adjunct Project to expand our resources for new adjunct teachers (who are often tossed into classrooms with no teaching experience or pedagogical background). We currently maintain a blog for new teachers at adjunctlifeline.blogspot.com, and we invite questions and topic requests.

*Jesse Goldstein,
Sociology Department:*

Before coming to CUNY, I received an MA from a school with a really active graduate student and teaching faculty union. The experience had a significant effect on me, and made me realize how important it was, and will increasingly be, to organize against the slow and steady corporatization of the university. I joined the Adjunct Project last year, hoping that it could be a place where these issues are raised, both at the GC and in the PSC. Right now it feels like the Adjunct

Project is slowly gaining momentum, with more regular meetings and a series of initiatives planned for the semester, and I'm happy to be a part of that process.

*Jennifer Gaboury,
Political Science Program:*

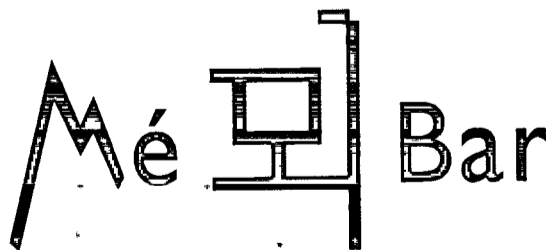
I'm involved with the Adjunct Project because I believe in education and social justice. When I've come to CUNY to study politics and learn how to be an educator, to not get involved in the fight to improve working conditions for adjuncts and fellows doesn't make sense to me.

The modest gains that adjuncts have had in past years, such as health insurance and tuition reimbursement for some and the paid office hour, came in large part from the hard work of adjuncts who preceded us. There is so much work to do around issues of adjunct equity that we should be in this not only for ourselves but for those who will follow us.

This spring, I'll be helping organize an event on the Taylor Law with participants from other NYC unions. The statute, passed in 1967, makes it illegal

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*mention the GC Advocate for available drink promotions

for municipal employees and their unions to cause, instigate, encourage, or condone a strike.

The obstacles we face are the same for all city workers and this forum could be the first of many efforts to find ways to work together to overturn this unjust law.

Michael Fisher and I will be surveying adjuncts and fellows in order get a better picture of things like how many courses people are teaching, how much paid labor they perform beyond that to pay the bills, and which issues they would make priorities within the PSC and the Adjunct Project. In the absence of such data, it's been easy for some folks to minimize the difficulties many people who are committed to teaching as an adjunct face, including outside paid work that essentially subsidizes the CUNY system.

Carl Lindskoog, History Program:

From my first semester of teaching at CUNY I began to understand the conflicting feelings that so many adjuncts have toward the work that they do. On the one hand, I found teaching to be extremely exciting! Exploring ideas with my students, I discovered, gave me great joy and satisfaction. On the other hand, it quickly became clear that I was not being fairly compensated for the immense amount of time and energy I was putting into my work.

The few benefits and little job security I received as an adjunct further increased my feelings of perplexity. As I became aware how widespread the adjunct system at CUNY was, and how egregious its abuses were (especially for the many long-serving adjuncts), my perplexity turned into frustration and anger. It was my conflicted response toward my new work experience,

as well as my hope for change, that motivated my first involvement with the Adjunct Project.

I have stayed involved with the Adjunct Project, and have served as its coordinator for the last two years, because I continue to be outraged by the abuses we suffer

as adjuncts at CUNY. The vast reliance on "contingent labor" at CUNY and at American colleges and universities in general, is an even greater cause for concern, since the adjunct-labor system increasingly imperils any hope we as graduate students have for future academic work that is secure and well-paying.

But outrage and frustration alone would probably not have been enough to determine a significant degree of participation on my part. Hope that we can improve the system has also been a critical element for me, and I remain hopeful that we can attain the changes we need which will allow us to do the work we so enjoy without having to experience the indignities

we now endure. Without an effective effort to correct these abuses the university will never be the just and equitable place we want it to be, nor will there be much future for young academics seeking secure, tenure-track employment. Most importantly if there is no hope for improving the system for adjuncts, we can never reconcile the conflict that unfortunately accompanies the meaningful and satisfying work we do.

WHAT IS THE ADJUNCT PROJECT DOING THIS SEMESTER?

The purpose of the Adjunct Project is to be a resource for graduate student-workers and to empower adjuncts, GAs, and fellows to achieve an equitable and just work experience at CUNY. This semester we aim to build upon earlier campaigns and adopt new initiatives toward this end.

Adjunct Week of Action

One central project for this spring will be to build upon the Campus Equity Week campaign that the Adjunct Project created last semester. Last fall, as part of the nationwide Campus Equity Week, CUNY graduate students and adjuncts implemented "equity curricula," an innovative technique to teach our undergraduate students about our labor experience at CUNY. We received a tremendous response, which encouraged us to continue to build alliances with our students so that we can work together toward a more just and equitable university for them, and for us.

This semester, in addition to continuing to teach our students about the labor system at CUNY, we will elevate the profile of the campaign by featuring coordinated teach-ins and other activities in an Adjunct Week of Action to take place in mid-April.

Contract Campaign

Of course, contract negotiations will continue between the Professional Staff Congress and CUNY, so another part of

our work for this semester will center on the contract struggle. One item on the table that is especially important to us is the provision of a state-sponsored health insurance plan for Graduate Center students. Although we hope the new contract will deliver other sorely-needed items like a movement toward pay equity, the obtaining of health insurance for graduate students will be a key objective in our support of the contract campaign.

Organizing Drive

Through our work in the last few semesters it has become increasingly clear that we cannot achieve all we hope for without a greater degree of organization and involve-

Paying to Teach

Continued from page 1

Gerdes also added that "the struggle to define graduate students as workers for the things that they do is important to us and considering the kind of commitment to social and political engagement in the work of the people in this department, it's hard to ignore these things."

For their part, the department has responded with an open mind and Steve Gorelick, the interim director of the IMA program, has said that he understands why students would be concerned about this as an issue. "Students are legitimately concerned," said Gorelick, adding that "we are not happy with a situation where any kind of work is not compensated." Gorelick also said that "the department was convening a group to advocate for funds that would make [these assistantships] compensated."

But Gerdes and Smolarski are not the only ones who have good reason to be concerned about what's going on in their program. Considering the amount and type of work performed by these students it is possible that there may be a violation of the university's contract with the Professional Staff Congress, which represents all faculty members,

adjuncts, graduate teaching assistants, and staff at the university.

The website for the IMA program describes the duties of teaching assistants this way: "at the very minimum, a TA must be in attendance for the full amount of time of every class meeting and individually present at least one lecture/lesson. Many TA's choose to present several lectures/lessons for the practice and the instructor's valuable feedback."

This actually sounds like very little work, but sources in the department confirm that there has been at least one example where a teaching assistant in the IMA program taught no less than four classes for a professor who was on sick-leave without receiving any compensation. Other teaching assistants in the program have reported that they graded some and sometimes all of the papers for a given course, that they lectured sometimes one and two times per semester, and that they often helped struggling students inside and outside of class. These kinds of duties, which are very similar to the standard duties of adjuncts and paid teaching assistants at other universities, could be cause for alarm at the PSC, who are meeting with Gerdes and Smolarski next week to discuss the legal implications of the program. ■

ment. Without an active and involved adjunct and graduate student population, CUNY will not take our key demands seriously at the bargaining table.

Likewise, without a much greater level of union membership and action among graduate students and adjuncts, union strategy and priorities will not reflect our concerns as much as we feel they should. The good news, however, is that graduate student-workers are increasing their role in the union and thus strengthening their power within the PSC as well as within CUNY. This semester we will rapidly increase this growth by mounting a semester-long organizing campaign, the goal of which will be to sign up the majority of graduate student-workers and to significantly increase the number of active members.

Taylor Law Forum

Finally, since we realize that low levels of involvement and union membership are not the only factors limiting our power within the university, we hope to initiate a process that will eventually remove some of the legal obstacles that stand in our way. The Taylor Law, a New York State law that makes it illegal for unions of public employees to engage in strikes, is a major obstacle that inhibits advancement for all faculty at CUNY, part-time and full-time alike.

With this in mind, we hope to reopen discussion about how to operate in the face of this constraint, and how to move toward repeal of this legal obstacle.

Our goal is to organize and host a public forum with a wide range of participation by public employee unions, in order to initiate this crucial process.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED WITH THE ADJUNCT PROJECT?

Here are three easy steps to join your fellow graduate student-workers in the campaign for a more just and equitable university:

1. Join the Adjunct Project listserv (by sending a signup request to clindskoog@gc.cuny.edu) and sign a union card (yellow for adjuncts, green for Graduate Assistants, and Grad. Fellows.) Union cards are available for pickup and drop off at the Adjunct Project office (GC 5494.)
2. Attend an Adjunct Project meeting (semester meeting schedule below)
3. Sign up for a particular campaign or propose a new area for Adjunct Project work ■

ADJUNCT PROJECT MEETING SCHEDULE FOR SPRING 2008

- Friday, Feb. 8th
5:30 pm, GC 5409
- Friday, March 14th
5:30 pm, GC 5489
- Friday, April 4th
6:30 pm, GC 5409
- Friday, May 9th
5:30 pm, GC 5414

Plan Colombia

Continued from page 1

Since then, American spending has mushroomed to nearly \$4.7 billion, making Colombia the largest recipient of U.S. money outside of the Middle East. Adam Isacson, of the Center for International Policy, estimates that seven of every 10 dollars of military aid spent by the United States in the Western hemisphere goes to Bogotá.

On paper, Plan Colombia outlines a comprehensive approach to fighting the drug war. According to the State Department, U.S. monies are designated for "promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society." Proponents of the plan point out that these goals have been largely met. Indeed, the number of drug traffickers extradited to the United States has increased, as have levels of coca eradication and guerilla demobilization. And perhaps

His skillful use of U.S. assistance to beat back the leftist guerilla group, *las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), into the southern jungles has made journeys between major cities considerably less hazardous than in the past.

The highway between Bogotá and Colombia's second-city Medellín was once the favorite playground of guerillas, paramilitaries, and bandits. The road provided the stage for countless kidnappings, robberies, torture-sessions, and murders. Today, the nine-hour ride can be made in relative peace, with frequent checkpoint stops and military searches. When I made the trip I was surprised to find soldiers stationed every 100 feet along the highway for the last 10 miles into Medellín. This sort of demonstration of a strong state presence has inspired confidence in ordinary Colombians to travel freely and often, and contributed to Uribe's wild popularity throughout the country. But a trip to Medellín also offers hints at the dark side of

capital and a model of social welfare development. A sleek new metro system shuttles residents around town, cable cars ascend into the mountain-side slums, and markets bustle with activity. Medellín claims to be the safest city in Latin America, and statistically, its crime rates are lower than most American capitals.

Security improvements are largely due to the control that *Cacique Nutibara Bloc* (BCN), a drug-funded unit of the larger *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) paramilitary outfit, exerts over the city. Its program of "social cleansing" — a creepy euphemism for the murder and disappearance of street thugs, prostitutes, petty thieves, and other undesirables — has created an environment for the city to emerge triumphant from its recent blood-soaked history. In return for monthly payments, local residents are provided with protection and peace of mind. Critics contend that the mafia-style tactics employed by these *de facto* landlords have Uribe's implicit endorsement, so long as they keep the streets safe, and the FARC at a distance.

Uribe's actions suggest there's some truth to these charges. He has argued that blanket amnesty be given to "reformed" fighters, and his efforts at disarmament have been half-hearted, at best. This was most egregiously demonstrated in Medellín, where a recent disarmament ceremony was held with great fanfare, despite the fact that more than half of participating paramilitaries showed up without turning in any guns. Opponents charge that Uribe's soft posture toward these factions reflects his cozy relationship with the paramilitary leadership.

Indeed, 2007 brought successive waves of scandal to the Uribe administration, linking the president to crimes carried out by right-wing armed groups. Of the numerous arrests and indictments of government officials in connection to paramilitary activities, the most damaging was the arrest of Uribe's presidential campaign manager Jose Noguera, who was later appointed director of secret police. Noguera has been charged with ordering hits on dozens of union organizers, activists, and left-

leaning academics. According to the Colombian magazine *Semana*, those on Noguera's list were either killed or threatened by paramilitaries belonging to the AUC. Yet, if paramilitary activities raise concerns about Uribe's presidency, a closer look at recent events surrounding the military question the country's very stability.

Bogotá was a ghost town when I visited for Uribe's second presidential inauguration in 2006. Light rain and chilly winds reinforced the general

feeling of gloom on what was supposed to be a day of national pride. The empty streets and shuttered gates contrasted sharply with the scene I witnessed a month earlier on Colombian Independence Day. On that holiday, a colorful parade marched down the city's main boulevard; families congregated around storefront *bodeguitas* enjoying ice creams and empanadas; a couple danced the Argentine tango in the middle of the street to the enjoyment of a large group of onlookers.

Inauguration Day was different. I spent my time trying to sneak past the military checkpoints into Plaza de Bolívar, in order to get a better look at the ceremony. But because I was virtually the only one on the streets, I didn't stand a chance. Every street corner was protected by a military guard armed to the teeth. Alleyways were filled with milling troops and roaming squads with bomb-sniffing dogs were everywhere. The officers I spoke with were edgy and unhappy with my presence. So I settled for watching the celebration blocks away on a storefront display TV with a group of homeless drunks.

Colombians stayed off the streets due to threats from the FARC. Four years earlier, FARC guerillas fired mortars at the square during Uribe's first inauguration. Far from assassinating the Colombian president, however, the FARC's poor aim killed dozens of poor civilians in a neighboring barrio. This time around, a series of car bombings throughout the country in the weeks leading up to the inauguration lent credibility to warnings of a repeat performance. Luckily, the day passed without incident, and the following morning Colombians resumed their normal lives.

Shortly thereafter, however, it came to light that members of the Colombian military were responsible for both the violence and the threats preceding Uribe's inauguration. This chilling revelation followed on the heels of another, more brutal incident perpetrated by Colombia's armed forces. In May, the small western town of Jumundí witnessed the massacre of an entire squad of U.S.-trained anti-narcotics policemen by Colombian soldiers. The murders were planned and executed on the orders of a local drug cartel being harassed by the policemen. Then in August, the army was involved in yet another incident, initially described as a botched rescue attempt of kidnap victims in the northern city of Barranquilla. The government later admitted that the officers involved had in fact been paid by a drug gang to execute members of a rival group.

These outrages have confirmed Uribe's critics in their convictions that the president's hard-line, military-focused approach to leadership will ultimately do more harm than good. With U.S. funding and equipment routed through the auspices of Plan Colombia, Uribe has equipped his army with big guns and high-tech equipment. But it's not clear that this modernization has been complimented with control mechanisms prevent-



Liquid coca decanting from a vat of gasoline. It will next be mixed with sulfuric acid and sodium hydroxide, then dry into a gooey paste.

MICHAEL BUSCH

most importantly for Colombians, the roads are safer than they've been in decades.

Securing land travel for regular citizens has been the crowning achievement of Colombia's president, Alvaro Uribe. Uribe took office in 2002 with a mandate to put down the country's raging guerilla insurgencies, disarm paramilitary factions, and aggressively pursue Plan Colombia's drug eradication program. Of his three charges, Uribe can claim the greatest success in fighting the guerillas.

Uribe's administration, and a glimpse at the realities of Plan Colombia in action.

At one time, Medellín was famous for being the world's most dangerous city. During the days of drug lord Pablo Escobar, it was joked that a citizen of Medellín diagnosed with lung cancer was still more likely to die from being murdered. Today, that image has been turned on its head. Since the demise of Escobar's cocaine cartel in the mid-1990s, Medellín has reinvented itself as Colombia's artistic

ing military threats to Colombia's hard-won democracy. If recent events are an indication that segments of the military have been bought by drug lords, Colombia could experience a return to the 1980s, when independent cartel commanders effectively ruled the country. Only this time, the United States would be picking up the tab.

Adding to these concerns are Plan Colombia's other ill effects on the country's viability. At the heart of joint-US efforts to eradicate drugs lies an aggressive strategy of crop fumigation and interdiction. Yet Plan Colombia's supply-side focus has produced few positive results beyond a better understanding of the nature of the Colombian drug trade. According to Coletta Youngers and Eileen Rosin, co-directors of the Drugs, Democracy and Human Rights project at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the terrain on which the War on Drugs is fought has a greater resemblance to "a balloon than a battlefield. When one part of a balloon is squeezed, its contents are displaced to another. Similarly, when coca production is suppressed in one area, it quickly pops up somewhere else, regardless of borders. Arrested drug lords are quickly replaced by others who move up the ranks; dismantled cartels are replaced by smaller, leaner operations that are harder to detect and deter. When drug-trafficking routes are disrupted by intensive interdiction campaigns, they are simply shifted elsewhere."

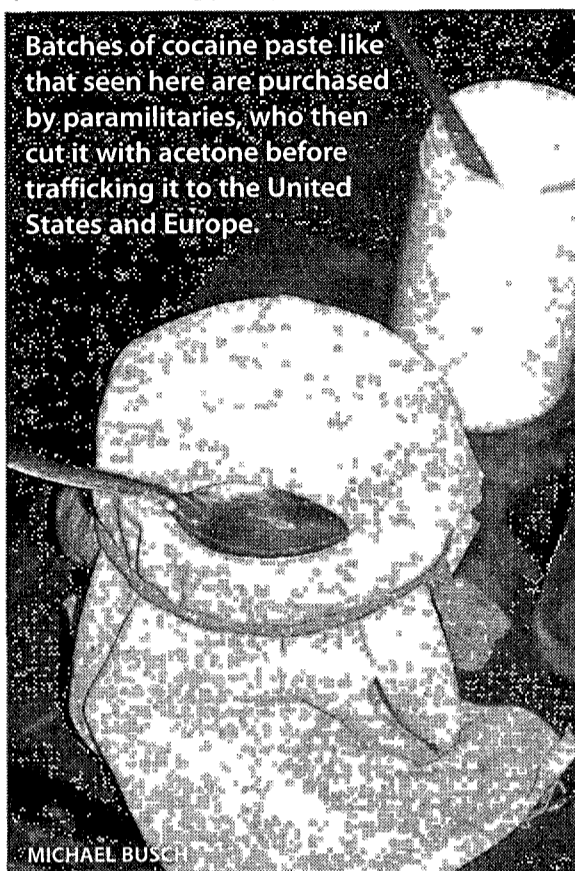
The balloon effect is most painfully illustrated by statistics of internally displaced Colombians since 2000. Forced

displacement has been a consistent feature of Colombian politics since the end of the country's fourteen-year civil war in 1964. As Human Rights Watch notes, the war "appears in retrospect as little more than the opening act for twenty-five years of military rule under a state of emergency, four decades of organized armed rebellion that official repression helped foster, and the horrific abuses by all sides that continue to this day." Yet since the inauguration of Plan Colombia, forced displacement has exploded under the falling mist of crop fumigation.

Along with the eradication of coca fields, Plan Colombia's rigorous crop-dusting program has destroyed countless hectares of subsistence farming. With their livelihoods wiped out, entire farming communities flee to neighboring departments, and in some cases, travel across borders into Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. In the first year of chemical spraying alone, over 75,000 Colombians were displaced from their homes. The ramifications are dramatic. According to the WOLA, internally displaced persons lose their right of return home, often live in severe poverty, are subject to human rights abuses, and perhaps most ironically, resort to drug trafficking in order to survive. Between the violence of military conflict on the ground and crop fumigation from above, experts estimate that over one

million Colombians have been displaced since 2000.

On top of this refugee crisis, Plan Colombia's mandated agenda of crop fumigation highlights its connection to private American military contractors. While corporations like Triple Canopy, DynCorp, and Blackwater



Batches of cocaine paste like that seen here are purchased by paramilitaries, who then cut it with acetone before trafficking it to the United States and Europe.

MICHAEL BUSCH

USA have received considerable attention for their contracts scored in the chaos of Iraq, the U.S. State Department has secured hundreds of millions of dollars beneath the radar for these same groups under the umbrella of Plan Colombia. Fumigation is farmed out to private corporations, who work in tandem with the CIA and the Colombian military to eradicate coca cultivation. Until a fumiga-

tion plane operated by private operators was shot down by FARC guerrillas in 2003, U.S. and Colombian officials refused to disclose the magnitude of private contractor participation in the War on Drugs.

In its 2003 report to Congress, however, the State Department revealed that over \$150,000,000 in Plan Colombia monies had been directed into the bank accounts of private American military firms in the 2002 fiscal year alone. As in Iraq, private contractors provide official governments insulation from accountability for human rights abuses and other unpleasanties carried out in the name of state objectives. And just as in Iraq, where private contractors have been accused of funneling weapons to insurgents over the black market, outsourcing in Colombia has led some private employees to participate in the very practices they're paid to prevent. Colombian police have reportedly interdicted drugs being shipped to the United States by private contractors since Plan Colombia's creation. Both the U.S. government and Colombian officials have refused to publicly engage with accusations that outsourcing has contributed to drug trafficking. Yet their secrecy suggests that a closer look at outsourcing in the War on Drugs would uncover unsettling revelations concerning privatized behavior in the public's name. A current list of private companies operating with Plan Colombia contracts is currently unavailable from the United States government.

In a tiny village near the city of Santa Marta, I drink beer with Tomas



Asian American / Asian Research Institute

The City University of New York

2008 CUNY Asian Faculty & Staff Lunar New Year Reception

Date: Friday, February 8, 2008 Time: 6PM to 8PM

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RSVP Deadline: Friday, February 1, 2008

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(real name withheld), a Colombian-American doctor from Bogotá traveling with his wife along the country's northern coast. Using a coded English – because the “listening ears here are everywhere” – Tomas explains to me what he sees going on. “PU [President Uribe] plays off PGB [President Bush] against the PMs [paramilitaries], and everyone is happy. PU gets PGB money and guns that he can use to fight the Gs [FARC guerillas], which makes the average Colombian feel safer,” and Uribe more popular. Then he cuts a deal with the paramilitaries. The factions are allowed control of the central and northern territories, Tomas believes, and in return, they provide foot soldiers in the hunt for FARC insurgents, and permit a greater share of their coca to be sprayed or their cocaine seized. The catch is that they're also growing more coca and producing more cocaine, so they don't lose anything. “PU shows PGB that he's getting results, so he gets more money.” And the military? “Who knows? Some of them are PMs with uniforms. Some just do their own thing.”

In light of the recent scandals involving the Colombia military, Tomas's analysis has found echoes in Washington. The unsettling trend of violence perpetrated by soldiers has led a number of policy-makers to question Plan Colombia's effectiveness, and call for its funding to be cut. Democratic Congressman

Jim McGovern of Massachusetts was recently quoted by the Christian Science Monitor as wondering out loud “Just how far have the drug mafias penetrated the military?”

He concluded that “all the money we have sent down there has basically not worked.” McGovern has led bipartisan efforts to fight increases in Plan Colombia's funding. His efforts have paid off of late, though perhaps not in the ways in which McGovern would like.

In light of the scandals surrounding the Uribe presidency and statistics demonstrating that Plan Colombia's militarized approach to fighting drugs fails to pay dividends, Congress has reduced spending on the program. The American government rescinded roughly \$13 million in military aid early in 2007, then refused at the end of September to grant the Bush administration its request to increase Plan Colombia by \$141 million in 2008. While it would be comforting to believe that these small victories represent the beginnings of a change in the American approach to combating drugs, such thinking is premature.

Instead, it is increasingly evident that these cuts are a reaction to regional political dynamics in Latin America. A close look at projected spending on Plan Colombia for 2008 reveals that the majority of reductions in military aid will be drawn from Plan Colombia operations in Bolivia. Moreover, as the Center for International Policy

has recently argued, money saved on Plan Colombia will likely be transferred to efforts at combating drugs more broadly in Central America and Mexico. This, in turn, increases the fears of some that Plan Mexico – an idea floated by the Bush administration several months back – is beginning to take shape.

To be sure, the security agreement between the Mexican and U.S. governments signed this past fall bears more than a passing resemblance to Plan Colombia in its nascent stages.

The agreement commits the American government to an aid package in excess of \$1 billion over two years to combat drug production and trafficking in Mexico. The money will cover the costs of military hardware (airplanes, helicopters, and gunboats), training of Mexican military personnel, and intelligence provided by the United States government and its private partners.

In return, the Mexican government of Felipe Calderón has promised to stem the rising tide of drugs and illegal aliens pouring across the Mexican-American frontier.

That Plan Colombia continues to be funded, despite widespread bipartisan opposition and a Democratically controlled Congress, is an astounding indication of the extent to which the Bush administration has bungled diplomacy in Latin America. Because President Bush has been an eager participant in what has become Hugo

Chavez's two-man populist comedy routine, America has lost many of its allies throughout the region. Each time the president or a member of his administration issues a miscalculated response to Chavez's baiting, America loses credibility in the eyes of Latin Americans. Uribe, no friend to Chavez, has proved a lone supporter of U.S. policy objectives in the region, and beyond (the invasion of Iraq the only serious exception). But his loyalty has come at a price. Plan Colombia thus serves as another reminder of America's willingness to stay the course in pursuit of bad ideas. Sadly, it also symbolizes the depleted reserves of America's international integrity.

All this highlights the need for the United States to mend its damaged relationship with Latin America. Otherwise, it will continue to be held hostage by schemes like Plan Colombia, which support those who should be in prisons, and do nothing to alleviate the suffering of people on both sides of the U.S.-Colombia divide. Back in the lab, I ask my host if he feels any remorse, knowing as he does that his trade ruins millions of lives. “No” he replies in a serious tone. “This is what I have done for 25 years. It is all I know.”

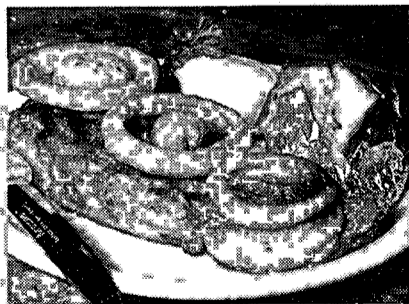
But then his face suddenly lights up, and he starts to laugh. “If Americans were not so stupid,” he says, “I'd be out of a job.” ■

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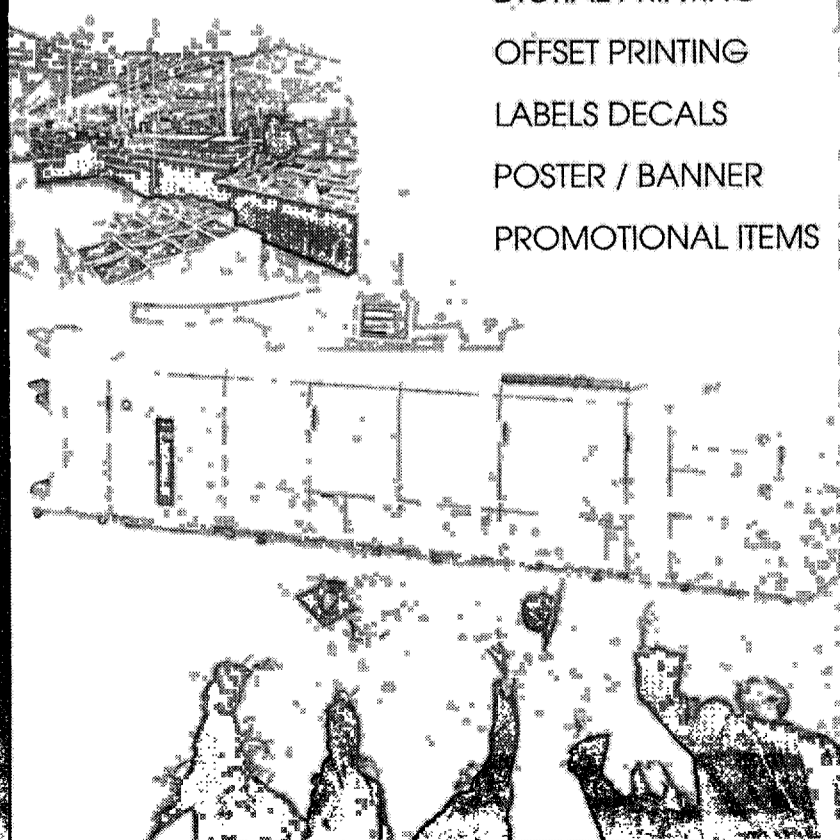
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Islam in the Media: They Still Don't Get It

IRENE MEISEL

They say that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. In the United States, however, one man's freedom fighter is often that same man's terrorist—maybe years later, but classifications can flip back and forth on any given day. The anti-Muslim hysteria that mushroomed after 9/11 and was fanned by the so-called "War on Terror" has infused media coverage with subtle and not-so-subtle Islamophobia that conjures up terrorists at every turn. While the threat of terrorism in the name of a politicized Islam is real, the American media's one dimensional depiction of this threat makes a realistic assessment of it much more difficult.

The idea of a clash of civilizations between the West and the East has deep historical roots. French scholar Maxime Rodinson has remarked that, "Western Christendom perceived the Muslim world as a menace long before it began to be seen as a real problem." Embedded in the idea of a Muslim threat is the conception of a monolithic Orient, with little room for change over time or regional cultural differences. During the 1950s and 1960s when the United States sought to ally with Muslim countries in a battle against the "godless" Communists, often siding with Islam over populist nationalism, vocal criticism of Muslims was rare. It wasn't until the 1970s that events in the Middle East, such as the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, led the United States to construct an image of a specifically-Muslim threat to Western interests.

Columbia professor and activist Edward Said documented the trend in his 1981 book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. His introduction to the book's 1997 reissue could just as easily have been written today:

...[there is] intense focus on Muslims and Islam in the American and Western media, most of it characterized by a more highly exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility than what I had previously described in my book. Indeed, Islam's role in hijackings and terrorism, descriptions of the way in which overtly Muslim countries like Iran threaten "us" and our way of life, and speculations about the latest conspiracy to blow up buildings, sabotage commercial airlines, and poison water supplies seem to play increasingly on Western consciousness. A corps of "experts" on the Islamic world has grown to prominence, and during a crisis they are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas about Islam on news programs or talk shows. There also seems to have been a strange revival of canonical, though previously discredited, Orientalist ideas about Muslim, generally non-white people...

The presentation of an unchanging Muslim world dedicated to terror is aided by its uncritical use of several key terms including, ironically, Islam, jihad and terrorism. While most Muslim exegesis is in agreement about the idea that G-d revealed the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammed (570-632 CE), exactly what the Qur'an says and how best to interpret both its laws and the related sunnah (the religious actions instituted by Muhammed) are topics subject to the vagaries of interpretation. Where Sunni Muslims see five pillars of faith, Shi'a see eight. While sharia is often presented by the American press as synonymous with Islamic law, it can more accurately be described as a system for formulating laws—a countless number of which have been created and debated since the death of Muhammed himself. Islam has no official governing body or reigning figure to hand down edicts analogous to

those from the pope. Thus different countries, different sects, different imams have and will continue to come up with a new interpretations of the Qu'ran and sunnah in the communities that make up the more than 1 billion Muslims living throughout the planet.

Not least among the concepts which should be subject considerable debate is the idea of jihad and its practitioners, mujahideen. The basic translation for the word jihad is to struggle, but by whom, why and how struggle is carried out has been construed in vastly different ways for the last 1300 or so years. In *On Suicide Bombing*, CUNY Anthropology professor Talal Asad argues that jihad is not part of a so-called homogeneous Muslim civilization, but rather a trope in the descriptions of Islam written by Western scholars. While the shorthand for jihad in Western discourse is holy war, Asad argues that jihad can refer to a range of struggles in both war and peace. In the realm of war, many Muslim legal scholars argue that struggle is appropriate only when there is the presence of a genuine threat to Islam coupled with the likelihood of success in opposing it.

And what of those engaged in violent and non violent forms of political activism claiming philosophical foundations in Islam? Syrian-born German political philosopher Bassam Tibi contends that, "Giving Islam a political imprint results in an ideology called al-Islam al-siyasi, political Islam. This ideology has little to do with the religion or the history of the related civilization, for political Islam is not a religious belief. It is a political ideology." Thus while those described as Muslim terrorists may indeed be Muslim, there is not necessarily something intrinsically Muslim about their actions.

Which of course begs the question of how to define terrorism itself, another word which seems to have a fairly fluid definition in the American lexicon. The American Heritage dictionary defines terrorism as the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political

cal reasons. What this understanding of terrorism and most accounts of terrorist attacks in the media fail to take into account is the huge power differential between the perpetrators of terrorism and the countries against which terrorist attacks are aimed.

Numerous scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman and Alexander George have argued that there is such a thing as state-sponsored terrorism which shares many characteristics with the non-state-sponsored variety. Chomsky contends that low-intensity conflict (the use of military force to enforce compliance with the policies or objectives of the political body controlling that military force) is basically terrorism carried out under the auspices of an internationally-recognized nation-state. He further asserts that United States intervention in foreign countries—such as the backing of Contra guerillas in their war against the Nicaraguan government or the United States-assisted overthrow of Mossadeq in Iran is akin to terrorism. Thus where many in the mainstream media see terrorism as unprovoked attacks on innocent civilians, others with a more critical bent describe a more complicated situation. Talal Asad suggests in *On Suicide Bombing* that in place of a simple agentive model, in which rational democrats in the West react defensively to destructive terrorists from the East, we substitute the idea of a historical space in which violence circulates. The trick here is to avoid condoning either kind of violence as bloodshed in response to state-sponsored savagery is as wrong as the force provoking it.

In the meantime, with the media steeped in such a narrow understanding of Islam, jihad and terrorism, reporters often present terrorist attacks as being completely irrational. It is hard to imagine a way for fragmented media stories that have a notoriously clipped time span to be able to tackle the difficult issues that must be addressed to arrive at a nuanced appraisal of American foreign policy. Without this, however, the story of circulating violence espoused by





Edward Said

Asad becomes a myopic vision of cartoon heroes and villains. Islam, rather than a multi-faceted religion with impossibly intricate subtleties becomes a diabolical aberration. Dr. Yvonne Haddad, Professor of Islamic History at the Center for Muslim - Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington, DC describes the confusion this way, "It is very difficult for Americans to distinguish between al-Qaida and not al-Qaida. It is very difficult for them to distinguish between the few people who are terrorists and the rest of Muslims who are just people trying to make their living, trying to raise their kids and have a peaceful life."

So-called moderate Muslims in the US are put in the awkward position of having to denounce extremism. This is awkward first because it is illustrative of the strange American insistence that there be only one Muslim voice. Certain Muslims are asked to speak for all Muslims in order to show that certain other Muslims do not speak for all Muslims. It is awkward also because by starting their own anti-terrorism campaigns groups like the Council on American Islamic Relations and the Muslim Public Affairs Council are perhaps unwittingly reinforcing the very conflation of Islam and terrorism they are seeking to counteract. Muslims in various parts of the country are forced to take on the daunting task of helping local mosques interact with a press that seems intent on ignoring them. Bushra Burney a member of the Media Committee the of South Bay Islamic Association (SBIA) (and one of the main bloggers for the SBIA's Media and Islam blog) relates that her committee regularly sends out DVDs to masjids across the country teaching them how to start their own media committees and offers frequent workshops on how to speak effectively on camera, the language and psychology of the media, interviewing techniques, and general public speaking.

The lines of battle were drawn early in the

American press, which is flush with articles such as Time magazine's, "Struggle For The Soul Of Islam", published in the fall of 2004 in which journalist Bill Powell wrote:

The war that began three years ago in lower Manhattan has never been a conventional one, waged solely against enemy armies in distant lands. It is a fight for the hearts and minds and souls of millions of Muslims...whose life choices may have a greater impact on the long-term security of the U.S., its citizens and its allies than battlefield victories or intelligence reforms.

While the threat of political Islam is indeed daunting, the war Powell describes certainly did not start in lower Manhattan in 2001. Powell detaches US security from United States policy, making it unclear what precisely Muslims will base their life choices on and implying that the US is

merely a passive victim of Muslim rage. By implying that the most important upshot of the decision of millions of Muslims will be the status of US security (and not, say, the well being of those millions of Muslims or the health of their own governments) Powell dehumanizes great swaths of the human population.

The apocalyptic tone of newspaper articles like this one has been mirrored on news programs. For instance, Fox News' "Radical Islam: Terror in Its Own Words" features reporter E.D. Hill in an exposé-like investigation of radical Islam and fits the stereotypical Muslims-as-extremists mold exceptionally well. Far from a tiny minority of politicized Muslims with a specific history rooted in a particular time and place, Fox's program presents a radical Muslim threat which is a scourge the size of America's biggest fears and seeks in Hill's words to "destroy our way of life." The "our" referred to here is what Hill calls the "civilized world."

A huge amount of international news is also filtered through the prism of a radical Islamic threat. For instance, in a recent Time magazine article titled "Why Pakistan Matters" Simon Robinson wrote, "It doesn't take much insight to see the dangers...Failure to keep the sole Muslim nuclear power stable, whole and democratic might be catastrophic not just for the war on terrorism and the stability of South Asia but also for the future of Islam and the relations between Islamic states and the West."

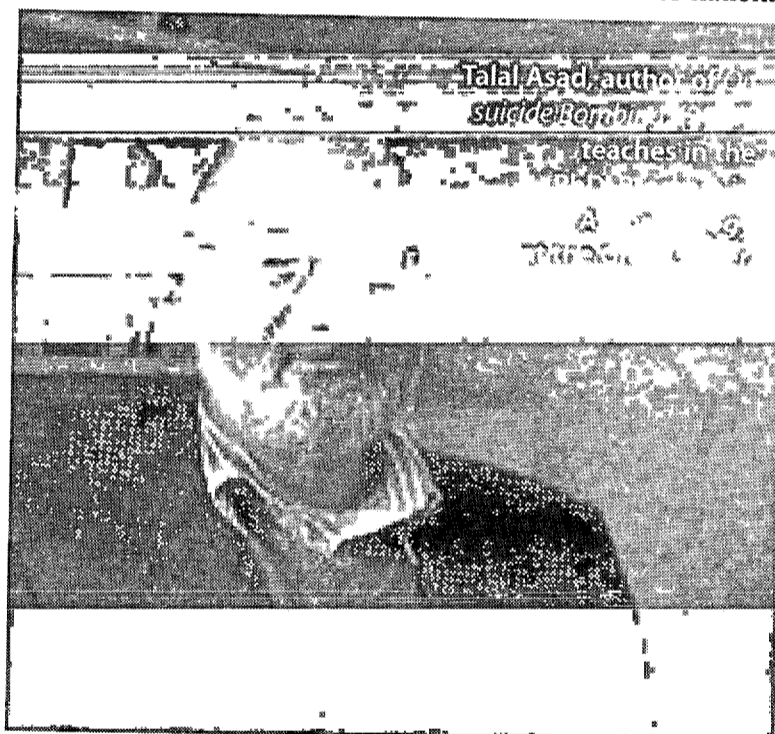
With its location in New York, one of the only places in the country where a terrorist threat from abroad has actually materialized, CUNY has participated in the public dialogue on terrorism in a number of ways, such as through its faculty's

publication of monographs such as Talal Asad's On Suicide Bombing. In addition, CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice has the rather unusual distinction of being one of the only schools in the country to offer its Masters students a certificate in the study of terrorism. Staff and research fellows at the center, such as Lee Quinby who studies apocalyptic thought in American culture, attempt to insert reasoned debate into the national media panic about terrorist attacks. CUNY shares board of trustee member Jeffrey Wiesenfeld with Citizens for American Values in Public Education on whose National Advisory board he sits. The rather opaquely named organization has just published a twenty page manifesto entitled "Stop the Madrassa: A Citizen's Guide to Islamist Curricula in Our Public Schools" which asserts that:

Studies have proven again and again that textbooks have been rewritten to represent only a militant Islamic view of history; training of history teachers is now subsidized and directed by Saudi-funded centers of regional studies; and anti-American and anti-Israel curricula packages are developed at those same universities for distribution throughout K-12 systems across the country.

Wiesenfeld's group was instrumental in the attack against a dual-language English-Arabic public school, the Kahlil Gibran International Academy, that opened in the fall of 2007. It contended that the school was slated to become a haven for terrorists.

With hyperbole as the hallmark of so much news coverage regarding Muslims and Islam, it is often difficult to get an accurate assessment of national



and international events. Concerned members of the CUNY community can make use of a number of activist tools. The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has created a pamphlet called Beyond Stereotypes. The public is invited to buy copies of this for media in its own state or in a state that CAIR chooses. In addition, on its website Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) offers the public a media activism kit. ■



Spotlight on the Board of Trustees

Wiesenfeld, Islamophobia, and the Madrassa

ADEM CARROLL

Alert, on edge New Yorkers are increasingly stressed, fed by a media diet of bad news stories sensationalizing the radical Islamist threat. Moreover, with upcoming presidential elections, many residents expect such scare stories to increase their apparent justifications for increased military expenditure, war and civil liberties restrictions.

Over six years after the terror attack of 9/11, a significant sector of the mainstream media has continued to fan the fear of immigrants in general and of Muslims in particular. Last month, CNN's Lou Dobbs spoke out, and the polls seemed to agree with him; and immigrant advocates were shocked to see the Governor of New York backtrack on Drivers Licenses for the undocumented. Yet far worse may lie ahead for immigrants and for Muslims. Mike Savage and Ann Coulter continue talk radio attacks unabated, while the transnational power of the blogosphere continues to churn out messages of extreme negativity, often focused on immigrants and Muslims.

While some threat most certainly exists, an army of self-proclaimed "experts" from neo-conservative think tanks have hyped the dangers of Islamic radicalization, seeing Muslim or pro-Arab radicals everywhere they look, and targeting academic freedom in the name of patriotism and the "War on Terror." FBI and Arab and Muslim community reports show hate crimes increase in relation to such media provocations as well as reports of real terror attacks.

With its history of immigrant assimilation, reviled by the far right as a haven for "illegals" and the "sanctuary city," one might expect New York City to be an exception to this xenophobic trend.

But sadly it is not an exception, with fearful residents influenced by tabloids and talk radio as well as class resentment of immigrant success. And yet one might at least expect the CUNY leadership to honor the multicultural character of this city. But with Jeffery Wiesenfeld on the CUNY Board of Trustees, CUNY seems to be providing sanctuary for yet another opponent of multicultural education who seems unafraid to make inflammatory statements against certain minority groups to achieve his radical ends.

In his first confirmation hearing for CUNY Board, State Senator Daniel Hevesi questioned Wiesenfeld sharply about these reports, including allegations from Community Advocate Isaac Abraham that he had called blacks "savages." As Hevesi remarked, "I don't know what to believe, but if

someone calls blacks 'savages' they have no business being on the CUNY Board of Trustees."

Even though Hevesi went on to say, "I know this nominee does not have the character to sit on the CUNY Board," Jeffrey Wiesenfeld was confirmed by the full State Senate in June, 1999, and then re-appointed by Pataki in a last minute "emergency" meeting of the state senate, just before the end of Pataki's term on December 13th, 2006. For more on this see "Pataki Appoints Two Trustees in Last Minute Senate Meeting" in the February, 2007 edition of the GC Advocate.

Most recently, Wiesenfeld has been in the forefront of the attack on academic freedom in 2007. As New York Board Chair of the Stop the Madrassa Coalition, he has joined a group that has repeated baseless charges that a new dual language Arabic English public school, the Kahlil Gibran International Academy, would inevitably become a haven for terrorists and was already a radical "Madrassa" religious school. None of the coalition's allegations against the school or against the Principal were or are grounded in fact. Nor were the numerous articles in the New York Post or the New York Sun, which linked them to its main web page.

After months of media harassment, the Principal of the Gibran school Debbie Almontaser was hounded out of her position when she was required to be interviewed by the New York Post, with minimal to no protection from the Department of Education.

"I don't know what to believe, but if someone calls blacks 'savages' they have no business being on the CUNY Board of Trustees."

Alan Hevesi

The New York Post demanded to know Ms Almontaser's views about T-Shirts that a female youth group was selling, which displayed the slogan "Intifada NYC" to indicate Arab empowerment. Despite no direct involvement with

the girls group, and despite denouncing any violence, Debbie Almontaser's efforts to explain the significance of the slogan to the Arab community was distorted in the right wing media and she was forced out by risk averse city officials. She was successfully scapegoated—despite a long career of almost unmatched interfaith dialogue and community-based peace work.

Echoing the groundless assertions of both Daniel Pipes and Dan Gillerman, the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Wiesenfeld argued that "we have to be concerned with this type of school on a different level for the simple reason that ... while today most Muslims are not terrorists, virtually all terrorists today are Muslim," (Daily News, 9/4/07) ignoring, of course, the tragic scale of South American, African and Asian terror and guerrilla tactics,



Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, a former FBI counterintelligence agent, is a current sitting member of the CUNY Board of Trustees and is on the advisory board for Citizens for American Values in Education.

not to mention the various insidious forms of state terror—in order to cast suspicion on all Muslims.

Wiesenfeld then went on to assert, to his allies at Pipeline News, "I think we have to get really serious about demanding that people say what they mean and mean what they say...especially in this era, this kind of duplicity has gone on for too long...[Almontaser] is very smooth...there are a lot of these smoothies, they are all very good at this...we are just being sold a bill of goods." He concluded, "I will fight [KGIA] in every way that I can...the concept is bad, it's dangerous...It's a national security concern" (also quoted in Frank Gaffney's Front Page blog).

Right Wing pundit Daniel Pipes and Wiesenfeld made it their "jihad" to shut down the school, before it even opened. Together with Pipes, Andrea Peyser of the New York Post did a hatchet job on Almontaser, and other pundits followed. New York officials (including Teachers Union President Randi Weingarten) distanced themselves from the school and then later quietly embraced it behind the scenes. Finally, in a minor media frenzy, the school opened on time on September 4 and currently offers a standard curriculum plus Arabic studies to 60 sixth grade students, mainly African American with some Arab American students as well. Wiesenfeld's Stop the Madrassa Coalition, <http://stopthemadrassa.wordpress.com/>, however, continues to vow to close down the school.

Wiesenfeld has spoken at rallies against the school, and, according to the Jewish Weekly, he and Daniel Pipes met with former Mayor Koch to sway him to their side. Koch said he continued to back the school based on his understanding that its policies and practices would be closely monitored

by the city's Department of Education. Koch told Pipes that Schools Chancellor Joel Klein had promised to do just that; "Pipes agreed with me," said Koch on the question of monitoring. "Not Jeff. He was for not opening the school. He did not believe any school devoted to Arab culture should be permitted to open."

Why this aversion to Arab culture? Is it racism or can the existence of alternative narratives of Palestine and Israel be a concern here? In his political roles, Mr. Wiesenfeld has facilitated meetings with representatives from the Ariel Settlement, where construction is ongoing despite repeated U.S. appeals that Israel freeze settlement expansion, and where the dividing wall chokes the economic life of

the Palestinian population, costing over 6,000 jobs. But Wiesenfeld's close colleague with Stop the Madrassa NY David Yerusalemi, has denounced all leftist critics of occupation as dangerous. And Wiesenfeld himself has denounced the Chris Hedges antiwar book War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, as racist and anti-Semitic and therefore violating CUNY's bylaws—despite disagreement from the Hillel chapter on campus.

Then who really is Jeffrey S. Wiesenfeld? Why was he re-appointed at a special legislative session just before the end of the Pataki term? Formerly Pataki's Jewish liaison to New York City, he does have important backing and there are reports that Rabbi Joe Potasnick of the New York Board of Rabbis went to bat for him. Like Clarence Thomas, he has clearly benefited from specific racial or ethnic-based preferences, and yet he denounces the use of preferences and special services for others.

Born of "two Holocaust survivors", and active in politics from a young age, Jeffrey Wiesenfeld also maintains active involvement with United National Development Program and with Sanford C. Bernstein & Co Global Wealth Management. He has done very well in some respects. In other respects, however, in his willingness to bait and defame others, on ideological grounds but often targeting vulnerable minorities, he resembles his ideological ally Rudolph Giuliani. He also shares some of the anti-Arab and Islamophobic paranoia of the far right in Israel, the Jewish Task Force, the Jewish Defense League, Betar, as well as Christian Fundamentalist groups. If he truly means what he says, Mr Wiesenfeld has proved that State Senator Hevesi was right—he does not have the character to be CUNY Trustee. ■

American Dreaming: The Surreal Imagination of George Saunders

JAMES D. HOFF

George Saunders' latest book, and his first collection of essays, *The Braindead Megaphone*, is a testament to both his sanity and the depth of his empathic abilities as a writer. From his imaginative critiques of American foreign policy and the news media, to sketches of the *uber*-resort that is Dubai (UAE); the dilapidated border towns of Texas and Mexico; and the meditating Buddha boy of Nepal, Saunders brings a quiet dignity and respect for human suffering to everything he writes about. But Saunders is primarily a satirist and a highly comic writer with a sharp, often absurdist critical acumen. Indeed the very first essay of the collection, "The Braindead Megaphone," offers a pointed critique of the American media establishment, setting the tone for the entire book, where each essay in one way or another deals with the problems of perspective and bias. In this title essay Saunders explores again the question that seems to dominate so much of his fiction: how much of the world is really our world and how much is it something that has been manufactured for us? Where does the line between product and person end? And how are our lives shaped by the messages we receive from the media?

Saunders' central image of the braindead megaphone operates as a kind of absurd conceit for the present state of the American media establishment. The American media, Saunders suggests, is like a man with a megaphone, walking into a nice, polite cocktail party.

He's not the smartest person at the party, or the most experienced, or the most articulate.

But he's got that megaphone.

Say he starts talking about how much he loves early mornings in spring. What happens? Well, people turn to listen. It would be hard not to. It's only polite. And soon, in their small groups, the guests may find themselves talking about early spring mornings. Or, more correctly, about the validity of megaphone guy's ideas about early spring mornings. Some are agreeing with him, some disagreeing – but because he's so loud, their conversations will begin to react to what he's saying. As he changes topics, so do they. If he continually uses the phrase "at the end of the day," they start using it too. If he weaves into his arguments the assumption that the west side of the room is preferable to the east, a slow westward drift will begin...

Saunders is not the first writer or critic to attack the stupidity and banality of the American media. Indeed, the idea of a stupid, irresponsible media seems to be a given among most intelligent Americans. It has even become the foundation for a whole cottage industry of satirists from the writers at *The Onion* to John Stewart and Stephen Colbert. Yeah, the media establishment sucks! So tell us something we don't know. What makes Saunders' essay so successful, however, is precisely the absurd and inventive, but deadpan way that he goes about his critique. Saunders is really a working class writer and this is both a virtue and a fault. His ideas are never any more complex than what the average fifth grader could comprehend with a little effort, and his language and vocabulary, like many satirists, are remarkably accessible and completely free of pretension. This often seems to work well in his short stories, carried along as they are by the brilliancy of Saunders' imagination, but in these essays his language more often than not falls flat, and one is left with nothing but a few good ideas and some sketchy descriptions of faraway places. The ideas that he generates, however, can be intriguing. The story of the "Megaphone Guy," as strange as it is, is woven into a larger, more complex and evocative analysis of the Iraq war and the 10 O'clock news

book REVIEW

- *The Braindead Megaphone: Essays by George Saunders*. Riverhead Books, 2007
- *In Persuasion Nation: Short Stories by George Saunders*, Riverhead Books, 2006

and how these two abominable failures of American society are, in some sense, the result of our increasing inability to tell good stories. "Megaphone guy is a storyteller," says Saunders, "but his stories are not so good," and the consequences of bad storytelling can be devastating.

Our venture in Iraq was a literary failure, by which I mean a failure of imagination. A culture better at imagining richly, three-dimensionally, would have had a greater respect for war than we did, more awareness of the law of unintended consequences, more familiarity with the world's tendency to throw aggressive energy back at the aggressor in ways he did not expect...The shortfall between the imagined and the real, multiplied by the violence of one's intents, equals the evil one will do.

The rest of the collection seeks to present a positive example of the kind of good storytelling that Saunders says he values and is largely divided between these kinds of strange political essays – including a remarkable and admirably earnest four-page manifesto at the end of the book – a series of magazine-style feature articles, many that he wrote for *GQ* magazine, and literary analyses of predictable Saunders influences: Donald Barthelme, Kurt Vonnegut, and Mark Twain.

One particularly astounding and evocative image – the objective correlative of the entire book, really – can be found in his essay on Dubai titled "The New Mecca." Here, in what he describes as an enticing but unsavory resort city on the Arabian Peninsula, among the most amazing wealth and privilege imaginable, surrounded by perfectly fabricated theme worlds, Saunders captures well the image of the international working poor who make this world of wealth and pleasure possible.

The dance floor is packed, the whole place becomes the dance floor, the rails are now packed with dancers, a Lebanese kid petulantly shouts that if this was *fucking Beirut*, the girls would be *stripped off* by now, then gives me a snotty look and stomps away, as if it's my fault the girls are still dressed. I drop my wallet, look down, and see the tiniest little woman imaginable, with a whisk broom, struggling against the surge of the crowd like some kind of cursed Cleaning Fairy, trying to find a small swath of floor to sweep while being bashed by this teeming mass of International Hipsters.

As great as some of these essays are, however, many of them seem like mere distractions from Saunders' true genius for short fiction. In fact, this reviewer at least, wishes that Saunders would stop taking money from *GQ* to fly all over the world and spend a little more time in his study with his own imagination, for, while the essays in *The Braindead Megaphone* are often very touching and sometimes brilliantly bizarre, Saunders' political

analysis in these essays is weak at best. In fact, his recent decision to go ahead with a glowing article for *GQ* (November, 2007) on Bill Clinton, despite the fact that the magazine killed an unfavorable article on Hillary Clinton in order to gain access to her husband, is a little more than problematic. Not to mention the fact that Saunders' good nature, his empathy and his kindness are hardly sufficient weapons against the allure of global capital and corporate media such as *GQ*. Indeed, because he tries to be so fair-minded and open in these essays, he sometimes comes across sounding more like a starry-eyed philanthropist, in reverential awe of the sheer constructive power of global wealth, than a sharp-minded critical essayist. The fact that he has more than once mentioned Ayn Rand as one of his influences is, of course, no help either.

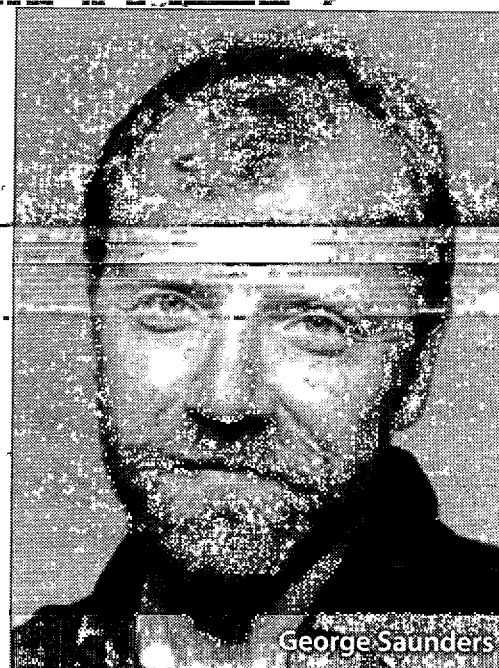
In Persuasion Nation, on the other hand, is possibly Saunders' greatest, most daring, and most original collection of short stories to date. Like his other short story collections; including *Civil War Land in Bad Decline* (1996), and *Pastoralia* (2001), *In Persuasion Nation* offers a not so subtle critique of post-industrial America, where our lives, or what we think of as *our* lives are increasingly dominated and manipulated by the manufactured worlds of consumer capitalism.

Consider the opening story titled "I Can Speak!" Framed as a rambling and oddly personal business letter in response to an unsatisfied customer, the whole story revolves around the merits of the "I CAN SPEAK!" learning tool, which, we soon learn, is actually nothing more than a talking electronic mask for infant children that can

Recognize familiar aural patterns and respond to these patterns in a way that makes baby seem older. Say baby sees a peach. If you or Mr. Faniglia (I hope I do not presume) were to loudly say something like: "what a delicious peach!" the I CAN SPEAK!, hearing this, through that hole, that little slotted hole near the neck, might respond by saying something like: "I LIKE PEACH." Or: "I WANT PEACH."

Of course the idea of a learning product that is also a mask is a pretty straightforward and amazing metaphor for our slow descent into a virtual fantasy world of consumer bliss and ignorance. In Saunders' world, even our children, it seems, have become mere playthings by which we seek nothing more than entertainment and distraction. What is really terrifying about this story, however, is just how closely, in spirit at least, the "I CAN SPEAK!" resembles actual learning tools for children and how subtly Saunders develops the rising action of the story by slowly revealing the product's actual function and rationalizing its use as the story progresses.

But now when childless friends are over, what we have found, Ann and I, is that there is something great about having your kid say something witty and self-possessed years before he or she would actually in reality be able to say something witty or self-possessed. The bottom line is, it's just *fun*, when you and your childless friends are playing cards, and your baby suddenly blurts out (in his *very own probable future voice*): "IT IS VERY POSSIBLE THAT WE STILL DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORT OF ALL OF EINSTEIN'S FINDINGS."



George Saunders

Baby Einstein™ anyone? Like all good futurists everything that Saunders writes about seems at once frightening and inevitable; waiting for us just around the next corner, in the next shop window, or displayed upon the next public television screen.

Saunders' real genius, however, is his remarkable powers of empathy. The "characters" of these stories – if you can call them characters, since some of them are as abstract as a torn piece of candy wrapper and a self-conscious sitcom character – are always rendered with an amazing sensitivity to human error and stupidity. Even the non-human characters, of which there are many, are more than capable of extreme levels of suffering and joy, transcendence and brutal violence. Take for example, the longest story of the collection, "Jon."

Jon is an adolescent boy, who we slowly discover, is one of a small minority of celebrity human product testers. Jon and the other adolescent boys and girls who comprise the "demographic category of White Teens," reside entirely in a sealed off testing facility and spend their entire physical lives surrounded with new products and their mental lives plugged into a commercial world, where their every thought and their every feeling is grounded in one commercial cliché or another. When Jon imagines having sex with one of the girls at the facility, the only precedent feeling that comes to mind is an MTV television show.

Then came the final straw that broke the back of me saying no to my gonads, which was I dreamed I was that black dude on MTV's *Hot and Spicy Christmas* (around like Location Indicator 34412, if you want to check it out) and Carolyn was the oiled-up white chick, and we were trying to earn the Island Vacation by miming through the ten Hot 'n' Nasty Positions before the end of "We Three Kings," only then, sadly, during Her On Top, Thumb In Mouth, her Elf Cap fell off, and as the Loser Buzzer sounded she bent low to me, saying, Oh, Jon, I wish we did not have to do this for fake in front of hundreds of kids on Spring Break doing the wave but instead could do it for real with just each other in private.

In any one else's hands this would seem merely vulgar and degrading, and the reader would have no connection with these seemingly vacuous teenagers, but Saunders manages, even in this setting, to actually give his characters an emotional depth that is heart-breaking. By the end of the story, as Jon and Carolyn make the difficult transformation back into the real world it is hard not to sympathize and even identify with the sheer terror of that change.

If "Jon" can be understood as a metaphor for fortress America, protected from the "reeks and wrecks" of the working classes of the third world, "Brad Carrigan, American" is even more explicit in its condemnation of the absolute apathy that wealth and consumer culture breeds. In this story, Saunders explores the thoughts and emotions of a real life sit-com character. On the surface Brad Carrigan seems like a normal American man, with a beautiful wife, an incorrigible trickster of a dog (actually a sock puppet), and a Native American neighbor who likes buttered toast. But Carrigan, like all of us, it turns out is haunted by fears of being "cancelled" – in Saunders' world this means being placed in the grey featureless back of a van until you slowly disappear into the void – and it doesn't take long before Saunders characteristic dark humor begins to infect Carrigan's world. In an absurdist plotline that recalls the best of Samuel Beckett's work for the stage, Carrigan's life slowly begins to collapse around him. As the Carrigans and Chief Wayne sit around watching other television shows, "previously they had never watched other shows on their show," says Carrigan, the back yard morphs into "a vast field of charred human remains."

"We're Belstonians," says one of the corpses, lying on its back, hands held out defensively, as if it died fending off a series of blows. "Our nation is comprised of three main socioethnic groups: the religious Arszani of the north, who live in small traditional agrarian communities in the mountainous northern regions; the more secular, worldly Arszani of the south, who mix freely with their Tazdit

neighbors; and the Tazdit themselves, who, though superior to the southern Arszani in numbers, have always lagged behind economically..."

The corpse's story goes on for another two paragraphs before Brad replies "Wow," "That's so complicated." "It might seem complicated, if the person trying to understand it had lived in total plenty all his life, ignoring the rest of the world," says the corpse missing an arm, as a butterfly flits from his chest wound to his head wound. Even in the face of the most gruesome and bleak landscapes, in Saunders there is almost always this butterfly, always some small if insufficient source of hope or comfort. Although Brad is indeed far too domesticated and comfortable to understand the byzantine nature of conflicts in places like Serbia, Darfur or the Congo, Brad's humanity, despite being a fictional character, is challenged and changed by his encounter with these corpses, which, for the rest of the story he tries to protect from the stinging rain and (don't ask) feral pigs that are trying to eat them. Although the story is an obvious critique of the ignorance and apathy of the average American, it still offers a surprisingly sympathetic view of Brad, who says finally, desperately "I just want to do something."

There's so much suffering. We have so much and others have so little. So I was just thinking that, you know, if we took a tiny portion of what we have, which we don't really need, and sent it to the people who need it...

Naive, yes; but Saunders is tapping into a deep-seated anxiety here implicitly at the heart of every zombie film ever made. How can we live our lives, our little peaceful suburban lives, when the dead refuse to remain in the ground?

Again, Saunders genius lies not in any original or deep intellectual engagement with these problems, but rather in the way that he captures, ironically, humorously, absurdly, the emotional resonances of our age, our futility, and our deepest despairs. ■

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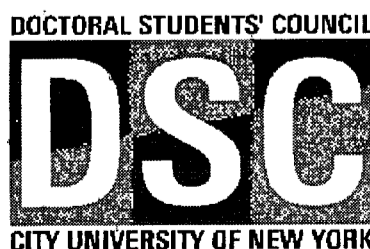
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Stuff You Can Sing: Radiohead Comes Home

MARK SCHIEBE

I was perplexed by the early response from some Radiohead fans that the group's seventh album, *In Rainbows*, released on CD in the U.S. on January 1st, represented a return to an earlier style, a relief from the relentless experimentalism and introspection of the trio of albums that began with *Kid A*. But then I got to thinking about it and remembered that when anything really new sounding comes along it is comforting to fall back on old assumptions. There is a story that goes something like this:

Once upon a time there was a great rock band and after they produced a rock masterpiece that everyone could agree was great (*OK Computer*), they quit playing rock music and their fans divided between those who thought they were on the cutting edge of something new (where they belonged) and those who thought they just stopped writing good songs. For those in the second camp, *In Rainbows* is a welcome return to "hummable stuff." The band had to deal with a lot of fame and accolades and went through a phase that we were supposed to dig and find "compelling" but it was really just boring. Now they've returned to what made them great.

There are two problems with this story (parodic oversimplification aside). One is that the new album continues the band's experimentation with the world of electronica: with new fusions of electronic and acoustic sounds, with loops, synthetic beats, ambient effects produced by different tape speeds, new combinations of noise and song. Basically, they pick up where they left off with 2003's *Hail to the Thief*. The second problem is that the "prettier" and more pop-sounding stuff on this album doesn't really sound like the "pretty" stuff they did in the 90's, when they were forging the unique, guitar-driven rock of *The Bends* and *OK Computer*. Instead, *In Rainbows* follows in the wake of its electronica-inspired predecessors and at the same time it is a step to the side, moving into pop territory the band had previously shied away from.

"15 Steps," the title of the album's first track, refers both to its uneven meter (the rhythmic units at the song's opening are divided into three "fives") and vocalist Thom Yorke's ominous line "15 steps then a sheer drop," a warning which doesn't seem to refer to anything specific. The guitar sound most prominently featured on the album, lightly overdriven and

music REVIEW

• *In Rainbows* by Radiohead (self-released)

very present in the mix, enters after an opening minute of the drums'n'bassish "15" and Yorke's vocals. The arpeggiated guitar riff and electronic snare sound give way to organ and a new darting bass line about halfway through. Soft crackle morphs into warm glow as the organ hangs ghost-like over the music. The track, like much of the album, is deceptively layered, yet somehow gives off a minimalist vibe despite the array of synthetic sounds buzzing around and through the vocal melody, from primi-



Radiohead circa *Hail to the Thief* (2003).
From left: Ed, Jonny, Thom, Phil and Colin

tive video game "blasters" to light-speed dashes through channels of dead air.

"Bodysnatchers" is typical of how the band uses the studio to create new fusions of conventional rock formulas and electronic soundscapes. The song's opening riff features a propulsive, off-kilter rhythm, but the instrument it is initially played on is distorted beyond the point of recognition. If it is a guitar, the "attack" of the notes (the initial sound made by the pick hitting the strings) has been mixed out and something like a blob comes at us. Beginning with *Kid A*, the band has really experimented with the "edges" of their sound, infinitely varying their levels of attack. The sound of "Bodysnatchers" is

uncompromisingly synthetic: something like being hit with a pillow of metal. Perhaps this is reflected in Yorke's lines "You killed the sound/ Removed backbone/ A pale imitation/ With the edges sawn off." "Bodysnatchers," like many other of the band's songs, is vertigo-inducing: sounds seem to come at us backwards as well as forwards. This is nothing new as Radiohead has practiced mixing in reverse tracks at least since "Everything in its Right Place" (*Kid A*) and *Amnesiac*'s "Like Spinning Plates" is a version of the earlier "I Will" played backwards.

The third cut on the album, the haunted ballad "Nude," features Yorke's characteristic aching and tender vocals, as he revisits the anti-utopian strain of earlier works like "2+2=5" (*Hail to the Thief*) in the lines "Don't get any big ideas/ They're not going to happen" and comments on the "white noise" of our media-driven cultural excesses: "You paint yourself white/ And fill up with noise/ But there'll be something missing." One thinks of the pleading cry "Hey man slow down/ Idiot slow down" from "The Tourist" (*OK Computer*) and the ecstatic chant "Here I'm allowed/ Everything all the time" from the "Idioteque" (*Kid A*). In the song's final verse, Yorke adds "You'll go to hell for what your dirty mind is thinking" setting up a pattern of sexual imagery to be followed up later in "House of Cards" and "All I Need."

"All I Need" is a striking departure from anything the band has done, as the music and words combine to evoke a menacing mood reminiscent of Trent Reznor. After airily opening with what sounds like a mixture of strings and an electronic chorus, the slow groove is established by a synthetic bass over acoustic drums. Yorke half whispers, half growls "I am all the days that you choose to ignore/ You are all I need/ You are all I need/ I'm in the middle of your picture/ Lying in the reeds." The song eventually fades into oblivion when a piano sustain pedal and a cymbal sound combine to wash over everything and drown out Yorke's receding plea "It's all wrong/ It's all right." Despite this, the stripped-down sound of the band (comprising the majority of the song) and pent-up energy of the vocals may well represent the beginnings of a new direction for them. For this listener, "All I Need" is a special track on the album, and represents an avenue Yorke and his mates would do well to continue to explore.

If *In Rainbows* is indeed more "hummable" than its immediate predecessors, it isn't because Radiohead is "returning to their roots." It is because the vocals of the front man, the band's greatest strength, are nudged closer to the center of the mix again. It is probably also a sign that the band's listeners, even those who favor the early work, have had their ears trained and stretched by the later work. One thing is for sure, the melodic and sonic experiments, continue to evolve unabated, which is a good thing. ■

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New Tricks from an Old Dog

FRANK EPISALE

The opening night of a Richard Foreman performance is a highly anticipated event in certain circles. The cramped seating area of the Ontological-Hysteric theatre in St. Mark's Church is dominated by downtown theatre luminaries and those who hope to someday join their ranks. Before the show begins, directors, producers, and actors seek each other out in order to compliment one another on shows they saw at last year's Fringe Festival, whether in Edinburgh or New York. There's genuine recognition and politely disingenuous recognition as phone numbers are exchanged and cheeks are kissed. All of this occurs under the watchful eye of Foreman himself, the 70-year-old patriarch of New York's avant-garde theatre scene, who stands near the entrance to the theatre surveying his audience and watching the clock, clearly anxious to start on time.

Foreman's most recent creation, a hybrid theatre-video piece called *Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland*, was no exception. As the lights dimmed, just a couple of minutes past the advertised 8pm starting time, the audience hushed in anticipation. For the first several minutes of the performance came the signature Foreman audience response: knowing smiles and uncomfortable giggles coupled with furrowed brows; few attendees at Foreman's shows pretend to "understand" the work, with its densely layered philosophical references and its aversion to both narrative and character. Still, there is generally something *fun* about the experience. Tonight, though, the laughter died down fairly quickly, the furrowed brows accompanied more by shuffling feet than knowing smiles. Foreman was up to something different this time, and not everyone was sure they liked it.

In a recent interview posted on his theatre company's blog, Richard Foreman said:

It's true that I've always disliked the theatre, at least for the last 30 years, and I work in the theatre in order to work out other certain problems that are for me of a more philosophical, spiritual nature. That's what concerns me, not making a good play. Now obviously you have your ego, so you want to make a good play to the extent that people like it, that you get good reviews, but that is less important to me now finally. I mean I suffered from being vain and being anxious about wanting to be a success and wanting to be accepted, but then you reach a certain point, you know, everybody feels they're not accepted sufficiently, or appreciated.

I think I have overcome that more than I ever have in the past, maybe not completely and I just want to be in an arena that I build for myself where I can work on certain problems and I resent, and I have for a number of years now, having to open these plays and subject myself to audiences, critics, what have you...

This paragraph, and others similar to it, shed a great deal of light on Foreman's current work. Having said repeatedly in recent years that he is no longer interested in writing "plays," Foreman has subtitled his new work "A Richard Foreman Machine," rejecting not just narrative and character (as he has in the past) but the medium of theatre altogether. Not only has he attempted to remove the word and concept "play" (as in dramatic text meant for performance) from descriptions of his texts but, with *Deep Trance* he has removed almost all sense of "play" (as in jest, fun, sport) from the performance itself.

His resentment of "audiences, critics," and the like is also on full display in *Deep Trance*, which repeatedly draws attention to the likelihood that the audience very likely has no idea how to engage with what they are seeing. My guest on opening night complained that he felt Foreman hates his audience and was treating them with scorn, making

theater REVIEW

♦ *Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland*. Written, directed, and designed by Richard Foreman.

them uncomfortable not in order to challenge them to engage the material in unconventional ways but simply to punish them for being there at all. While I didn't agree with this assessment, I did sympathize with the frustration behind it and it brought to mind another passage from the aforementioned interview.

Asked to clarify concerns he has raised in the past about his plays "not being as boring as [he] morally feels they should be," he responded by again revealing his antipathy towards most of his audience: "[Y]ou have people sitting out there and you don't want them to fidget, even though you know that most of them should if you were doing something really good because they wouldn't be interested in really high art."

Whether *Deep Trance in Potatoland* is "high art" is an open question, of course, but it does seem that Foreman has largely conquered his need to keep his audience from fidgeting; by the end of the 62 minute performance, I had been (accidentally, I hope) kicked in the back a number of times and there were few in the sold-out house who didn't seem to want to stretch their legs.

The set incorporates some of the usual Foreman touches: a funhouse use of distorted perspective, strings stretched above the stage and dividing the space into an enigmatic sort of longitudinal system, etc. As with more recent pieces, the back wall is dominated by two large video screens which, like the rest of the set, are slightly askew.

Projected onto the screen are moving tableaux filmed in Japan and England of inscrutable performers who sometimes intone fragments of philosophy and tell jokes without punch lines. At other times, the soundtrack of the show is a densely layered collage of Foreman's famously sepulchral voice-overs, fragments of music ranging from Romantic to Industrial, and bits of text in English, German, French, and Hebrew (but none in Japanese.) The voice-over describes those on screen as "Japanese people of all ages who understand" and "young English people who understand," as if to remind those in the audience that we, by contrast, don't get it at all.

Five live performers, four women and a man, perform precise and strange, if mostly prosaic, choreography with little apparent psychological motivation. They may or may not be vampires. They place pills carefully on their tongues. They explore the set and occasionally confront the video, sometimes recoiling in horror from something an on-screen performer says, sometimes trying to enter that other world, and sometimes going about their business as if they were unaware of the images upstage. The lights shift intensity and focus, sometimes drawing attention to the video screen, sometimes to the stage, and sometimes shining directly into the

faces of the audience, drawing attention to the three distinct layers of Foreman's deep trance.

References abound to classical philosophy, to numerology, to Jewish mysticism, to Deleuze and Guattari, and to Foreman's earlier work. "Potatoland" has been part of Foreman's geography since at least 1975's *Rhoda in Potatoland*, which also included the line "Only being a tourist can one experience a place," which is repeated several times in the new piece. All of this intertextuality lends the work a density and an opacity that can be extremely frustrating; in earlier pieces, the frustration was often mitigated by the leavening humor of absurdity, but those moments are few and far between in *Deep Trance*.

Two major questions arise from all of this, and not necessarily the questions Foreman is hoping to raise. If Foreman resents having to present his work for an audience, and if he is more interested in his ideas than in theatre, why does he continue to produce theatre at all? And if the audience is going to feel antagonized and frustrated through much of the evening, why do they continue, as so many of us do, to make their enthusiastic pilgrimage to St. Mark's Church year after year?

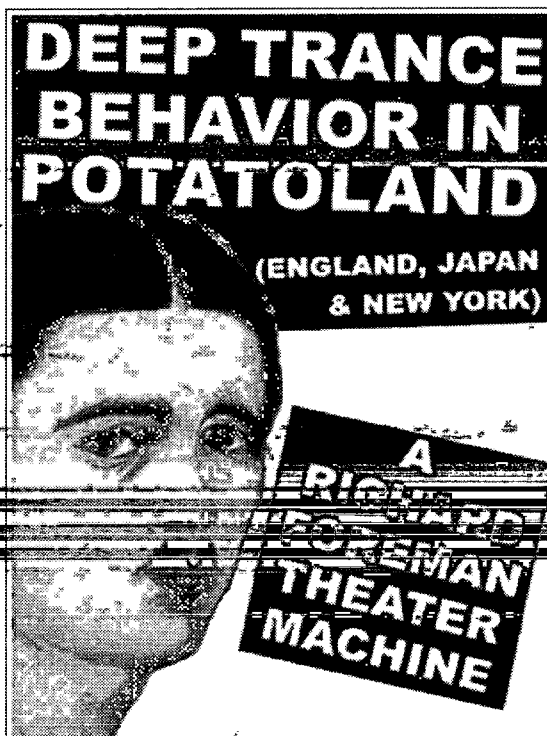
The answer to the first question seems to be that Foreman *needs* the audience, whether he resents them or not. He needs them not only to fund his work (both directly and by continuing to attract grants) but in order to complete the image he is building. The lights need to foreground the audience from time to time. Messages to the audience need to occasionally appear on the screen. Perception is part of the process Foreman is exploring, and the audience represents that aspect of his ontology.

Foreman's shows can indeed be frustrating, and there are an awful lot of ways to spend your \$25 or so. And yet, even in *Deep Trance in Potatoland*, surely one

of his more difficult works, there is a reward to be had in giving yourself over to the experience at hand. When Foreman's voice declares that "no relationship exists between what happens on stage and what is happening on the illuminated screen" he is encouraging you to stop trying to figure it out and just let the images wash over you. He continues, "Except - click - and now a profound relationship does exist. It's that simple."

In a program note, Foreman explains (or tries to) that he is trying to create "theater dissolving itself in the 'acid-bath' of film, hopefully revealing beneath, the skeleton-support of consciousness itself." Foreman is not trying to depict consciousness, but to reveal it. Perhaps the "deep trance" he seeks is not something he is trying to represent but something he is trying to evoke, in both himself and in his audience. Enlightenment, I suspect, is a quixotic quest, but it is a quest to which Foreman has devoted the past 40 years of his career. As long as he keeps staging explorations in his "Ontological-Hysteric laboratory of the mind," I'll keep checking in on him, once every year or so, to see what he's come up with and to wonder what I might be missing. ■

Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland. Written, directed, and designed by Richard Foreman. With Joel Israel, Caitlin McDonough-Thayer, Fulya Peker, Caitlin Rucker and Sarah Dahlen. Ontological-Hysteric Theater at St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th Street, East Village; Through April 13. Running time: 62 minutes. General admission: \$25; Student tickets \$20. Available at www.ontological.com or by calling 212-420-1916.



Days of Blood and Oil

NICOLE WALLENBROCK

The prophecy *There Will Be Blood* is announced against a black drop as the first frame of the eponymous feature: the letters, which recall the white, spindly Gothic script of a hymnal and their appearance in the cinema, underscore the film's central struggle between religion and capitalism. Indeed, it is the mutual dependence of the twin themes that control the life of oil tycoon Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) and all those whom he dominates. Simple dichotomies, such as the black and white of this title frame, become a complex web between the two principal characters in an epic of power; black quickly comes to signify oil and its commander's smothering properties, while white implies the affected prophetic gesture in the pioneer hymnal of Eli (Paul Dano), a nascent Evangelical minister, and Daniel's arch-nemesis. The ominous title, Peter's prophesy of humanity's gory finale, is a Biblical quotation from Acts, and its implications of fear and fate apply to the spectator's viewing experience as well. Anticipation of murder, constantly augmented by dissonant rising chords and Day-Lewis's driven face reddened by firelight, propel the spectator into the most original cinematic depiction of the American West to date. In the new Western, cowboys and Indians are replaced by the greed of capitalism and the Evangelical Christian church. One might question director Paul Thomas Anderson's political motivations, (the film premieres as the United States struggles in a war many claim is based on oil and religion.) Though the film



• *There Will Be Blood*, directed by Paul Thomas Anderson

Though their first film together proved the fierceness of their chemistry, in *There Will Be Blood* the potential of method acting antagonism is reached. Although Day-Lewis's mastery of greed and distance could carry the audience for the film's 2 ½ hours, it is the chime of Dano's whining pleas and the tumble of his weak limbs that push Day-Lewis's characterization of misanthropy into drive.

The grandeur of the epic grasps the spectator in the first 15 minutes of the film, which are completely free of dialogue: amid high pitches and rattling, we witness a lone miner dive deep into his hole to discover the Midas touch. Soon his tiny gold mine becomes a well and Plainview gains associates to haul buckets of grease into a black pond. Eventually the oil well machinery litters the dusty golden landscape, absorbing the pool and leaving Plainview a rich man who has never lost the perseverance of his desperate, gold-digging past. The sequence ends as an oil well motions against the hills and a setting sun shines in front of Plainview; though still covered in the day's spoils, he now coos an orphaned baby on his knees, demonstrating the need for affection at the core of his stoic gaze, a need that can only

tion. The script makes no hints at a love interest in Daniel's past or present, and thus while demonstrating his contempt for people, the script is equally uncompromising.

Though there are countless overt references to the Bible in the dialogue, the over-riding Biblical theme is again a pairing, that of Cain and Abel, represented often by dark and light. Visual allusions abound in the dripping black with which Daniel's founding son H. W. is baptized and again as Daniel's oil-covered face gleams in the firelight during the sick ecstasy of an oil burst. The hypocrisy of Eli is apparent early in the film; his dream of a powerful ministry allows him to accept the oil-thirsty Daniel's bargaining price for his family's land in exchange for a small bonus he in fact never receives. Sky blue and heavenly clouds are reflected in a broad puddle of oil when Eli walks by, symbolizing his hopes to turn oil money into his own godly enterprise. In the shadows of his covered church the young minister wrestles a devil made of air, and then runs gloriously into the sun's rays to release Satan to the breeze. The simplicity of the Cain and Abel story or the dark/light metaphor is misleading in a film with such superb detail. The characters develop gradually and significantly with each scene so that each glance and gesture is rich with meaning, as is the meticulous framing which often profiles Eli and Daniel as they debate and demand.

The sheen of oil, running and spurting like blood, is magically enhanced by an expert sound design, leaving the empty landscape a wondrous audio retreat. The clanking of oil rigs and the roar of fire is exquisitely highlighted by the score composed by Johnny Greenwood of Radiohead. The spacious haunting sounds of Arvo Part infiltrate one scene; it is in this tradition of music that Greenwood composes the disturbing score so reliant on silence. An escalating chord quickens your pulse, and an eerie dialogue of strings mimics the pastor and the oilman's verbal duels.

In the last scene of *There Will Be Blood*, the evil root within Daniel, which has grown stronger through fortune's soothing decadence and the fraudulent hysterics of Eli's ministry, meet for a much anticipated showdown. The finale relieves the spectator of the title's prediction, but more importantly completes a circle within the film's narrative to reach a pinnacle of comic irony. The scene takes place 20 years after Eli and Daniel first meet and reveals how the rivals' antagonism has developed through the Roaring Twenties; Eli has become a radio preacher and speaks with an affected theatric confidence, while Daniel, an alcoholic in a mansion, is even more alone after rejecting his son. Now, he drools hate in his lonely but expensive pit of despair. The mounting tension between the actors is never more biting as in this final duel, and the paradox and power of money never more translucent. All of the film has thus far taken place outdoors or in dim houses, thus the last scene appears in stark contrast, lit brightly in Plainview's basement bowling alley, waxed lanes shining as a stage for Eli's exaggerated performance and Plainview's sardonic tricks.

At last, Greenwood's cryptic score is completely abandoned to give way to the major chords and a dancing rhythm of Haydn. Although the title card appears again shortly after the fruition of its prediction of blood, the music of Haydn, places the crime of murder and the greed of oil in a playful context, signaling not only the victory of Daniel Plainview, but the triumph of irony over violence. ■



can be understood in allegorical terms, it is truly character-driven, showcasing remarkable performances that are only made more effective by the photography of glistening oil and fire and the eeriness of a doom-inflected score.

Daniel Day-Lewis delivers what many claim is the performance of his career. Yet his performance of nihilism would be incomplete without the tension produced by the preacher Eli Sunday. Perhaps Paul Dano won the part of Eli because he so convincingly played a similar role of a Bible-thumping teen in *The King*. However, here it is the tension between the actors that empowers their dialogue and the physicality of their gestures towards and against one another that make the conflict so compelling. Although Dano was cast as Eli only four days prior to shooting, the decision was anything but haphazard. Day-Lewis and Dano previously played adversaries in the 2005 film, *The Ballad of Jack and Rose*, in which Day-Lewis as the father of Rose is enraged by Dano's sexual advances towards his daughter.

be satisfied from a creature as non-threatening and ignorant as child.

After gallantly saving a lady in near nudity in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Daniel Day-Lewis reached sex symbol status. However, the limping bearded Day-Lewis of *There Will Be Blood* is less appealing than Hawkeye, and furthermore does not so much as speak to a woman. In fact, there are no speaking female roles in the script. Perhaps this is justified by the narrative's loyalty to Sinclair's novel, but nonetheless, the absence of women in *There Will Be Blood* appears as a transgressive act against mainstream cinema, as any possibility of the typical movie's compulsory sex scene is negated. However rebellious this lack of romance, it is also key to the characterization of Daniel Plainview as a man who dispels contact with others. Therefore, the frequent hugs and pats Daniel awards children, (his son H. W. and Mary, a young girl who is Eli's sister) feel heavy and over burdened by the awkwardness of a man who has no other outlet for physical affec-

NEWS FROM THE *doctoral students' council*

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

We've taken a moment to consider the accomplishments of the last semester as we contemplate new ways to improve student life at the Graduate Center. The DSC has revamped its website, creating a more streamlined resource for students. We've responded to the Master Plan under consideration. We've worked with Student Affairs to resolve the Wellness Center crisis, and implemented stopgap services. We've devised a white paper in strong opposition to Microsoft's proposed acquisition of our email services, and we will continue to work to ensure that a fair email system is created for graduate students. We've sold 356 movie tickets, held two wildly successful parties, one caffeinated coffee hour, achieved quorum at every meeting while maintaining membership at over 80% of possible seats filled with certified members.

Looking to this semester: there will be a May issue of the *GC Advocate*, making a grand total of four issues this semester, and seven issues in the 2007-8 academic year. There will be online nominating and voting for

DSC elections, reducing costs and (hopefully) reaching more students for inclusion in student government. There will be more parties, coffee, and advocacy for student issues by your DSC.

Go to www.cunydisc.org/email to read the history of the Microsoft situation, see our White Paper, sign our petition, and keep abreast of ongoing developments.

Keep looking out for ways the DSC is serving you: check the DSC news in the *GC Advocate*. Check out our website, www.cunydisc.org. Attend our meetings and events, which are advertised in the *Advocate* and on our website.

And if there's more we can do – if there's more you want to do – talk to us. Drop by room 5495. Call x7888. Email dsc.steering.committee@gmail.com. Come to a meeting (see dates/times below). Talk to your rep – or fill an opening in your department and become a rep.

DSC CALENDAR

The DSC has the following meetings scheduled. Guests are always welcome.

Plenary Meetings (all plenary meetings are held in room GC 5414)

- ♦ Feb. 15, 6:00 p.m.
- ♦ March 14, 6:00 p.m.
- ♦ April 11, 6:00 p.m.
- ♦ May 9, 5:00 p.m. (2007-8 reps)
- ♦ May 9, 6:00 p.m. (2008-9 reps)

Steering Committee Meetings (all SC meetings are held in room GC 5489 except as noted)

- ♦ Feb. 1, 6:00 p.m.
- ♦ Feb. 29, 6:00 p.m.
- ♦ April 4, 5:00 p.m.
- ♦ May 16, 6:00 p.m., room 5409 (2005-6 and 2006-7 Steering Committee members)

Media Board Meeting

March 7, 6:00 p.m., room 5489

Spring DSC Party

March 14, 8:30 p.m., room 5414

STEERING COMMITTEE OFFICE HOURS

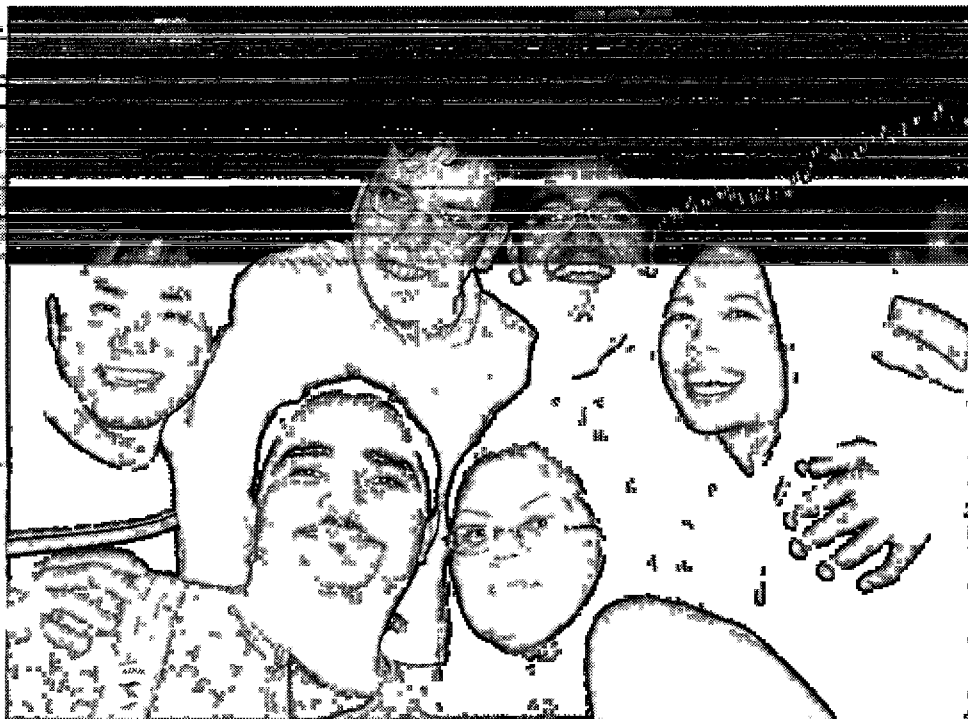
Come visit us for all your student government needs. Buy discounted movie tickets, make a room reservation, pick up forms and/or flyers, or just chew the fat about grad student life.

1. Rob Faunce (Co-Chair for Communications), Fridays, 12:00-5:00, room 5491.
2. Denise Torres (Co-Chair for Business), Fridays 1-6pm and by appt., room 5499.
3. Allyson Foster (USS Rep), Wednesdays 3-6pm, room 5494.
4. Alissa Ackerman, Mondays, 12-3pm, room 5495.
5. Nancy Medina, Tuesdays, 8-11am, room 5495.
6. Brenda Vollman, Fridays, 2:30-5:30pm, room 5495.
7. Danielle Wu, Wednesdays 8-11am, room 5495.

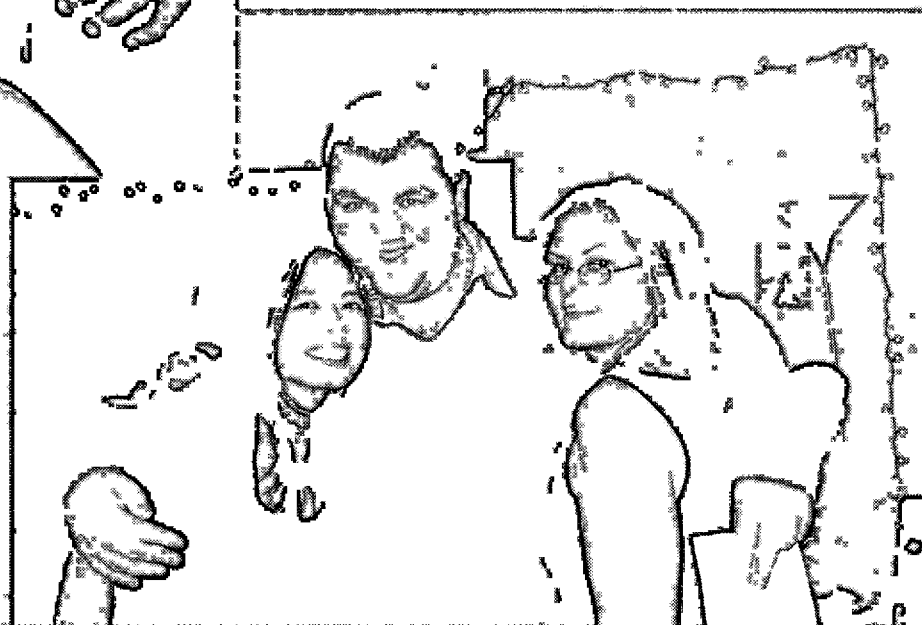
At press time, Gregory Donovan (Co-Chair for Student Affairs), room 5493, Adele Kudish, room 5495, and Anton Masterovoy, room 5495 have yet to determine their office hours. You'll be able to find that information, and so much more, by visiting us on the web at <http://cunydisc.org>.

You can also reach us on the phone at (212)817-7888, via e-mail at dsc.steering.committee@gmail.com, or in person at room 5495 of the GC.

Ye Olde Holiday Merrimente



DSC members and GC students frolic at the DSC Holiday Party in December!



Special Black History Month Edition

R Kelly's Ancestor Once Owned by President Kelly's

MATT LAU

R Kelly, the R&B singer and recording artist, is descended from a slave owned by relatives of Graduate Center President and erstwhile calendar model William Kelly.

"It was probably the most shocking event of my life," said R Kelly. "And that's a life that includes not loving a number of 'ho's, to say nothing of the time that midget was trapped in my closet."

Indeed, many R Kelly fans mistook the shocking revelations for a leak about the much anticipated new chapters of *Trapped in the Closet*, Kelly's critically acclaimed, ongoing hip-opera. "This is definitely one of the most unlikely twists yet," was the comment from Black

black, but she's an old white guy." But the most discerning of them all read simply, "WTF?"

While the frenzied "remix" of speculation and prediction continued on the internet, officials at The Graduate Center took a more openly enthusiastic tone with reporters. "He's in a mighty good family," said one university official. "And we mean not only the President's of course, but also CUNY's."

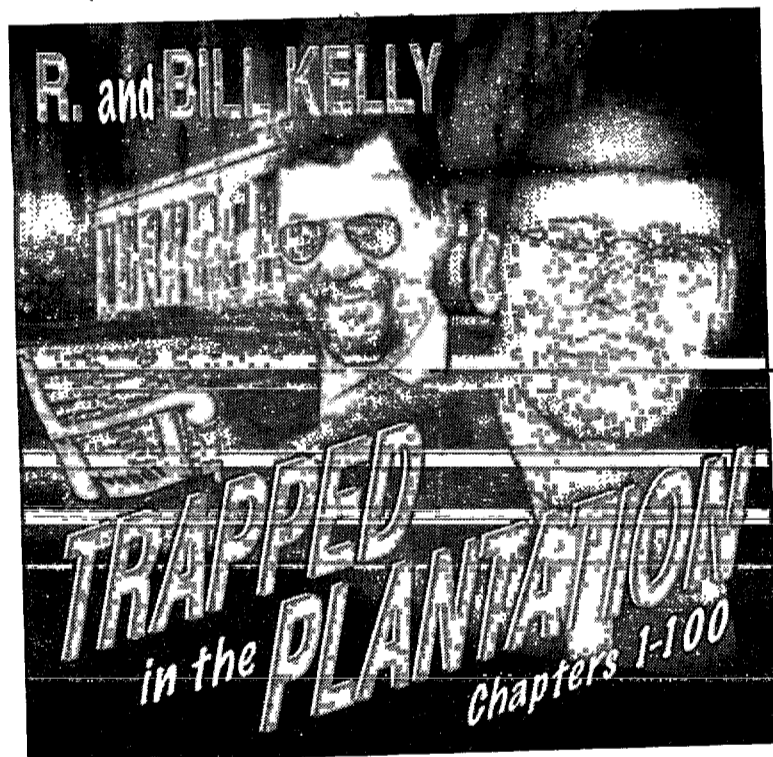
The President's office issued a statement confirming that President Kelly and "The Playa from the Chi" had spoken briefly after hearing the news. "President Kelly is both saddened and honored by the news. He is saddened to be reminded of his family's role in America's dark...I

mean troubling...past, but he's also honored to roll up to the club on '28s' with R Kelly sometime soon."

The artist's agent insisted that the conversation had been entirely cordial despite his client's warnings to the President. "These statements have been taken way out of context," he said. "Sure Robert warned President Kelly not to bring his 'ho's to the club because my client will probably end up sleeping with them. But Robert does this with everyone he meets. It's really the only decent thing."

Towards the end of what was obviously a long day for them, a representative at the President's office responded, "Look, things are happening quickly around here. Yes, we are in discussions about incorporating the President into the 'opera,' or whatever. Yes, that would probably mean, as with chapter 5, re-shooting bits from a few previous episodes for the sake of continuity. And for the last time, No! The President does not have any 'ho's, at least not anymore, so that is a moot point as far as we're concerned."

There was even serious talk, late in the day, of R Kelly receiving some kind of honorary doctorate from the Grad Center, that or President Kelly's first born as a sacrifice. In exchange, one lucky GC film student will get to hold the boom microphone on the set of *Trapped*. ■



Bill and R. Kelly soon decided to collaborate on an album and DVD series that explore their shared cultural heritage.

Entertainment Television's gossip blog as the news emerged from press conferences yesterday.

BET subsequently retracted and corrected its original statements, but it was too late, the initial misunderstanding spread like midget feces through the underwear of the internet, quickly and profoundly. "I figured they were all just going to die of AIDS and that would be the end. LOL!" read a typical comment on the You Tube wall for Chapter 22 of *Trapped*.

More than a few commentators tried to figure out which *Trapped* character Bill Kelly is. "Who 'dis B Kellz, son?" begins one discussion in a Facebook group devoted to praising the R&B saga. There were conflicting answers. "It's that corny Joey, son," read one response. Another suggests, "Nah, foolz, it's Gwen, she looks



Dear Harriet,

I went out last week with this self-avowed feminist I met online and she let me pick up the check for both dinner and drinks afterwards. What's going on? I thought feminists were supposed to be liberated or something. I mean, she could have at least picked up the drinks, don't you think? She said she was poor, but I'm a freakin' grad student! Not to mention when I asked her out again, she didn't get back to me for a full week. What am I doing wrong? Help!

- Lonely and Broke

Actually, LAB, you've hit on something that many of us self-avowed feminists have been kind of keeping under our hats, if we wore any. Since you've already uncovered part of the secret I'll show you the whole picture, but you have to make sure you don't spread it around, because it'll seriously gum up the works.

I want you to take this word *feminism* and hold it in your mind for a moment. Just set it down on any cerebral countertop for a moment (though, since you're a guy, I expect you'll probably have to get out a wet paper towel and wipe up the dried, sticky cerebral Foster's Lager you spilled on your cerebral countertop a week ago and forgot to clean up, so go ahead and do that first). Come with me now on a tour of other words that end in -ism and see if you can spot any trends.

- Conservatism = world run by conservatives
- Liberalism = world run by liberals
- Nazism = world run by Nazis
- Patriotism = world run by patriots
- Communism = world run by communes
- Stalinism = world run by Josef Stalin
- McCarthyism = world run by Charlie McCarthy
- Calvinism = world run by Bill Watterson

See where I'm going with this? And there's more:

- Infantilism = world run by infants
- Relativism = world run by relatives (whose, though?)
- Alcoholism = world run by alcohols (or possibly gasohols)
- Objectivism = world run by objects
- Social Darwinism = world run by social Darwins (all shy Darwins to be subjugated)
- Egotism = world run by egotes (virtual zygotes)
- Anthropomorphism = world run by shape-shifters
- Nominalism = world run by nouns
- Pantheism = world run by panthers

I think you're starting to get the idea. See, since the 1960s guys have bought into the idea that feminism has something to do with equality - things like income parity, shared expenses among couples, and so on. Guys are so clueless! You've been totally ignoring all the evidence around you. Just looking at the linguistic clues, it shouldn't take much brainpower to realize that feminism doesn't mean "let's share." It means, "Thanks for a zillion years of wiping your feet on us, guys, this is our world now."

Don't believe me? I'm not surprised. Your "self-avowed feminist" date actually demonstrated the concept for you, and you still didn't get it. Examine her behavior. She (a) let you pay, offering up a flimsy excuse that you bought anyway, then (c) ignored you and let you twist in the wind for a week while she got on with margin-adjusting her hedge funds or whatever it is she really does with her life. (If you're wondering about (b), well, if you were sponge-worthy, LAB, there woulda been a (b).) She spelled it all out for you. That's Standard Date Number 12A. Clearly, these are not the actions of an "equalist."

So. You asked for help, an explanation of what you were doing wrong. It's a tricky skill you need to master, but you can actually count dating a "self-avowed feminist" as a blessing. Many women are "feminists," but they won't tell you out loud: they silently proclaim their supremacy to you, and when you miss the signals, as always, you end up getting raked over coals you didn't even know had been specially prepared in the pre-heated furnace of feminine fury for you in the event of your only-too-likely failure to recognize.

We self-avowed feminists, however, are wearing t-shirts, buckles, badges, and placards all saying the same thing: treat us right, buster, or you're toast. When a woman goes out of her way to buy airtime to broadcast her slogans at you, all the way through to "I am a self-avowed feminist and I approve this message," it's all up to you, son. When election day comes at the end of the night, you better vote for her - if you want to dance at the inauguration. ■