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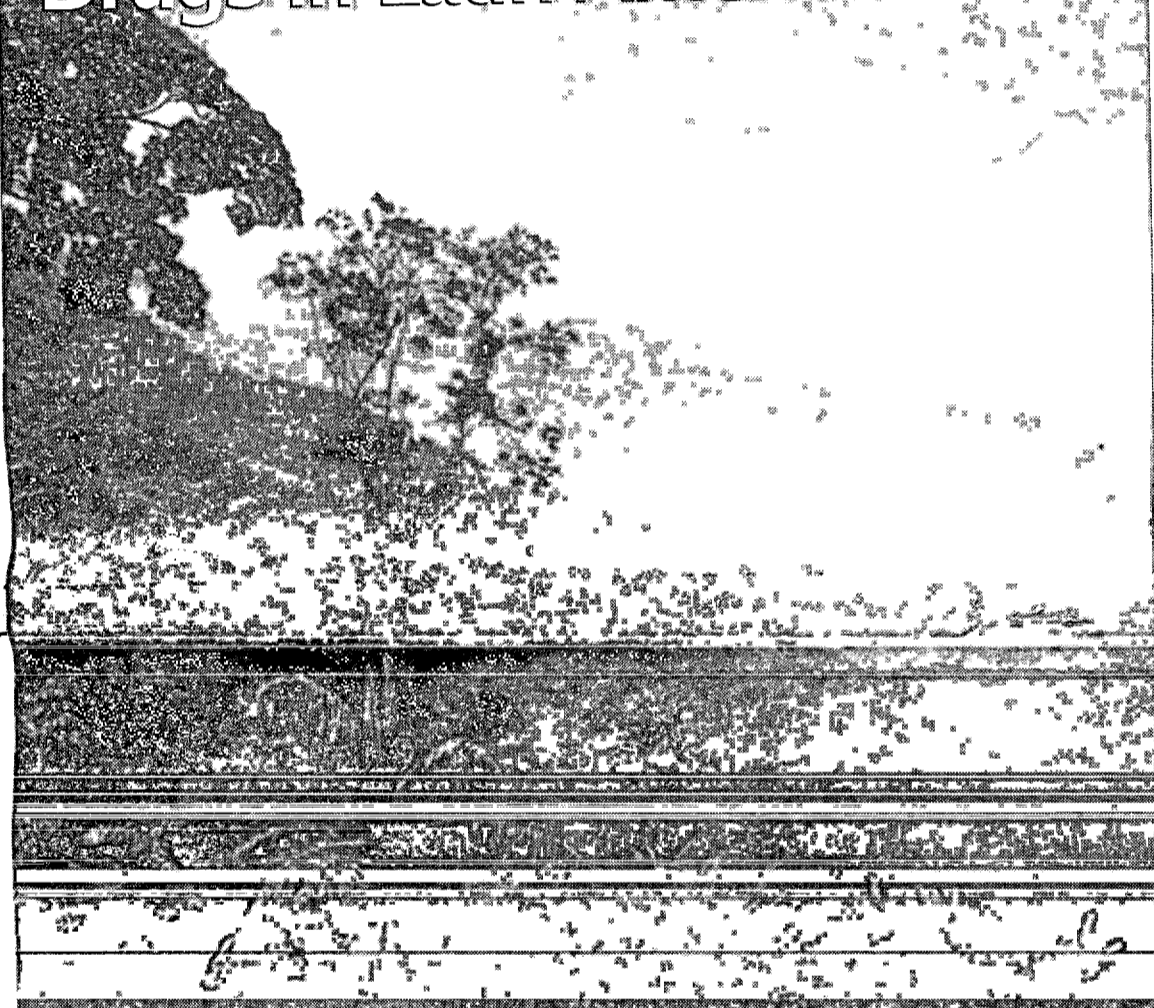
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Radiohead Comes Home
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Plan Colombia and the American War on Drugs in Latin America



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

MICHAEL BUSCH

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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.

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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."

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