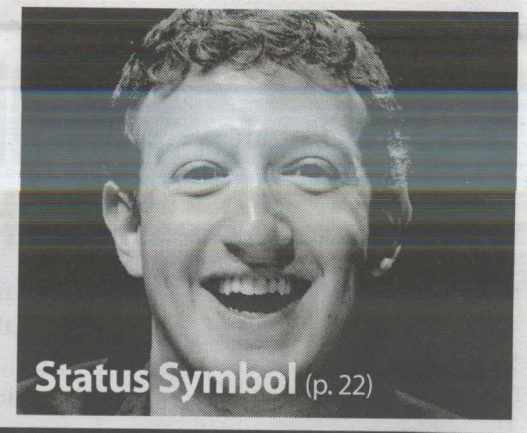
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

Advocate

November 2010 http://gcadvocate.com advocate@gc.cuny.edu



Status Symbol (p. 22)

Undocumented at CUNY

CUNY's Programs for Noncitizen Students: Haven or Empty Promise?

ALSO INSIDE

David Harvey on the Crises of Capitalism (p. 11)

Ros Petchesky Urges Faculty Support for Contingents (p. 9)

Size Matters: Big-Canvas Abstract Expressionism at MoMA (p. 16)

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
Advocate

November 2010

http://gcadvocate.com
advocate@gc.cuny.edu

CUNY Graduate Center
Room 5396
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016
(212) 817-7885

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
James Hoff

MANAGING EDITOR
Michael Busch

LAYOUT EDITOR
Mark Wilson

MEDIA BOARD CHAIR
Suzanne Tamang

CONTRIBUTORS
David Harvey
Geoff Johnson
Noelle Kocot
Matt Lau
Amanda Licastro
Michael Partis
Ros Petchesky
Jeremy Rafal
Conor Tomás Reed
Justin Rogers-Cooper
Victoria Romeo
Doug Singsen
Alyson K. Spurgas

PUBLICATION INFO
The *GC Advocate* is the student newspaper of the CUNY Graduate Center and is published six times a year. Publication is subsidized by Student Activities Fees and the Doctoral Students' Council.

SUBMISSIONS
The GC Advocate accepts contributions of articles, illustrations, photos and letters to the editor. Please send queries to the email address above.

Articles selected for publication will be subjected to editorial revision. Writers who contribute articles of 1,000 words will be paid $50 and those who submit longer articles requiring research will receive $75. We also pay for photographs and artwork.

The GC Advocate is published six times a year, in September, October, November, February, March, and April. Submissions should be sent in by the middle of the month. Print copies will normally be on the stacks around the end of the month.

FROM THE editor's desk

Divided But Not Yet Conquered

Why the PSC's Political Strategy is Hurting CUNY

Anyone who reads the *GC Advocate* is likely familiar with the plight of CUNY adjuncts. Like other universities and colleges across the country, CUNY adjuncts are paid a small fraction of the wages that their tenured and tenure-track colleagues receive for much of the same work; are frequently fired, rehired, and then fired again from semester to semester; receive few or none of the vital benefits that their full-time colleagues receive; are often forced to share crowded offices with no room to meet with students and little or no access to computers or printers; and, even though they teach a great majority of CUNY classes, adjuncts are regarded by some full-time faculty as second class citizens, fly by night workers who don't really care about their institutions, or worse, ignorant scabs who undermine the integrity of academia. Despite these demoralizing circumstances and the utter lack of respect accorded most of these workers by the faculty and administration, adjuncts at CUNY and elsewhere across the country have been courageously rising up, forming or joining unions, staging protests, drafting and proposing legislation, and in the words of the March 4 Coalition to Defend Public Education, demanding the impossible.

At CUNY this struggle has taken the shape of a powerful grassroots rank-and-file movement within the Professional Staff Congress: the union which represents both adjunct and tenured and tenure-track (TATT) faculty, as well as higher education officers and other workers at CUNY. Undaunted by the economic climate of austerity in New York State, these rank and file members have been pushing for a series of core demands that would fundamentally address and begin to dismantle the two tier-labor system at CUNY. These demands include: minimum three-year contracts of employment for adjuncts and other contingents, wage increases of $30 per credit hour, step raises every year (currently adjuncts only receive steps every three years), and comprehensive employer-paid health insurance for all contingent employees. These demands, which have the endorsement of over 1,200 faculty and staff members at CUNY, are ambitious, but if realized would fundamentally transform the university, making it a more equitable and collegiate institution, while dramatically improving the quality of teaching and learning that takes place at its more than eighteen campuses across the city.

Despite this powerful movement and the potential that it represents, the leadership of the PSC has failed to adequately embrace these demands and has shown little willingness to take the steps necessary to make them a reality. Instead, PSC leadership has proven, once again, that they don't care about actually transforming the university, but are more concerned with maintaining power through continuing to prioritize TATT faculty demands, while offering piecemeal improvements to the rest of the constituencies they represent. This ultimately self-defeating strategy was succinctly, if inadvertently, articulated in a recent editorial by the PSC President Barbara Bowen, published in the November edition of the PSC *Clarion* newspaper. There Bowen asserts that the PSC:

> "Has already named four overarching goals for this round of bargaining, all of which would provide a richer education for our students: 1) continuing improvement in salaries to allow CUNY to attract and keep top quality personnel; 2) more time for faculty to spend with individual students and for mid-career and senior faculty to produce meaningful research; 3) a path to advancement for those in the professional staff who have had no promotional ladder; and 4) real change in the unconscionable system of adjunct labor."

I am delighted to hear that President Bowen thinks the CUNY system of adjunct labor is unconscionable—indeed it is, and saying so is at least a step in the right direction—but what exactly does "real change" mean here, and haven't we heard this phrase somewhere before? If Bowen's rhetoric sounds a lot like Barack Obama's, it's no accident. The PSC leadership, like the Democratic Party, frequently invokes the language of "real change" to inspire the rank-and-file, but inevitably offers little more than temporary solutions to recurring problems intrinsic to the system. These "goals" that Bowen articulates may sound nice; indeed, the PSC leadership is well versed in the "spoonful of sugar" method of delivering bad news to its members. But we are never going to be able to "provide a richer education for our students" without addressing the fundamentally unequal structure of the CUNY labor system. It is clear from Bowen's editorial and all the union's proposed demands that the leadership's real priority here is not to transform the university, to create greater faculty equality, or better learning conditions for our students, but to continue to devote the greater part of their efforts (through wage increases and reduced course loads) to the needs of the TATT faculty, while appeasing the rest with small wage increases and minor improvements in working conditions.

The moral failing of this kind of piecemeal approach was made evident in the last bargaining agreement, where the leadership not only failed to address the huge gap in pay and benefits that still exists between TATT faculty, but instead helped negotiate a contract that actually increased that disparity. By creating a new paid-parental-leave benefit exclusively for full-timers, while simultaneously insisting upon across the board percentage wage increases, the last contract actually increased the disparity between the compensation an adjunct receives to teach a class and what a full-time or tenure-track faculty member receives. This is an unacceptable strategy for the future. How, as educators, can we call for equality for our students while treating our own colleagues unequally? And how can we talk about the injustices affecting our society when our own institutions are rife with unaddressed injustices?

Adjuncts have waited long enough. As demands for a new contract are being drafted, it is now more important than ever that TATT faculty put aside their differences and come together in unison with adjuncts and contingent faculty to prioritize dismantling the two-tier labor system that is destroying our university. As Distinguished Professor of Political Science Ros Petchesky noted in an open letter published in the *Hunter Union Voice*, (see the full letter on page 9) the increasing exploitation of adjunct faculty hurts all of us. "Every day," says Petchesky:

> "We teach and work in conditions that hyper-exploit over one-half of our colleagues, asking them to make the same commitment of intellectual energy, devotion to students, and professional rigor that we do, at a tiny fraction of the pay and without commensurate benefits, job security or respect. This is a form of peonage. It corrupts our work environment and compromises the very principles of morality and justice that public higher education is supposed to stand for; and it makes every one of us complicit in a foul, unjust system. It has to stop; *we* have to stop it."

As we prepare for the next contract struggle we must heed Professor Petchesky's words and stand together unified against the CUNY administration and the Democratic and Republican politicians in Albany who shamelessly cut our budgets and raise our students' tuition. It is also important, however, that we demonstrate to them and to ourselves, as well as other educators across the nation—whose eyes are always closely focused on events at CUNY—that we believe, as the PSC slogan goes, that "another kind of university is possible." As Professor Petchesky says "Unity between full-timers and part-timers in fighting for a fair contract will give our union unprecedented strength—of both numbers and moral and political clarity."

Achieving this unity, however, will not be easy and will require a real shift in the way each of us thinks about our relationship to our fellow union members and the institutions where we work and teach. The entire PSC must realize and accept the hard fact that any economic advances made at the bargaining table on behalf of full-timers must—in order to avoid any greater increase in inequality—be counterbalanced by significantly greater economic gains for adjuncts. In a climate of economic austerity this means that TATT faculty who support adjunct equality may very well feel as if they will have to settle for less in this next contract. If union members find this fact inconvenient and troubling, as no doubt many of them will, then it will be important in this instance that they see adjuncts as an ally and not an enemy. Instead of giving into the politics of austerity, and settling for a piecemeal contract, they will then be able to confidently come together with their part-time colleagues in a spirit of solidarity and renewed vigor to fight for a better university for all. Ⓐ

Contingents Vent as CUNY Augments

Adjuncts Exhibit Strength as PSC Bargains for New Contract

On Thursday, October 21, the CUNY Contingents Unite/Adjunct Project (CCU/AP) completed the first phase of its assault on the PSC Delegate Assembly's inattention to contingent labor demands. The CCU/AP delivered a petition with over eight hundred signatures to the DA, leafleted the delegates as they entered the assembly, and distributed "Petition Packets" to each of the DA's fifteen members—packets that included CCU/AP literature and a hard copy of the petition with all eight hundred signatures (as we go to press there are now more than 1,200 contingent and full time faculty members who have signed the petition).

The DA represented a major victory for CCU/AP. "We did a great job with this!" proclaimed Holly Clarke, a member of the CCU's Coordinating Committee. "We publicized our petition, showed strength, and gained allies in an important arena of struggle. Everyone's efforts in circulating the contract demands and getting signatures should be applauded! This has been—and still is—a truly united effort!"

But there is still plenty that needs doing. It's clear that the PSC has not accepted the CCU/AP's demands. In the coming days leading up to the November 4 DA vote on the bargaining proposal, CCU/AP pressure needs sustaining. Among other things, increasing the number of signatures on the petition will demonstrate through force of numbers just how many contingent employees there are paying attention and willing to take action in defense of their rights. Moreover, the petition is an important opportunity to attract full-time CUNY labor—tenured, tenure-track, and junior faculty members—to the cause. This copy of the *Advocate* reprints Distinguished Professor Ros Petchesky's moving call to arms to full-time employees to act on behalf of their part-time employees (the full letter is reprinted on page 9). Use it to recruit full-timers as you press for more signatures. Remember also that the petition can be accessed online at http://www.petitiononline.com/demands/petition.html. Let's sustain the momentum!

Perhaps more important still is the need for adjuncts and other contingent CUNY labor to show up to the November 4 DA meeting itself. Says Alyson Spurges, co-coordinator of the Adjunct Project and all-around superwoman, "It is crucial that we are present at 61 Broadway (PSC headquarters) that evening; our numbers and actions in that room will speak for us even if we are not given the chance to speak at the microphone…Even if you've never been involved with the Adjunct Project before—it is absolutely necessary that you come out to the DA meeting on Thursday November 4. We are working on how to present ourselves that evening—and are currently making t-shirts to wear, signs, and possibly buttons to show our solidarity as contingent workers."

Hanaa Khalil

CUNY Expands Colonial Reach to Outer Boroughs

In the wake of massive budgetary cuts to state and local public higher education budgets, CUNY has been forced to take drastic belt-tightening actions of its own. Hiring freezes, expanded enrollment, and reduced class offerings are just three methods by which public education institutions are being forced to atone for the sins of Albany's irresponsibility.

So it's heartwarming to know that CUNY central is not only making demands on the various colonial holdings in its vast, city-wide empire, but is itself taking measures to cope with the ongoing economic and financial crisis. Like, for example, the recent Board of Trustees decision to reward Matthew Goldstein yet again with another raise for his tireless effort to privatize the CUNY system.

So it shouldn't be surprising that CUNY has taken further fiscally responsible action this week to spend more of the money it apparently doesn't have on new property in the outer boroughs. In late October, CUNY signed a two-year lease for prime-time real estate in downtown Brooklyn. The deal secures CUNY 27,000 square feet worth of executive suites on two floors in Brooklyn's tallest skyscraper, located on Montague Street across from the federal courthouse complex that anchors the neighborhood. CUNY has made no comment on the details of the acquisition, but has acknowledged that it plans to move into its new digs at some point in January 2011.

CUNY Campus Settles Anti-Discrimination Suit with Human Rights Group

After firing an adjunct who claimed she was discriminated based on her race and creed, Kingsborough Community College settled a lawsuit with the New York City Commission on Human Rights this past month. The CUNY campus agreed to pay Hanaa Khalil, an adjunct teacher of chemistry, $7,700 in back pay and $10,000 in damages. The school also agreed to provide anti-discrimination training to its entire supervisory staff, including department chairs and academic affairs officers.

In Spring 2009, Khalil was fired by her department chair after complaining to human resources that she was receiving discriminatory treatment from her department's administrative assistant. Khalil claims that Kingsborough staff increasingly treated her with disrespect that eventually evolved into harassment.

Khalil had been offered the adjuncting position sight unseen by the department's administrative assistant in a desperate move to fill empty slots for classes that had already begun. When Khalil arrived to the campus to fill out her paperwork, the assistant "started immediately to have a very different way of dealing with me," Khalil told the *Clarion*. "She looked shocked to see that Dr. Hanaa Khalil was wearing a scarf." For its part, Kingsborough claims that Khalil was fired for repeatedly missing classes, claims that Khalil denies.

The college's decision to settle Khalil's claims could produce positive results. According to Patrick Lloyd, an associate professor at Kingsborough who spoke to the *Clarion*, "people at CUNY often are not getting proper training. Especially with all the budget cuts, they're overworked and undertrained." For Khalil, the settlement lays the groundwork for avoiding similar ugliness in the future. "I am hoping that this will help other people have a good experience." Ⓐ

Protests Erupt Across CUNY

DOUG SINGSEN

There is a lot happening at CUNY these days. Last month, at least three protests were organized by CUNY students and faculty against budget cuts, tuition hikes, and other attacks on public education, and across CUNY, adjuncts and full time faculty members have begun mobilizing for the next round of contract negotiations between PSC-CUNY and the CUNY administration. The issues addressed by these protests affect different members of the CUNY community in different ways but are all interconnected, which demonstrates the need to link different issues affecting CUNY together and to build a united fight-back against all attacks on public education.

The first protest was held on Thursday, October 7 at the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building on 125th Street and Lenox Avenue. This protest was part of a national day of action to defend public education that was called by activist groups in California and around the country. Actions were held in twenty-two states around the country, with the largest taking place at the University of California (UC)-Berkeley, where eight hundred students peacefully occupied a reading room in Doe Library.

The October 7 protests were the sequel to the first national day of action to defend public education, which was held on March 4 of this year. Both days of action were first called for by activists in California, where students and employees in the state's UC system were facing 10 percent budget cuts and 33 percent tuition hikes. Students and workers in California's other university systems, the California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC) were also facing similar attacks.

In response, students across California organized large protests and building occupations beginning in September 2009. When college students, workers and K-12 teachers and students called for a protest on March 4, 2010, that call spread across the country. The October 7 call for protests followed the same pattern, originating in California and then spreading across the country.

The rally at the State Office Building drew around two hundred protesters, and made links between attacks on public education and other austerity measures being introduced as a result of the recession. Students from Hunter College, City College, Queens College and Bronx Community College were present and spoke to the crowd about the impact that budget cuts and tuition hikes had on them and the need to fight back against them.

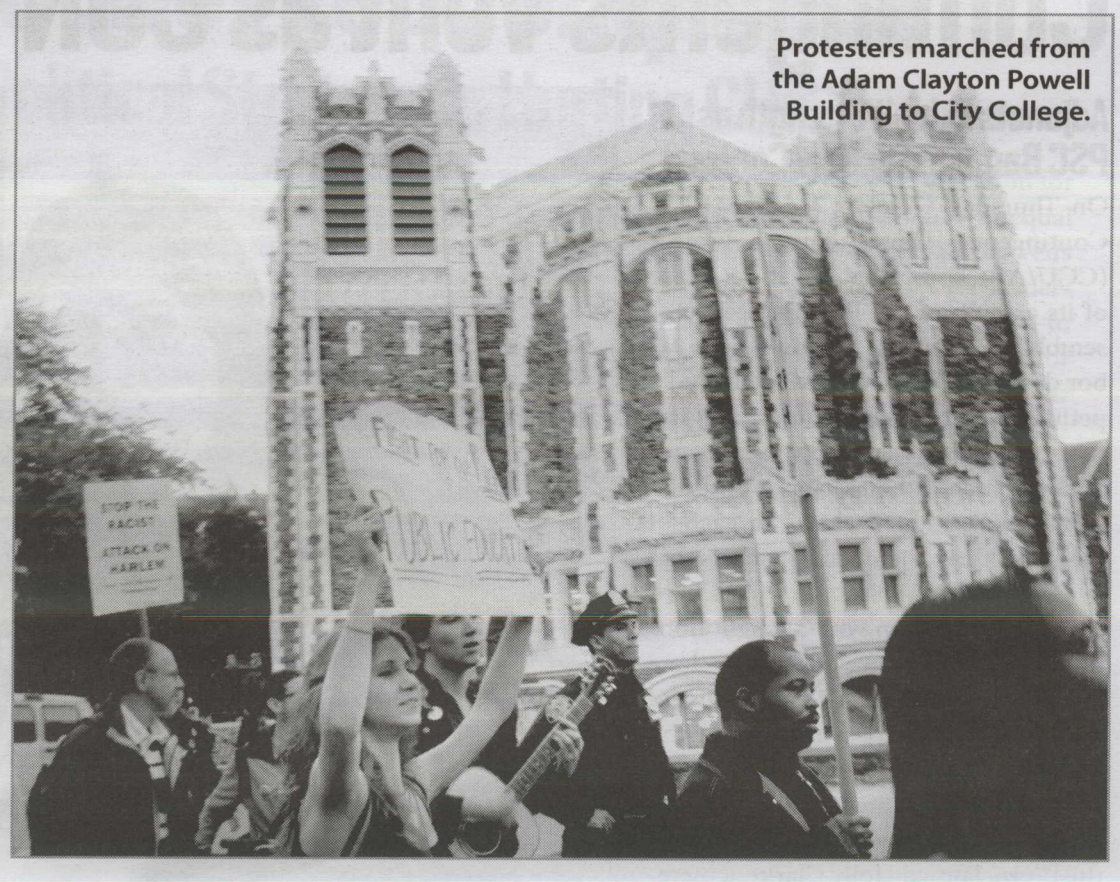
A doctor at Harlem Hospital who is helping to organize a struggle against the closing of that hospital also spoke at the rally. As *New York* magazine recently reported, community hospitals across the city have closed down in massive numbers in recent years due to decreased repayment rates provided by Medicare and Medicaid and the large number of uninsured individuals who use their services. New York City is truly facing a crisis in the hospital services available to its low-income residents. Just as the budget cuts to CUNY are a result of the state's budget deficit, which in turn is a result of the recession that was caused by the economic crisis triggered by the financial industry's housing bubble, so are the wave of hospital closings a direct result of state underfunding of the public hospital system.

High school students from Hunter High School and the Youth Activists Youth Allies (Ya Ya) Network also spoke at the rally about the need to defend K-12 education against school closings and privatization. K-12 teachers from the Grassroots Education Movement were also present and spoke against school closings, privatization and attacks on teachers' unions and job security. Representatives from the campaign to prevent a private charter school from being built on land belonging to the St. Nicholas Houses, a public housing project, also spoke to the rally.

Following the rally, protesters marched through the streets of Harlem to City College at 137th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, where they held an impromptu rally in NAC Plaza, the campus's central public space. Smaller rallies were also held earlier in the day at Hunter College and Queens College. At Hunter, members of a student group called Hunter Fights Back organized a "die-in" there to protest the "death" of public education at CUNY as a result of these attacks.

While the October 7 protests were smaller than those of March 4, both nationally and in New York City, the reasons for this are understandable. In New York, there are currently no budget cuts or tuition hikes being proposed for CUNY or SUNY, which means that for the moment such attacks are not on the minds of students and faculty. The national momentum has also slowed, since the California students and workers who have been leading the movement are also not currently facing attack.

Three weeks later, on Wednesday, October 27, around 150 students protested against tuition hikes at Lehman College. The protest was organized by the Campus Association for Student Activities (CASA) and Student Conference, the two wings of student government there, and Black Legacy, the school's Black and Puerto Rican student union. The message of the rally was amplified by the matching t-shirts bearing the protest's slogan for a tuition freeze, provided by the student government, which all the student protesters were wearing.



Protesters marched from the Adam Clayton Powell Building to City College.

Olu Onemola, the Board Vice President of CASA and one of the organizers of the October 27 protest, said that the rally was "a preemptive move against PHEEIA," the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Investment Act, which sought to allow the CUNY and SUNY boards of trustees to raise tuition at their sole discretion and to impose different tuition rates for different schools and majors. PHEEIA was defeated in the state legislature earlier this year, but is likely to be reintroduced again next year. CASA's long-term goal, according to Onemola, is to "bring all CUY campuses together and demand a tuition freeze. It's only if we come together that we can combat this problem."

This protest was about twice the size of a protest organized on March 4 by Black Legacy alone, which was the inspiration to CASA and Student Conference to get involved in organizing against the cuts and hikes. Onemola said that this protest was "the brainchild of March 4."

The third protest held in October took place on Tuesday, October 19 at Bronx Community College (BCC) and was called by the PSC chapter there. The goal of the rally, according to PSC member Lenny Dick, is to kick off the PSC's upcoming contract negotiations. PSC President Barbara Bowen spoke at the rally, telling the crowd that "this is only the beginning" of the union's efforts to win a good contract. At the end of her speech, Bowen led the crowd in chanting "We'll be back."

The BCC protest was small, drawing around forty faculty and students, but the fact that it was called at all is a positive sign. Mobilizations of both students and faculty will be key to winning real gains in the upcoming contract negotiations—especially for CUNY's adjunct majority, which requires a major shift in CUNY's labor policy in order to prevent the further erosion of tenure at the university—and in defeating future budget cuts and tuition hikes.

While CUNY is not facing budget cuts right now, that situation could change very soon. In New York, the governor has proposed mid-year cuts to CUNY and SUNY in both of the previous two years. The most likely reason that cuts have not been proposed yet this year is the upcoming elections on November 4, since the governor undoubtedly does not want to propose unpopular cuts immediately before an election. Since the economy's brief rebound now appears to be giving way to stagnation once again, and the state has already spent nearly all of the stimulus money it received from the federal government, which was intended to last the state a full two years, it's likely that cuts will again be proposed even before next year's budget comes up for consideration in the spring.

These cuts hurt both faculty, especially adjuncts, and students. Several schools, including City College, Hunter College and the Borough of Manhattan Community College, have already announced layoffs of adjuncts for next semester, which is a direct result of budget cuts. More broadly, the poor pay and lack of benefits suffered by the adjuncts who teach a majority of classes at CUNY can only be rectified by reversing the perennial cutbacks of CUNY's budget.

Students are affected by budget cuts because it means that their teachers are being asked to do more with less, which inevitably results in more crowded classrooms taught by instructors with less time to prepare for classes and work individually with students. Both students and faculty are also affected by the increasingly poor physical condition of CUNY schools. Across CUNY, buildings are crumbling, needed repairs are left unfixed, and basic sanitation is neglected, all because maintenance budgets are often among the first items to be cut. Protests like those at the Harlem State Office Building, Lehman College and Bronx Community College point the way forward for fighting back against these cuts. Ⓐ

adjuncting

What Do You Have to Lose? Or...What Do You Stand to Gain?

ALYSON K. SPURGAS

When many students begin their sometimes long and arduous educational journey at the Graduate Center, they don't know that if they teach or are otherwise employed by the City University of New York, they are represented by a union—the Professional Staff Congress (PSC/CUNY), American Federation of Teachers Local 2334. Our understanding of ourselves as union members often comes at the expense of being confronted with any of a variety of possible trials and vicissitudes that we may endure as CUNY contingent workers—whether we are adjuncts or graduate assistants. These trials may take the form of being paid months after the semester has begun, "non-reappointment" in a department that we have been teaching in for years, having a class pulled from us after the semester has already begun, not being afforded an adjunct workload waiver in order to teach in excess of the contractually-limited "9/6" workload, or being forced to relinquish a course or give up a fellowship due to our own illnesses, pregnancies, bereavement, or those of our family members. These unfortunate experiences allow us to truly understand just how important it is to have adequate representation in our workplace, one of the largest public university systems in the country. And sometimes, even after these unfortunate occurrences, we are simply told by HR, our departments, or other administrative bodies that "things happen." We are not alerted to the fact that as dues-paying union members, we are entitled to grieve certain workplace infractions against us. "*Certain* infractions" is the key phrase here.

At CUNY, contingent workers are the majority. There are over 8,000 teaching and non-teaching adjuncts and graduate assistants A, B, and C (this includes graduate teaching fellows, writing fellows, instructional technology fellows, research assistants, and teaching assistants) employed within the university, and we teach between 55 percent and 70 percent of classes, depending on the campus. CUNY also employs over 7,000 full-time tenure and tenure-track instructors, about 3,500 Higher Education Officers, and around 500 College Laboratory Technicians. All of the workers in each of these different categories are represented by the PSC, and CUNY is a closed shop, which means that we all pay union dues and are entitled to union representation through a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between our union and CUNY. But different worker titles carry very different provisions—including different benefits, wages, and levels of protection—under this contract. For instance, you and your department chairs at the GC and the school where you teach are all union members. But contingent workers are obviously afforded very different contractual provisions in the form of pay and benefits than our chairs are entitled to. Some workers have stability, while others live in a constant state of precarity and contingency, at the mercy of the departments in which we teach and the state budget crisis which we are told we must prepare to be the first to suffer from. And we are very much contingent—the reserve of disposable labor that the university relies on to keep its costs down. Both CUNY management and our union leadership know this.

Our current CBA, originally put into effect in 2002, amended in 2007, and now up for renegotiation as of October 19, is filled with gaping holes and murky language when it comes to adjuncts' and grad assistants' rights and protections. Article 21 of the contract, for instance, which concerns "disciplinary actions," states that members of the full-time instructional staff may be disciplined by removal, suspension, or any lesser form of discipline for a variety of reasons, including incompetent or inefficient service. This means that the university can fire full-timers for alleged infractions, but *the burden of proof will be on management to do so*. For full-time faculty, all disciplinary proceedings must be initiated by the president of the college at which the person in question teaches. However, article 21.11 states that adjuncts shall be subject to discharge for "just cause," so Article 21 doesn't apply to them. Don't know what "just cause" is? Well neither do I, and that's because it's never defined in the contract. Article 21 clearly states that in order to fire full-time faculty, the burden of proof resides with the college. Adjuncts, on the other hand, must grieve their own non-reappointments, often by futilely attempting to prove that their non-reappointment was "unjust." The burden of proof lies on the contingent worker, and as I'm sure you can imagine, it is very difficult to prove that your non-rehiring was "unjust," especially because Article 9.5 states that part-time appointments may be for less than one year (a formal concretization of our contingency). Full-timers also have the right to meet with the president of the college or her appointee to discuss their non-reappointment. When was the last time you had a meeting with the president of the college where you teach to discuss why you're no longer being assigned classes?

Full-timers also have the right to meet with the president of the college to discuss their non-reappointment. When was the last time you had a meeting with the president of the college to discuss why you're no longer being assigned classes?

Under our current contract, one of the only means adjuncts have to dispute a non-reappointment is to prove that we were not informed of the decision in a timely manner. According to Article 10.1(a)3 of the contract, adjuncts hired on a semester-by-semester basis shall receive notice of reappointment/non-reappointment on or before December 1 regarding the spring semester and by May 1 regarding the fall semester. But, because the university's access to a reserve of cheap labor is apparently more worthy of protection than its workers' well-being, this clause is added: "Such notification shall be subject to *sufficiency of registration* and *changes in curriculum* which shall be communicated to the employee as soon as they are known to the appropriate college authorities." Nowhere in the contract are "sufficiency of registration" nor "changes in curriculum" defined (nor is a quorum for what constitutes a sufficient number of students to go ahead with a class). I don't know about you, but I don't feel very secure.

Adjuncts are also excluded from protection under Article 9.10-9.12, the clauses which state that full-time members of the instructional staff may appeal "negative decisions" regarding reappointment, tenure, promotion, etc. and if these appeals are unsuccessful, they must receive documentation of the *reasons* for these decisions. "Just cause" means nobody has to give part-time instructors a documented list of "reasons" for non-reappointment.

The gaps in the contract around protection for contingent workers are endless, so I will give you just a few more instances to consider. Whereas full-time faculty receive their sick leave and family leave through Article 16 ("Temporary Disability or Parental Leave") and are entitled to paid leave time, adjuncts are excluded from 16 and are covered by Article 14.8 instead, which states that adjuncts may miss "1/15 of their total number of clock hours of the semester for personal needs which cannot be postponed" (this amounts to two classes), but that requests for such leave must be received in writing, in advance, by the department chair. And, as you may have guessed by now, the "reason provided must be satisfactory to the chairperson." In real life, we all know that we are generally expected to find our own substitutes in these cases, sometimes being asked to pay them out-of-pocket, and are ultimately subject to the whims of our departments regarding how mercifully our situations are treated.

Think graduate assistants and fellows have it better? Maybe when it comes to wages and job security, but not when it comes to short-term leave. Any of us who have been sick, pregnant, in need of surgery, or otherwise requiring time off know how much our ability to take leave without penalty is determined by the goodwill of the executive officers of our departments at the Grad Center and the chairs of the departments in which we teach (I was recently alerted to the fact that there are university procedures in place so that chronically ill students requiring long-term medical leave don't lose their fellowships, but these leaves are not paid, and the rules are not covered in the CBA). There is no language in the contract that specifically protects graduate assistants, and although we may be eligible for protection under Article 16 and/or the *Family and Medical Leave Act (because we are not directly excluded* from these protections), this has never been tested. In any case, it would be up to a graduate assistant to grieve her case and attempt to set a precedent. In practice, most of us try to handle our illnesses or need for temporary leave time informally with a variety of results. It is unclear how a grievance would even play out, particularly when considering the language in Article 11 ("Classification of Titles"); 11.2(a) states that "the employment, retention, evaluation, or assignment of persons employed in the title Graduate Assistant, to the extent that it is based upon their status, progress, and evaluation as graduate *students*, shall not be subject to the grievance procedure established in this contract." This clause really makes one wonder—could it always be argued that graduate employees can or should be evaluated as graduate students, first and foremost? Could any infringement upon us be excused as "ungrievable" under this article? Or, in simpler terms, are we ever valued as workers?

Since the spring semester, the Adjunct Project, along with CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU/AP), have been building a campaign to get four specific demands into the bargaining agenda that the PSC takes to the table with CUNY in the coming months. The demands we have outlined include:

1) Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority,
2) Wage increase of $30 per credit hour for adjuncts, equivalent for graduate fellows and other contingent titles, and step raises every year,

Continued on page 7

political analysis

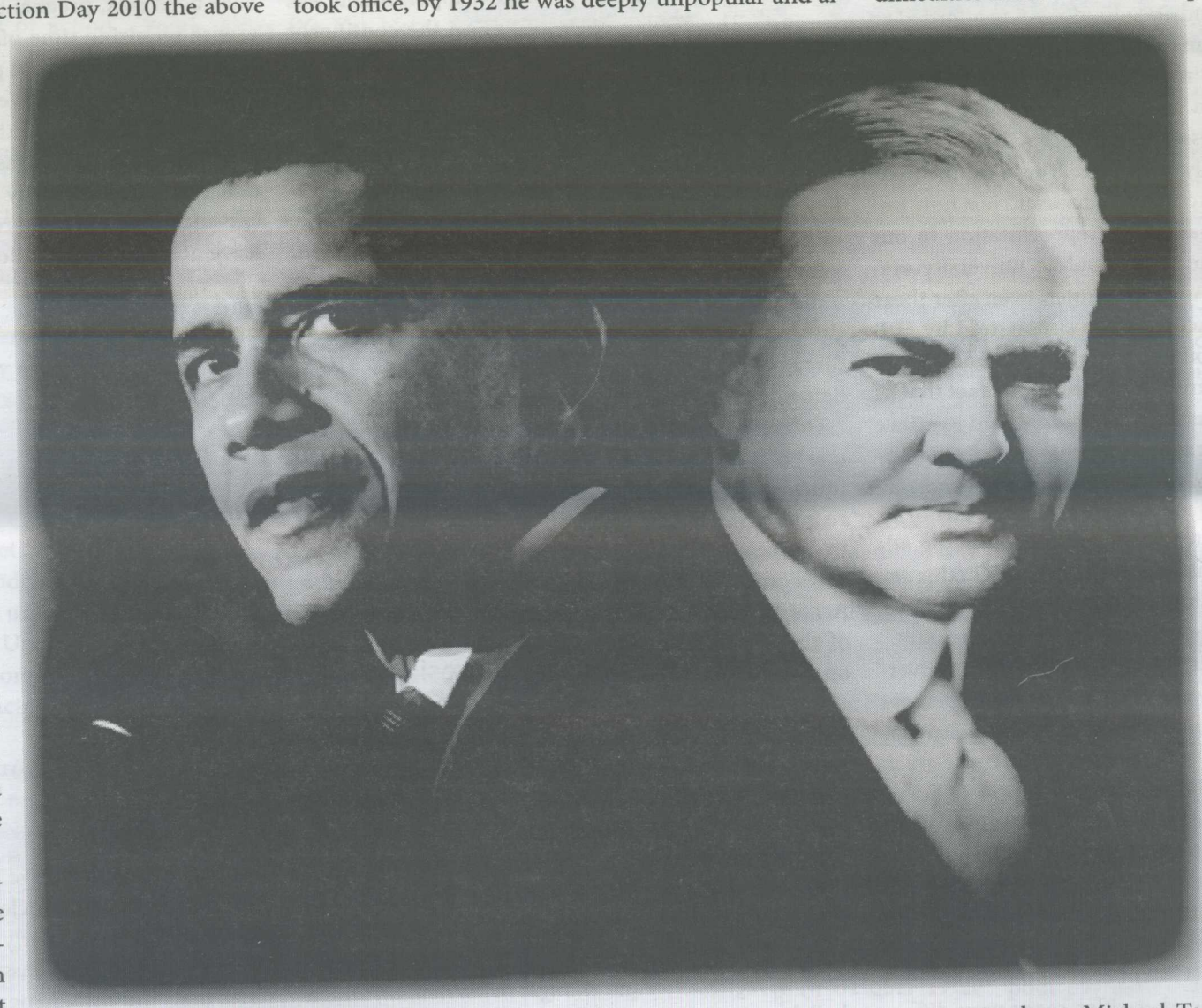
The Great Recession Election

GEOFF JOHNSON

Barack Obama came to office on the strength of a huge electoral victory. He was even able to win several Southern states—including Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida—which in recent election cycles had been won by the other party in America's political duopoly. The president's party also had an overwhelming majority in both houses of congress. The new chief executive was seen as a brilliant, focused, capable decision maker, and hopes for his presidency were quite high.

But then, there was the economy. Financial markets were in chaos, and unemployment was worse than it had been in decades. Ultimately, most voters did not feel the president had done enough to alleviate the economic pain of average Americans. In the midterm elections, they handed him a stunning defeat: his party would, in the end, narrowly lose the House and only hold on to a bare one seat majority in the Senate.

By the morning after Election Day 2010 the above sentences, or something close to them, could well apply to Obama. But they already apply to a prior occupant of the Oval Office—Herbert Hoover. Eighty years before Obama's historic election, Hoover defeated his Democratic opponent Al Smith in a landslide, even making some inroads into the "Solid South" that white supremacist Democrats had dominated since the end of Reconstruction. Hoover's Republican party enjoyed a sixteen seat majority in the Senate and a 100+ majority in the House of Representatives during his first two years in office, before the onset of the Great Depression contributed to a disastrous midterm cycle in 1930.



Analogizing modern-day presidencies to those of the past is a remarkably popular—if often dubious—component of political discussion and debate in this country, and certainly this has been no less true for Barack Obama's administration. Even prior to taking office, the president-elect himself assiduously cultivated a connection with Abraham Lincoln, going so far—too far!—as to feature the kind of "root vegetables and wild game that Mr. Lincoln favored growing up on the frontier in Kentucky and Indiana" at his Inauguration Day luncheon.

Most observers, however, have preferred to compare him to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Given the similar economic crises they faced and the thought (hope?) among many progressives that Obama would implement something akin to a "New New Deal," Roosevelt seemed a natural model for the 44th president. But with Obama increasingly blamed for the country's economic misfortunes, a populist right-wing movement dominating the headlines while populist left-wing movements garner little attention unless they are led by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and televised on Comedy Central, a "New New Deal" nowhere on the horizon, and a fairly massive Republican midterm victory all but guaranteed, Obama-as-FDR references are few and far between these days.

The far more counterintuitive comparison to FDR's predecessor was suggested by Kevin Baker in a July 2009 article in *Harper's Magazine* entitled "Barack Hoover Obama." There Baker reminded his readers that Hoover, while eventually much maligned for his failures, "was widely considered the most capable public figure in the country" at the time of his election. Hoover was a hugely successful mining engineer, and during and after the First World War he coordinated a massive food relief operation in Europe (Baker suggests that "it's unlikely that any other individual in human history saved so many people from death by starvation and want"). After his heroic efforts during WWI, Hoover was seen as a possible presidential candidate for either party, and around1919 an up-and-coming politician by the name of Roosevelt argued that "there could not be a finer one."

After initial excitement about Hoover when he took office, by 1932 he was deeply unpopular and already permanently associated with the Great Depression, which is really all that future generations would remember about him. While Hoover actually took a fairly aggressive approach toward the Depression and even implemented some measures that foreshadowed the New Deal, most notably the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, ultimately his efforts were insufficient and economic conditions worsened. His defeat in 1932 marked the end of an era of Republican dominance, and, as historian Michael B. Stoff has noted, "for the next thirty years, Democrats would campaign against the memory of Herbert Hoover and his pitiless incompetence, no matter whom Republicans ran."

In his *Harper's* article, Baker argued that Hoover had (and Obama has) a temperament and political orientation which made it difficult or impossible to implement radical (and necessary) changes in the country. "Much like Herbert Hoover, Barack Obama is a man attempting to realize a stirring new vision of his society without cutting himself free from the dogmas of the past—without accepting the inevitable conflict." Hoover could not fully break with the economic dogma of the 1920s, while Barack Obama has shown no willingness to break with the economic dogma of the Bill Clinton/mid-late 1990s era. Among his top economic appointees were Clinton-era holdovers Lawrence Summers and Timothy Geithner, a continuity which was pointed out to Obama when he appeared on *The Daily Show* on October 27. Jon Stewart told the president, "I remember very clearly you said, 'We can't expect different results with the same people.' And I remember when you hired Larry Summers. I remember thinking: well that seems like the exact same person." Obama, after making an unfortunate verbal *faux pas* by employing the "heckuva job" phrase of Michael Brown and Hurricane Katrina fame, lamely offered that "Larry was integral in helping to think through some complicated stuff."

While some of us might ultimately judge Obama a failure because he failed to break with recent history and push for more radical fixes to some rather dire long-term problems, the immediate electoral difficulties for the Democrats probably lie elsewhere. The stagnant employment situation is clearly issue number one, and lingering unease over health care reform seems to be playing a role as well. Obama is far less popular among moderate independents than he was in November of 2008, and there is a genuine—if, I would argue, mistaken—impression of *liberal* overreach on the part of the administration in the minds of many Americans.

But Obama and the Democrats have also failed to successfully articulate convincing and easily digestible arguments what, exactly, it is they stand for, and as a result they have confused not only moderates but also their liberal/progressive base. Michael Tomasky argued in a recent issue of *The New York Review* that this problem is a longstanding one for Democrats (not so much for Republicans). "Republicans routinely speak in broad themes"—liberty, freedom, family, etc.—while Democrats tend to focus on policy details, in part because the Democrats have been the authors of popular policies like Social Security and Medicare. "What Democrats have typically not done well since Reagan's time," Tomasky suggests, "is connect their policies to their larger beliefs. In fact they have usually tried to hide those beliefs, or change the conversation when the subject arose. The result has been that for many years Republicans have been able to present their philosophy as somehow truly "American," while attacking the Democratic belief system as contrary to American values." Obama had a pretty coherent and powerful—if admittedly rather vague—narrative driving his candidacy in 2008, and the lack of such a narrative for the Democrats this year—what are you voting for when voting for the Democrats, other than "not the Republicans?"—is likely part of the reason they are facing losses of Hooveresque proportions.

The 1930 midterm election was the last time the

House changed hands but the Senate did not. Eighty years later it seems extremely likely that this scenario will be repeated. As of October 28, election forecasting guru Nate Silver, who blogs for *The New York Times*, gave the Democrats an 86 percent chance of holding onto at least 50 seats in the Senate—VP Joe Biden would be the tie-breaker—but only a 17 percent chance of retaining a majority in the House. Most prognosticators seem to be settling on a fifty-plus seat gain for the GOP, more than enough to make John Boehner the new Speaker.

Regardless of the size of the Republican victory, it will likely be smaller than it could have been, particularly in the senate. 2010 will probably be remembered as the "Year of the Tea Party" due to the fact that Tea Party groups have helped a number of conservative Republicans capture their party's nomination for various offices. Many, including rising star and possible 2012 vice presidential nominee Marco Rubio of Florida, will probably win their elections and go to Washington. Others, for example western state candidates Sharron Angle, Ken Buck, and Joe Miller, might pull out victories or might cost the GOP seats they could have won had a more moderate candidate been nominated. In Delaware, late-night-comic fodder Christine O'Donnell seems guaranteed to lose what should have been a safe Republican pickup (twenty years from now no one will remember her—bank on it). If the GOP misses a Senate majority by a seat or two, some Republican leaders will begin to grumble (probably very quietly) about the Tea Party's virtual stranglehold over the party.

Still, the Republican caucus in both chambers will be more conservative than it has been the last two years, hard as that may be to believe. Assuming the Republicans take the House, Speaker Boehner will face the challenge of constantly trying to placate his hyper-conservative base while not alienating the rest of the country—no mean feat. The fact that a number of conservative activists are already talking about shutting down the government or even impeaching Obama, while most of the GOP leadership is pushing back against such suggestions, gives a hint of the tensions to come.

A radicalized congressional GOP pressured by an angry base might be a serious problem for the Republicans in the long run and could prove to be the primary reason why the legacy of 2010 is quite unlike the legacy of 1930. Roosevelt obviously won the election that followed the 1930 Democratic landslide, beginning a run where Democrats won seven of the next next presidential cycles up through 1964. They controlled both houses of Congress for all of those years, excepting the loss of both chambers for two years following the elections of 1946 and 1952. Will we see a similar trend for the GOP going forward, beginning with this year's midterms?

Probably not. As several studies have suggested, including work done by political scientist Ruy Teixeira, the future demographics of the United States do not bode well for the Republicans—particularly for a party purged of moderates and dominated by the Sharron Angles of the world. Non-whites, the still up-and-coming voters of the "Millennial Generation," professionals, the college educated, unmarried women, and voters who are secular or non-affiliated in their religious orientation are among those who turned out in force for Obama in 2008. They will increasingly dominate the country demographically, and it's likely they will continue to have relative affection for Obama and the Democrats while being very much put off by the antics of a radicalized GOP. The electoral consequences of this could be pretty earth shattering. For example, a rapidly increasing Hispanic population could—assuming the Democrats continue to poll very well among that group, which is not guaranteed—lead to Texas being a state that Democrats can win in presidential contests as early as the 2020s. Thus it's entirely possible that the 2010 election, or one soon to follow, could prove to be the high water mark of the Tea Party movement, rather than one that ushers in an era of Republican dominance the way 1930 did for the Democrats.

Even if all of that might be somewhat heartening to progressives, there's no doubt that it's unfortunate that the Great Recession Election of 2010 might, for the time being, end up looking a lot more like the Great Depression Election of 1930. If only it instead looked like the Great Depression Election of 1934. In the first midterm of FDR's presidency, the Democrats picked up seats in both chambers (nine in the Senate) and the election was widely seen as referendum (a successful one) on the New Deal. Compare this with the 2010 election, where it's entirely possible that the Democrats will *lose* 9 Senate seats and where Democratic candidates all over the country are running away from the policy achievements of their party (this phenomenon was captured in a recent *Onion* headline: "Democrats: 'If We're Gonna Lose, Let's Go Down Running Away From Every Legislative Accomplishment We've Made'").

After their 1934 victory, the Democrats arguably achieved more in the following two years than they have before or since, a period generally referred to as the "Second New Deal." 1935 saw the passage of Social Security and the National Labor Relations Act (or Wagner Act), almost certainly the most important piece of labor legislation in American history (today, the Employee Free Choice Act, the number one priority of the labor movement, languishes and seems not to be a priority for the president, despite the strong support labor gave him in 2008). Also beginning with the Second New Deal, millions of Americans would be employed by the Works Progress Administration, and taxes were raised on the wealthy and on corporations.

Suffice to say, whatever the exact result of the elections on November 2, it's pretty unlikely that we'll see an expansion of the welfare state, passage of an important labor law, a massive federal jobs program, or an increase on taxes for the wealthy in the next two years. Thus the historical legacy of the 2010 midterms might be that they cement an already developing reality: the governmental response to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression is more Hooverian than Rooseveltian. Ⓐ

Adjuncting

Continued from page 5

3) Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par with municipal workers for all contingent employees, and
4) Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs (who, like adjuncts and GAs, are also excluded from many of the contract provisions that full-time faculty receive).

The demands concerning job security and pay parity for adjuncts have also been included in a resolution put forward by the PSC Committee for Part-Time Instructional Staff and all of these demands have been endorsed by the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) in a recent resolution. We have put together a petition for CUNY workers to sign to show their support for these demands, and at the time of this writing, almost 1,200 union members have signed in hard copy format or online: www.petitiononline.com/demands. Many of these signatures are from full-time faculty, some of whom have begun their own mini-campaigns to support the CCU/AP-endorsed demands. One example of this is Distinguished Professor Ros Petchesky's article in the Sept–Oct 2010 issue of the Hunter Union Voice, entitled "Three Reasons Why All Full-Time, Tenure-Track Faculty in the PSC Should Support CUNY Contingents Unite: An Open Letter to My Full-Time Colleagues." (See the full letter on page 9 of this issue of the *GC Advocate*.) Building camaraderie with full-timers, including our department chairs, is pivotal if the two-tier labor system is ever to be adequately challenged. Full-time faculty must be reminded that a system that perpetuates vulnerability and contingency amongst the majority of its workforce ultimately destabilizes conditions for all of its workers. As Petchesky reminds us, when this type of corporatization runs rampant in a workplace, fear and scarcity become strategies used by management to divide its workforce, further allowing administration to deny everyone improvements in working conditions—for full-timers and part-timers alike.

When a memorandum of agreement was added to the PSC/CUNY contract in 2007 during the last round of negotiations, important gains were won. These included across the board salary increases of 10.5 percent with additional increases at the top step for both adjunct and full-time titles, paid parental leave and improved sick leave policies for full-time faculty, and outside of the agreement, 100 new full-time positions for experienced adjuncts and NYSHIP health insurance for doctoral employees. All of these gains are part of what Barbara Bowen, president of the PSC, has referred to as "Phase 2" of a three-phase plan to improve structural problems within the CUNY workplace. On October 30, 2007, Bowen stated: "Because the problems we face are structural and have taken thirty-five years to develop, they are best approached through a strategic, focused approach that encompasses more than one round of bargaining. The PSC leadership has decided that the crisis in several areas is so acute that we must address the major structural issues."

At the September 30 Delegates Assembly this fall, Bowen articulated the union's priorities for Phase 3 of this plan, which were very similar in content to what she had outlined in 2007 (i.e. reducing teaching load to a nationally competitive level, continuing progress on nationally competitive salaries, achieving adjunct salary parity, and improving promotional opportunities for HEOs). It seems obvious that the first two of these priorities are directed to full-time faculty, and that the last two concern part-time and professional staff. In the recent November issue of the Clarion, Bowen rearticulated these demands again in slightly different language; the adjunct-related concern now includes the notion of fomenting "real change in the unconscionable system of adjunct labor." Since the flat salary increase of 10.5 percent won in 2007 arguably widened the pay gap between full-time and part-time instructors, and thus the "major structural issues" Bowen mentioned in October 2007 have not yet been adequately addressed, it seems that equity for adjuncts—in terms of salary, benefits, and job security—should be the top priority in this round of bargaining, in accordance with the union's own three-phase plan.

If you work at CUNY, you are entitled to representation by the PSC. Contingent workers are the largest constituency represented in the union. The union leadership has stated time and again that they are ready and willing to tackle the two-tier labor system, and on Thursday November 4, the elected delegates will vote on the demands to take to the next round of bargaining. Guests are welcome at this meeting, and the Adjunct Project encourages CUNY contingents to attend. We will be there in full-force to remind delegate voters what our leaders have promised us and how much we all need changes in a truly unconscionable labor system that deeply disenfranchises us all.

Come to this meeting and join us in encouraging our delegates to choose to compensate contingent workers fairly. What is ratified at this meeting will greatly influence how we mobilize going forward, and build from the incredible momentum that has been created recently. The Adjunct Project wants to stand behind our union in the coming months during their contract campaign with CUNY, and mobilize on behalf of the PSC. Whether or not this happens will be largely determined by how the PSC chooses to engage with the demands we have put forward during our own campaign this fall, and whether our leaders will hold themselves accountable to the promises they have made. One thing is certain however—we have shown the PSC leadership that we are organized, that we stand in solidarity with each other and with all of our union brothers and sisters, and that we care very much about winning a good contract. Ⓐ

Tales of a Freeway Flyer

AMANDA LICASTRO

Considering the great number of recent articles, editorials, and YouTube videos ("So you want to get a PhD in the Humanities" for example) warning students not to go to graduate school, it would be ignorant of me not to ask myself why I am beginning a doctoral program in English at CUNY. I do not have a trust fund or a stable supplemental income, and I realize the prospect of actually landing a tenure track job as a professor is not guaranteed. However, I am not entering into this solely for the love of reading or with the naive belief that I will land the perfect tenure track job at MLA while finishing the last pages of my dissertation. My masters program at DePaul University allowed me to actually enter the academic workforce and immediately begin teaching with an M.A., and that is exactly what I did. Within two weeks of graduation I was offered classes as an adjunct instructor at seven different colleges in Pennsylvania. As perhaps some of you are aware, most colleges only allow adjuncts to teach two or three sections a semester, so I taught the maximum possible: three schools, two classes at each school, and over 120 students. Most people would call this insanity. I call it the best experience of my life.

To be clear, I am not supporting the abuse and exploitation of adjuncts. However, for a twenty-something without a family to support, teaching a plethora of classes at multiple institutions was a rewarding and informative process that led to immense personal and professional development. The learning curve was steep. First, there was the culture shock of moving from Chicago to Scranton: the middle-of-nowhere coal mining town, whose one claim to fame is that it is the setting for the TV show "The Office." My quick commute on the Chicago El train was replaced with a forty-minute commute through mountain highways to make class times that were barely an hour apart. This only intensified the fact that I was lost in a world of prepping and teaching three different courses.

My quick commute on the Chicago El train was replaced with a forty-minute commute through mountain highways to make class times that were barely an hour apart. This only intensified the fact that I was lost in a world of prepping and teaching three different courses.

A lot of ink has been spilt on why teaching your own course for the first time is terrifying. In my first semester as an adjunct I was faced with developing syllabi and lesson plans three composition courses, a remedial writing course, and an Early American Literature course at three different campuses with three different sets of departmental requirements and guidelines. It was impossible to hide my performance anxiety. Dr. Laurie McMillian, the interim chair at the university where I was teaching a variety of courses, gave me some sensible advice however: "You don't need to reinvent the wheel," she said; and she was right. Even though I had not taken an Early American Literature class since undergrad, and had never taught from a grammar-based workbook, I did have training in the classroom. In addition to the wisdom and knowledge I had gained from the many articles I had read on pedagogy by Bartholomae, Murray, Lunsford, and Elbow, I had also discovered several brilliant blogs such as Prof.Hacker, which offer practical approaches to the many difficulties of teaching at the college level. To my dismay, however, many of the pedagogical priorities I had developed in graduate school were quickly replaced by more realistic approaches to the limits of my students. I realized that my idealistic notion of assigning dozens of novels each semester was absurd. Not only did I need to teach from an anthology, I also needed to search for the cheapest ones available. The chairs who hired me were more than willing to provide me with sample syllabi and desk copies of potential textbooks, which I enthusiastically spent the summer annotating and analyzing until I had composed my course outlines. So even though my color-coded filing system complete with traveling filing cabinet failed, I learned two key tools for success: first, most department heads want their faculty to succeed and many schools have resources for new teachers; and, second, technology can help you conquer the classroom.

As a born digital Jerome McGann groupie, my proclivity for technology informs the central doctrine of my political approach to teaching. I strongly believe we should be teaching students technological skills across the disciplines. But as many of you are aware, finding support for digital endeavors is unbelievably frustrating, if not infuriating. I needed to build six courses on three separate LMS formats, and due to the bureaucracy of human resources, I had very little time to orient myself with the systems. My inquiries about faculty workshops were met by a middle-aged woman in a kitten sweatshirt and Crocs who printed out the four hundred page Moodle manual and handed it to me—single sided. Clearly, I was on my own. The sink-or-swim style of survival actually benefitted me greatly. I was forced to teach myself how to build an online course and navigate various models of smart classrooms, and those skills have saved me every semester. The freedom of paperless grading is essential to my success as a freeway flyer. My wrath for the Windows operating system aside, the "Track Changes" function in Microsoft Word can be a powerful teaching tool and an advantageous agent for managing hundreds of students' papers.

Apart from navigating virtual worlds, adapting to the office culture of three different schools was a daily challenge. I met the recently-denied-tenure assistant professor who was fighting to have the adjunct office turned into a meeting space for one of her many service commitments. I met the cynical ABD with a new baby harboring resentment toward her tenure-track husband. And I met the clinically insane adjunct who insisted that I was speaking backwards as he rocked back and forth in our shared office. At times, this was a scary and hostile world. These encounters often made me question my desire to pursue my doctoral degree. Luckily, the faculty members who were kind, enthusiastic, and welcoming far overshadowed these ill-spirited apparitions. Three of my colleagues invited me to join a panel at CEA last spring, giving me the opportunity to present at a conference with funding from our university. One of those professors, a CUNY alumnus, encouraged me to apply to this program and advised me through the application process. Despite a significant age gap, I fostered great friendships with my fellow faculty, and these are important professional relationships that will be fruitful throughout my career. I learned to constantly contact the chairs of each department, keeping them abreast not only of my triumphs, but also my concerns in the classroom, and the result was a steady supply of courses each semester. Even when an unprecedented drop in spring enrollment devastated the region, my chairs fought to give me at least one course. I was not only a teacher to my students, but also a student to my fellow teachers. On the same note, my administrative assistants were possibly the most vital resource during my time as an adjunct. There is no possible way to manage copy quotas, departmental meetings, registrar deadlines, campus calendars and grading procedures without them. If there is one valuable piece of advice I can share, it is to respect your office managers. They can and will rescue you when all else fails.

I have to admit, there were times when I thought I was going to fail. Upon reading the writing samples of my composition students in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I thought that there was nothing I could teach them. Unlike the diverse, street smart, low-income population of the urban community college in Chicago where I had interned while getting my MA, the students in these rural suburbs seemed privileged, homogenous, and apathetic. Their diagnostic essays were polished and organized, with clear thesis statements, and well constructed support. However, one truism echoed across the pages: the students professed their abhorrence of writing. Since the majority of the students came from the surrounding towns, they had all been educated in Pennsylvania public schools wrought with corruption. They complained of inadequate teachers who only provided exercises designed to help them obtain high scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests. Each of their essays was a formulaic replica of the last without any personality or creativity expressed within the well constructed lines. I did not need to teach them basic writing skills, they needed to find their voices. We worked on using critical thinking skills to develop opinions on controversial current events. We debated, defined terms, and read newspaper articles. They challenged me to change my approach to composition. I adjusted not only the course objectives, but the assignments every semester to meet the needs of that particular student population.

The hundreds of students who sat in front of me each day taught me more than any textbook ever could. Unfortunately, it is from the extreme cases, the "bad" students, that I have learned the most. In my first semester of teaching I had a remedial writing class. I was privy to the scores they received on a very basic grammar test, and all of the students had missed more than 50 percent of the questions. When the first full length paper from one freshman football recruit came back practically perfect, I knew I was in for a fight. As he slouched back in my office chair, headphones blaring, no books or pens in tow, he mumbled something about his coach "helping" him write his paper. With his arms folded and sunglasses on, his coach declared to me, without guilt or regret, that his facilitation was acceptable because it was the student's ideas, but he had put them on paper. I was outraged. My chair informed me that this was not unusual, and that the most I could do was fail him on that assignment. The administration did not remove him from the class, nor did they suspend him from play. This Division III school made athletics a higher priority than academic integrity. The next semester a student forged an e-mail from me and delivered it to academic services as proof that I was changing her grade from a D to a B. When the director called me with the student and her mother in her office demanding the grade change, I laughed. My outrage was replaced by confidence in my documentation of this student's work through my online course site. Although I defended my position, this girl paid tuition and therefore remained a student in that university despite this astonishing act of academic dishonestly. These are the realities of academia today.

The most radical realization about how the private university system works came from a student in my most recent summer composition course. Her di-

Three Reasons Why All Full-Time, Tenure-Track Faculty in the PSC Should Support CUNY Contingents Unite

An Open Letter to My Full-Time Colleagues from Ros Petchesky, Distinguished Professor

1. Because the two-tier labor system in public higher education weakens and destabilizes working conditions for us all.

As long as management can be assured of a very huge, vulnerable contingent work force willing—or, more accurately, compelled—to work for a pittance of the value they create, it can resist the demands of full-time union members for improvements in our working conditions, following a corporate model in which more and more of the work force is pushed into contingency and a sense of vulnerability. This is doubly true in a period, like now, of severe economic crisis, retrenchment, and high unemployment. It is a structural problem that affects us all by arming management with the economics of job scarcity and the politics of fear. Divide and conquer is real—we do have material privileges and gain a dubious sense of superiority as full-timers and tenured employees. But in the long run that division is a veneer that covers the structural and financial imbalances that contaminate the two-tier system at every level and weaken us all.

2. Because CUNY Contingents Unite represents one of the most forward-looking elements in the academy and in the labor movement.

Adjuncts and all contingent CUNY workers are those whose marginalized position within the system and clear vision (double consciousness) of its cracks have the greatest potential to bring real, structural change to our institution and to radicalize the collective bargaining process. Their four key demands,[a] if met, would not only institutionalize equality in the system but would also transform the political economy of public higher education and help to reverse the conditions of general instability and insecurity I just described (see #1). Unity between full-timers and part-timers in fighting for a fair contract will give our union unprecedented strength—of both numbers and moral and political clarity. "CUNY Contingents and Full-Timers Unite" as an organizing strategy just makes good sense.

3. Because it's the right thing to do.

Every day we teach and work in conditions that hyper-exploit over one-half of our colleagues, asking them to make the same commitment of intellectual energy, devotion to students, and professional rigor that we do, at a tiny fraction of the pay and without commensurate benefits, job security or respect. This is a form of peonage. It corrupts our work environment and compromises the very principles of morality and justice that public higher education is supposed to stand for; and it makes every one of us complicit in a foul, unjust system. It has to stop; WE have to stop it. I urge all my colleagues to get behind the demands of CCU, including advancing the recent gain around winter session pay for adjuncts to include summer session and to become a permanent reform, not just a one-time reward. These demands should be the number one priority of our delegates at the bargaining table in this round of contract negotiations, uppermost in our collective vision, and deeply embedded in our sense of who we are as educators and union members.

In solidarity,

Ros Petchesky

Distinguished Professor of Political Science

Hunter College & the Graduate Center

(a) The demands are:

1. Minimum three-year contracts for adjuncts, with documented reasons for non-reappointment and a system of seniority.
2. Wage increase of $30 per credit hour for adjuncts; equivalent for graduate fellows and other contingent titles. Step raises every year.
3. Comprehensive employer-paid health insurance on par wwith municipal workers for all contingent employees.
4. Promotional series, real job security and due process for HEOs.

agnostic was at the lowest level I had ever seen in a college classroom. From what I could abstract from her remarkably poor writing was that she was a foreign student who had transferred from a large public school to take this class for the third time. Her ESL issues seemed beyond my ability to address, especially considering the high level of writing I received from the other students in the class, even those from her country of origin. I contacted my chair and international student services to assist me in providing supplemental support for her. Since this was a summer class on a compressed schedule, by the time a representative from the school had assessed her situation, the student had handed in an obviously plagiarized paper. The chair of my department said he had never seen such blatant plagiarism, and that he would fully support my decision to fail her. However, the representative wanted to speak with the student to ensure it was intentional plagiarism and not simply a misunderstanding due to cultural differences. During that conversation the student confessed that she had not taken the TOEFL exam and did not believe herself to be capable of composing a paper without outside help. Even after this stunning admission, the representative warned me that the student would not be removed from my course because the university did not want to damage its relationship with the embassy. When she failed the next assignment, she promised me that she would revise it and declared her dedication to my class, while at the same time threatening academic services that she would tell her embassy that the university treated foreign students unfairly. Further investigation revealed that the student had falsified not only her test scores, but also her address and sponsorship information. Now it was my integrity that was being questioned, and I was forced to use every resource at my disposal to ensure that neither my standing nor the standards of my classroom would be jeopardized any further. While in the previous cases I conceded to the pressure from the administration, this time, I held my ground.

I know tenure track jobs are scarce. I have read the dozens of articles and hundreds of comments that demoralize those going into graduate studies in the humanities. To the naysayers I ask, "Who will be teaching your children some day?" I do not believe, as the cynical ABD once proclaimed, "That a monkey can teach composition." If you are disgusted by the injustices I have described, then consider that we need highly educated, well trained professors in our universities. It is not for some lofty love of literature that I dream will manifest itself into a million dollar book deal that I am in graduate school. Despite earning under the poverty line, without benefits, as an adjunct, I refuse to retreat back to the world of public relations where I could have a high- paying "real job." I am dedicated to enacting the change necessary to ensure your children will LEARN. The students in my classroom will not be given grades in exchange for performance on the field or tuition checks paid in full. I am here at CUNY pursuing my path to a PhD because of my time as an adjunct. To my fellow students, I ask "What about you?" Ⓐ

CONTINGENT WORKERS OF CUNY!

demands for our next union contract will be discussed at an important meeting on november 4.

a strong presence at this meeting is crucial if we want a good contract.

Without CUNY's contingent majority, our demands will be ignored.

It's up to you: Tell the PSC your needs matter. Be at the Delegate Assembly meeting this Nov. 4 at 6:30 p.m.!

WHERE

Professional Staff Congress
(The union that represents CUNY's contingent workers)
61 Broadway, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10006

WHEN

November 4, 2010 at 6:30 p.m.

MORE INFO

www.cunyadvocateproject.org
theadjunctproject@gmail.com

The Crises of Capitalism

David Harvey, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the CUNY Graduate Center, spoke at the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) on April 26, 2010. In his lecture, Dr. Harvey asked whether it's time to look beyond capitalism and instead envision a new social order that would allow us to live within a system that really could be responsible, just, and humane. The following is a transcript of Dr. Harvey's lecture to compliment the "RSA Animate" visual accompaniment (which follows on pages 12 and 13), furnished by Cognitive Media and reprinted with the generous permission of the RSA.

DAVID HARVEY

Okay, so we've been through this crisis and there are all sorts of explanatory formats out there and it's interesting to look at the different genres. One genre is that it is all about human frailty, I mean Alan Greenspan took refuge in the fact that it's human nature, and you can't do anything about that. But there's a whole world of explanations that say it's the predatory instinct, it's the instincts for mastery, it's the delusions of investors and greed and all the rest of it. So there's a whole range of discussion of that and of course the more we learn about the daily practices on Wall Street we figure there's a great deal of truth in all that. The second genre is that there are institutional failures, that regulators were asleep at the switch, the shadow banking system innovated outside of their purview, etc. etc. etc. and therefore institutions have to be reconfigured, and it has to be a global effort by the G-20, or something of that kind. And so we look at the institutional level and say that has failed and that has to be reconfigured. The third genre is to say everybody was obsessed with a false theory: they read too much Hayek and believe°d in the efficiency of markets, and it was time we actually got back to something like Keynes or we took seriously Hyman Minsky's theory about the inherent instability of financial activities. The next genre is that it has cultural origins. Now we don't hear that much in the United States, but if you were in Germany or France, many people there would say this is an Anglo-Saxon disease and it's nothing to do with us. I happened to be in Brazil when it was going on, and Lula was saying "Oh thank God the United States has been disciplined by the equivalent of the IMF, we've been through it eight times in the last twenty five years and now it's their turn. Fantastic!" said Lula and all the Latin Americans I knew, until it hit them, which it does, and then they kind of changed their tune a little bit. So there's a way in which it became cultural and you can see that by the way in which this whole Greek thing is being handled, the way the German press is saying, well it's defects in the Greek character, and there's a lot of rather nasty stuff going on around that but actually there are some cultural features that have led into it. For instance the US fascination with home ownership, which is supposedly a deep cultural value, so 67-68 percent of US households are homeowners, it's only 22 percent in Switzerland. Of course it's a cultural value in the US that has been supported by the Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction, which is a huge subsidy that's been promoted since the 1930s and was very explicitly built up in the 1930s because the theory was that debt incumbent homeowners do not go on strike. And then there's a kind of notion that there's a failure of policy and that policy has actually intervened, and there's a funny kind of alliance emerging between the Glen Beck wing of Fox News and the World Bank, both of whom say the problem is too much regulation of the wrong sort.

So there are all of these ways and all of them have a certain truth, and skilled writers will take one or other of those perspectives and build a story and actually write a very plausible story about this. And I thought to myself well, what kind of plausible story can I write which is none of the above, which is one of the things I always think to myself, and it's not hard to do particularly if you're coming from a Marxist perspective, because there aren't many people who try to do this analysis from a Marxist perspective and I was really clued into this by this thing that happened at the London School of Economics about a year and a half ago when her majesty the queen asked the economists: "how come you guys didn't see this thing coming?" She didn't say it exactly that way, but you know, it was just the sentiment. And they got very upset, and then she called the Bank of England and said how come you didn't see it coming, and then the British Academy got all of these economists together and they came up with this fabulous letter to her majesty. And it was actually astonishing. It said, well many dedicated people, intelligent, smart, spent their lives working on aspects of this thing very very seriously, but the one thing we missed was systemic risk. And you say "what!" And then it went on to talk about a politics of denial and all the rest of it, so I thought, well, systemic risk I can translate into the Marxian thing. You're talking about the internal contradictions of capital accumulation. And then I thought maybe I should write a thing about the internal contradictions of capital accumulation and try to figure out the role of crises in the whole history of capitalism and what's specific and special about the crisis this time around.

And there were two ways in which I thought I would do that. One was to look at what's happened since the 1970s to now, and the thesis there is that the form of this current crisis is dictated very much by the way we came out of the last one; that the problem back in the 1970s was excessive power of labor in relationship to capital and that therefore the way out of the crisis last time was to discipline labor. And we know how that was done. It was done by off-shoring; it was done by Thatcher and Reagan. It was done by neo-liberal doctrine; it was done all kinds of different ways. But by 1985 or 1986 the labor question had essentially been solved for capital. It had access to all of the world's labor supplies. Nobody in this particular instance has cited greedy unions as the root of the crisis. Nobody in this instance is saying that it has anything to do with excessive power of labor. If anything it is the excessive power of capital, and in particular the excessive power of finance capital, that is the root of the problem. Now how did that happen? Well, we've been, since the 1970s, in a phase of what we call wage repression; that wages have remained stagnant. The share of wages in national income right throughout the OECD countries has steadily fallen. It's even steadily fallen in China of all places. So that there is less and less being paid out in wages. Well, wages turn out to be also the money which buys goods, so that if you diminish wages then you have a problem of where is your demand going to come from. And the answer was, well, get out your credit cards; we'll give everybody credit cards. So we'll overcome, if you like, the problem of effective demand by actually bumping up the credit economy. And American households and British households have all roughly tripled their debt over the last twenty or thirty years and a vast amount of that debt of course has been within the housing market.

Well, wages turn out to be also the money which buys goods, so that if you diminish wages then you have a problem of where is your demand going to come from. And the answer was, well, get out your credit cards; we'll give everybody credit cards...

And out of this comes a theory which is very very important, which is that capitalism never solves its crisis problems, it moves them around geographically. And what we're seeing right now is a geographical movement of that. Everybody says "well, everything is beginning to recover in the United States…and then Greece goes bang and everybody says what about the PIGS," you know, and it's interesting. You had a finance crisis in a financial system. You sort of half-solved that, but at the expense of a sovereign debt crisis. Actually if you look at the accumulation process of capital, you see a number of limits and a number of barriers, and there is a wonderful language that Marx uses in the *Grundrisse*, where he talks about the way in which capital cannot abide a limit; it has to turn it into a barrier which it then circumvents or transcends. And then when you look at the accumulation process you look at where the barriers and limits might lie, and the simple way to look at it is to say look, the typical circulation process of accumulation goes like this: you start with some money: you go into the market and buy labor power and means of production and you put them to work with a given technology and organizational form, and then you create a commodity which you then sell for the original money plus a profit. Now, you then take part of the profit and recapitalize it into an expansion, for very interesting reasons. There are two things about this. One is that there are a number of barrier points in here. How is the money got together in the right place, at the right time, and in the right volume? That takes financial ingenuity.

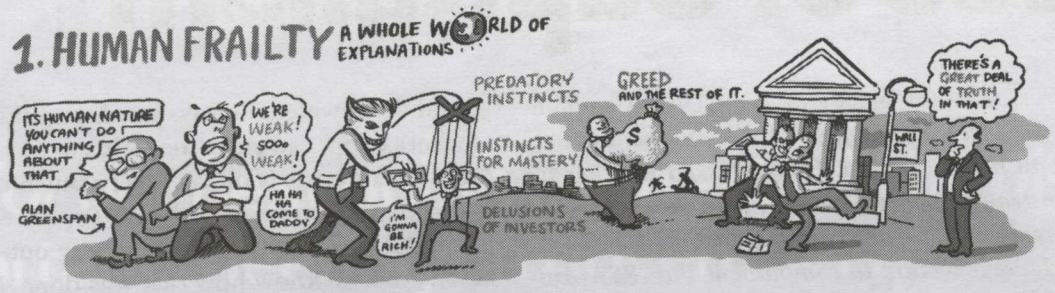
So, the whole history of capitalism has been about financial innovation. And financial innovation has the effect of also empowering the financiers. And the excessive power of the financiers sometimes makes them get greedy, there's no question about it. And if you look at the financial profits in the US, they were soaring in the 1990s, and profits in manufacturing were going down, and you could see the imbalance. In this country, I think the way in which this country has sided with the city of London against British manufacturing since the 1950s onwards, has had very serious implications for the economy of this country. You've actually screwed industry in order to keep financiers happy. Any sensible person right now would join an anti-capitalist organization. And you have to! Otherwise, you will have this continuation and notice it's a continuation of all sort of negative aspects. For instance, the racking up of wealth: you would have thought the crisis would have stopped that. Actually, more billionaires emerged in India last year than ever. They doubled last year. The wealth of the rich in this country has accelerated. Just last year! What happened was leading hedge fund owners got personal remunerations of three billion dollars each, in one year! I thought it was obscene and insane a few years ago when they got $250 million. But they are now hauling in $3 billion. Now that's not a world I want to live in. And if you want to live in it, be my guest. I don't see us debating and discussing this. I don't have the solutions. I think I know what the nature of the problem is. And unless we're prepared to have a very broad-based discussion about this that gets away from the normal pabulum you get in the political campaign—"now everything is going to be ok if you vote for me"—its crap! You should know it's crap, and say it is! And we have a duty, it seems to me, those of us who are academics and seriously involved in the world to change our mode of thinking. *[Turn page for the Animate version of this talk]*

DAVID HARVEY
THE CRISES of CAPITALISM
26TH APRIL, 2010

IS IT TIME TO LOOK BEYOND CAPITALISM TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL ORDER THAT WOULD ALLOW US TO LIVE WITHIN A SYSTEM THAT COULD BE RESPONSIBLE, JUST & HUMANE?

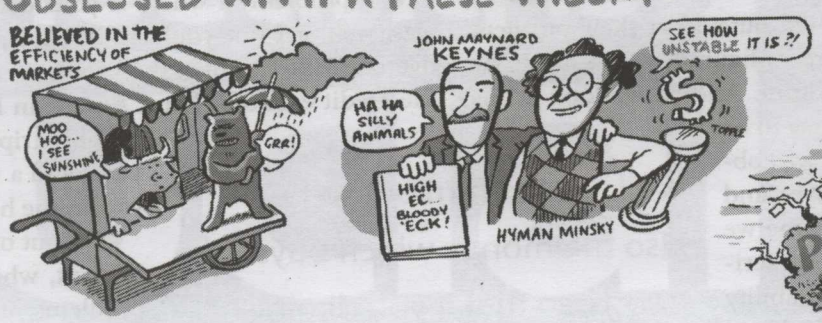
OKAY WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS CRISIS. THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF EXPLANATORY FORMATS GENRES

1. HUMAN FRAILTY
A WHOLE WORLD OF EXPLANATIONS



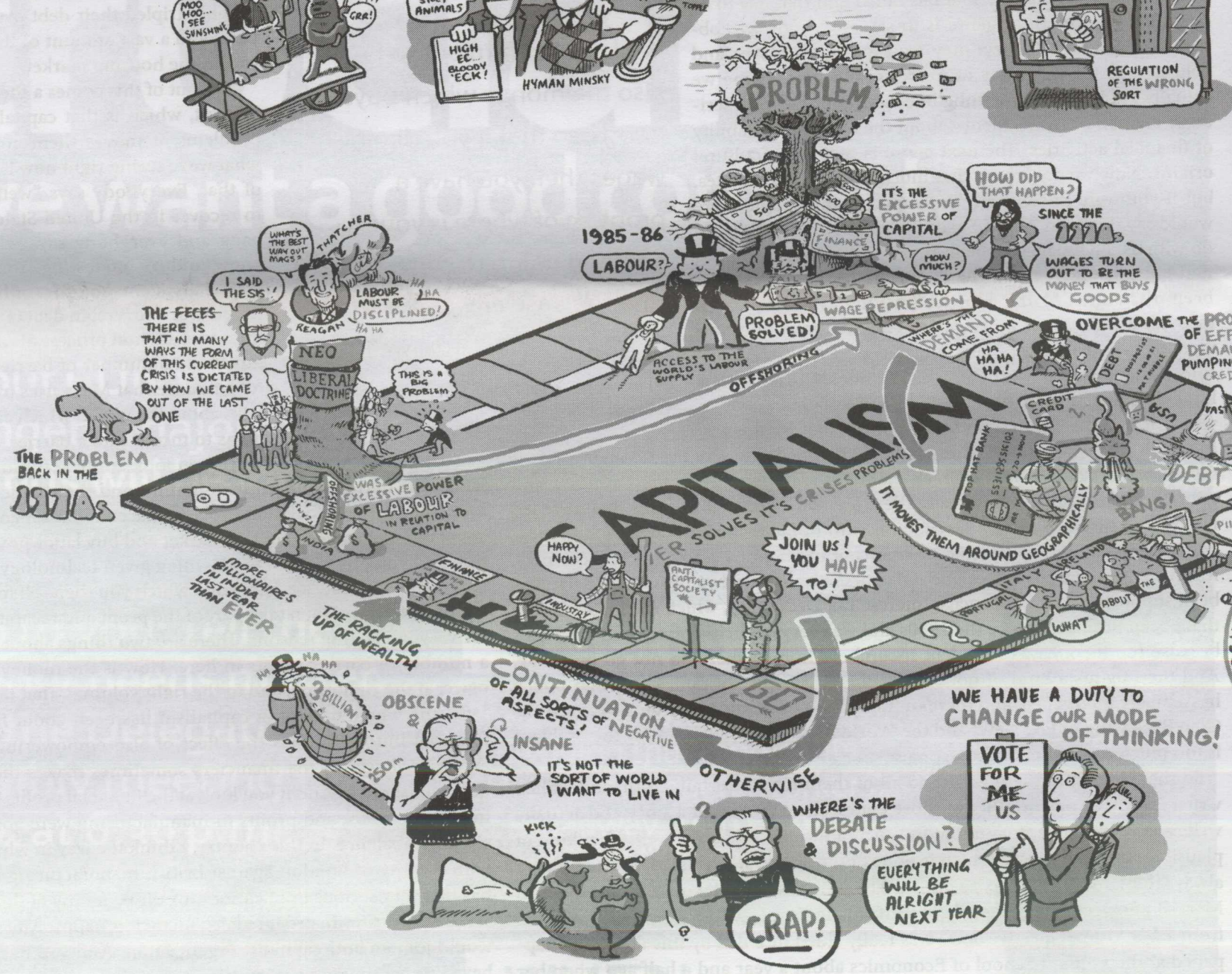
2. INSTITUTIONAL FAILURES

3. OBSESSED WITH A FALSE THEORY

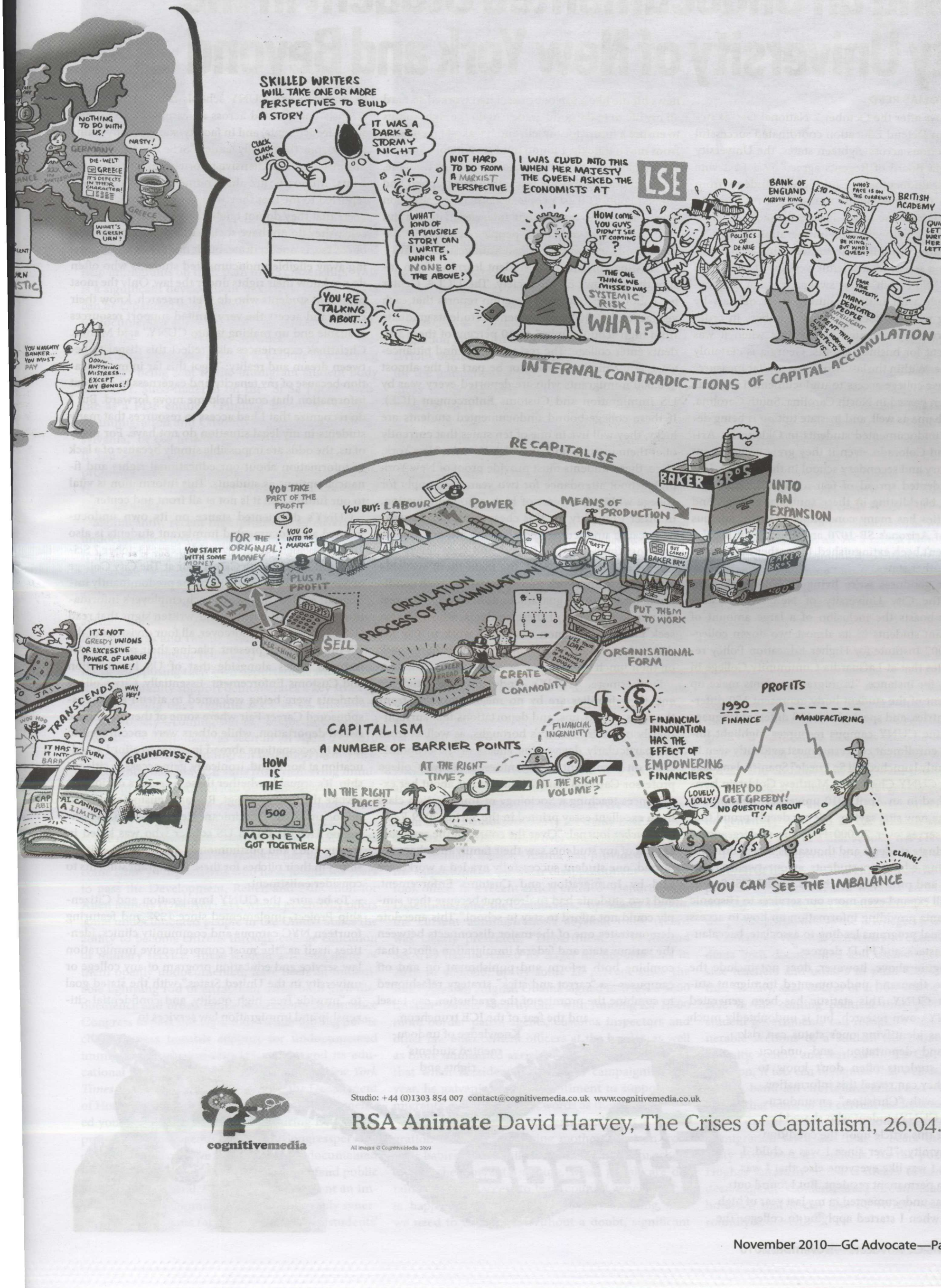


4. CULTURAL ORIGINS
CULTURAL FEATURES THAT HAVE LED INTO IT

5. FAILURE OF POLICY



ONE WRONG



cognitivemedia

Studio: +44 (0)1303 854 007 contact@cognitivemedia.co.uk www.cognitivemedia.co.uk

RSA Animate David Harvey, The Crises of Capitalism, 26.04.10

"Or Does it Explode?"

Being an Undocumented Student in the City University of New York and Beyond

CONOR TOMÁS REED

Five days after the October 7 National Day of Action to Defend Education coordinated successful protest actions across eighteen states, the University of Georgia Board of Regents agreed by a 14-2 vote to ban all undocumented immigrant students from access to the state's public universities. And just to make sure no stone is left unturned, Georgia school officials are scrutinizing the immigration statuses of all students paying in-state tuition. This scandalous act is, in a sense, an academic version of the Social Security "No Match" letter sweeps that saw employers collude with national immigration officials by checking workers' social security numbers in order to deport undocumented immigrants when it was convenient for business profits. Georgia is certainly not alone. Within the last two years, similar measures that refuse college access to undocumented students have been passed in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama as well, and in-state tuition is being denied to undocumented students in Oklahoma, Arizona, and Colorado, even if they grew up and went to primary and secondary school in these states. This unprecedented spread of fear-mongering and educational blacklisting in these southern colleges and universities has many concluding that the noxious flames of Arizona's SB-1070 anti-immigrant legislation haven't been extinguished, but rather deftly scattered to other states.

Thank goodness we're living in New York City, right? The City University of New York system proudly boasts the inclusion of a large amount of immigrant students in its almost two dozen colleges. A 2007 Institute for Higher Education Policy report states that at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, for instance, "immigrant students make up 60 percent of the student body, represent 150 different countries, and speak about 110 different languages." Online CUNY campus resources highlight immigrant enrollment concerns, most evidently seen in the recently launched "Sí Se Puede" Spanish-language website. CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein himself gushed in an April 2010 university press release about the new site, saying "We are deeply proud that CUNY serves over 70,000 Hispanic undergraduate and graduate students and thousands more adult and continuing education students at our twenty-three colleges and professional schools… And ["Sí Se Puede"] will expand even more our services to Hispanic immigrants providing information on how to access educational programs leading to associate, baccalaureate, master's, and Ph.D. degrees."

The figure above, however, does not include the over two thousand undocumented immigrant students at CUNY. This statistic has been generated by CUNY's own research, but is undoubtedly much higher, as identifying one's status can risk arrest and deportation, and undocumented students often don't know to whom they can reveal this information. I spoke with "Christina," an undocumented CUNY student who shared her story for this article upon the condition of anonymity: "Ever since I was a child, I thought I was like everyone else, that I was at least a permanent resident. But I found out that I was undocumented in my last year of high school, when I started applying to college. The news hit me like a ton of bricks. I had worked so hard all my life to make good grades, to do the right things to ensure a future for myself, and it was all taken away from me so quickly. I found out I was unable to apply for financial aid, that many schools wouldn't fund me, that I couldn't travel for research. I felt trapped and alone. I couldn't trust people because of the situation I was in." At the time of our interview, I found out that I was one of only three people outside of Christina's family who knew her real immigration status.

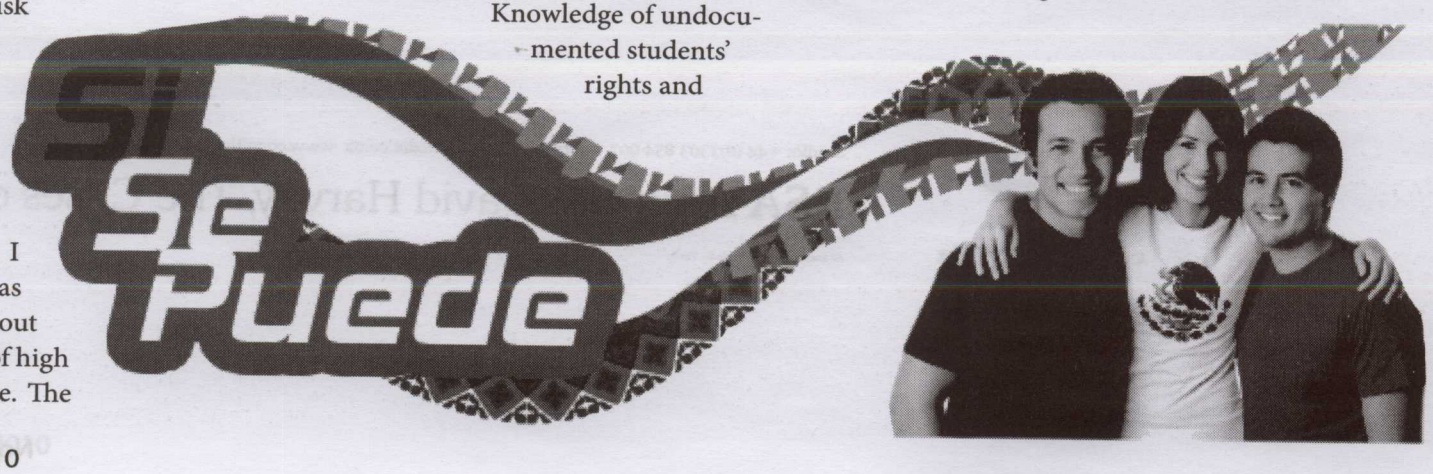
Christina isn't the only student learning from inside the shadows of US society. The UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education reports that each year around 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school. Only 5 to 10 percent of these students enter college. The rest will likely find pittance-wage non-unionized work, or be part of the almost 400,000 immigrants who are deported every year by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). If these college-bound undocumented students are lucky, they will live in one of ten states that currently offer them in-state tuition, which includes New York. Here, these students must provide proof of New York high school attendance for two years, and apply for college within five years of high school graduation, in order to qualify for this cheaper tuition. However, because undocumented students are not eligible for most financial aid—federal and state funds like FAFSA and the Pell Grant, the majority of available scholarships, and work study programs—such conditional lower tuition guarantees don't assuage the real economic concerns of these students, who will also seek pittance-wage non-unionized work to pay for their tuition and books while doing their homework on their lunch breaks.

Furthermore, CUNY's undocumented students and their families are by no means absolved from the raids, round-ups, and deportations that surreptitiously occur in the city's boroughs, as well as from the particularly devastating effects of the economic crisis on immigrant communities. Brooklyn College professor Carolina Bank Muñoz writes about her experiences teaching a Sociology of Immigration class in an excellent essay printed in the Spring 2009 *Radical Teacher* journal: "Over the course of the semester, several of my students saw their family members deported, one student successfully evaded a workplace raid by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and two students had to drop out because they simply could not afford to stay in school." This anecdote demonstrates one of the major disconnects between the various state and federal immigration efforts that combine both reform and punishment on and off campuses—a "carrot and stick" strategy refashioned to combine the promise of the graduation cap tassel and the fear of the ICE truncheon.

Knowledge of undocumented students' rights and treatment inside CUNY schools has not been consciously coordinated across all campuses, in admissions departments, and in faculty/staff/security training. Despite the heavily lauded "Sí Se Puede" website's promise of comprehensive information for these students, Muñoz writes that "numerous students have reported to me that they were told by admissions officers that they do not qualify for in-state tuition, because they do not have social security numbers. This, of course, is not accurate, but it has the effect of turning away eligible undocumented students who often do not know their rights under the law. Only the most persistent students who do their research, know their rights, and access the very limited support resources available end up making it into CUNY," said Munoz. Christina's experiences also reflect this disparity between dream and reality: "I got this far in my education because of my tenacity and eagerness to seek out information that could help me move forward. But I do recognize that I had access to resources that many students in my legal situation do not have. For many of us, the odds are impossible simply because of a lack of information about our educational rights and financial options as students. This information is vital to our futures, but it is not at all front and center."

CUNY's disoriented stance on its own undocumented and documented immigrant students is also evident in such examples as the recent October 7 Science and Engineering Career Fair at The City College of New York. To the surprise of the predominantly immigrant student attendees, each employer's information table posted hastily hand-written signs that read "US Citizens Only." Moreover, all four divisions of the US military were present, placing their prominently featured tables alongside that of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Essentially, City College students were being welcomed to attend a campus-sponsored Career Fair where some of them may have risked deportation, while others were encouraged to serve in occupations abroad in order to afford an education at home and, ironically, gain access to citizenship. It's arguable whether these recruiters decided to invoke the history of Sgt. Riayan Agusto Tejada—an undocumented Dominican Republic-born, Washington Heights-raised US soldier who was killed in Iraq in 2003 and posthumously awarded US citizenship—in their pitches for these immigrant students to consider enlistment.

To be sure, the CUNY Immigration and Citizenship Project, implemented since 1997 and featuring fourteen NYC campus and community clinics, identifies itself as "the most comprehensive immigration law service and education program of any college or university in the United States," with the stated goal to "provide free, high quality, and confidential citizenship and immigration law services to



Raúl Al-qaraz Ochoa, seen here at right at a sit-in at John McCain's office, opposes linking the DREAM Act to military spending.

Adriana, an undocumented single mom enrolled in the CUNY program, told The *Daily News*: "This opened the door to college that I was afraid to open."

help immigrants on their path to US citizenship." This is a significant development in CUNY, but its efforts can be expanded to systematically inform and protect undocumented students, while simultaneously educating the whole university network about these students' legal rights and helping to end the bewildering messages being sent to the immigrant student body at CUNY. Such material on the "Sí Se Puede" website as a PDF entitled "Finding Someone Detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Pennsylvania," or the heavily detailed page "What To Do If You Are Arrested by Immigration," illustrates the profound state of uncertainty and potential danger that undocumented CUNY students face outside of the classroom.

Significantly, recent high-profile news coverage of undocumented college students who have successfully resisted deportation suggests that this perilous situation can be transformed by the still-nascent immigrant rights movement, with undocumented students being at the forefront of their own defense. Such inspiring stories as nineteen-year old Harvard student Eric Balderas and twenty-two-year-old University of Harold Washington (Chicago) student Rigo Padilla publicly opposing their own deportations with visibly loud community support demonstrates a key strategy to demanding one's rightful place as an immigrant in US society—coming out as "undocumented and unafraid." Additionally, as seen in an April 27, 2010 protest at a Chicago immigrant detention facility that successfully blocked ICE vans from delivering immigrants to O'Hare Airport to be eventually deported, immigrant community coalitions can actually prevent their own people from being taken away.

The most prominently coordinated national actions to support undocumented students has undoubtedly come from young activists who have fought for years to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which potentially offers some undocumented people in the United States the ability to become citizens through college education or military service. These student activists, many of them openly undocumented, have been an undeniable lightning rod of attraction, using both civil disobedience and broad educational efforts to convince Congress to pass this legislation, while shifting public consciousness towards support for undocumented immigrants' inclusion into US society and its educational institutions. Importantly, a recent *New York Times* article by Maggie Jones noted, "the Department of Homeland Security has so far spared undocumented youth who have been arrested during Dream Act protests." By courageously sitting in Congressperson's offices, hosting massive forums led by undocumented students, and participating in efforts to defend public education in general, these activists represent an immense new development that can conceivably synergize the movements for immigrants' rights, students' rights, and worker's rights. By publicly refusing deportation, undocumented immigrants are stepping out of social invisibility and demanding to be seen.

However, as explained in a well-circulated July 2010 Migration Policy Institute report on the DREAM Act, serious obstacles do exist within the Act's provisions for the immigrants it purports to aid. Two-thirds of those under eighteen who would benefit from the DREAM Act's passage are living below the poverty line, which means that "many will have a hard time paying tuition, fees, transportation, living, and other expenses;" therefore, "paying tuition for a two-year college appears well beyond the means of most potential beneficiaries who would need to pursue higher education to be eligible for conditional status." The DREAM Act's passage may, then, be a veritable boon for the US military. As US soldier-turned-antiwar-activist Camilo Mejía pointed out in a September *Democracy Now!* debate on the DREAM Act, the two-year military service provision obscures the reality that a military contract uncompromisingly exists for eight years, and then there's always the stop-loss order that can send a veteran back into war. By a more blunt connection, in a calculated move led by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid this September, passage of the DREAM Act was tied to that of a $670 billion war spending bill. This action spurred DREAM Activist Raúl Al-qaraz Ochoa—one of the five students who sat in John McCain's office in May—to write an open letter in mid-September stating that he now is opposed to the DREAM Act bill as it stands connected to US imperialism by the Democrats' handling.

Although this moment marked severe disillusionment in the Democratic Party for many DREAM Act activists, some have been overwhelmingly surprised that President Barack Obama has provided most of the opportunities for such disappointment since he took office. In a recent article entitled "Deportations, Detentions, and the Democrats," by Shaun Harkin, the current administration's abysmal track record was clearly presented: "Department of Homeland Security has increased its target for deportations in 2010 to 400,000, up by some 20 percent since the Bush years. In August, Obama signed into law a $600 million "border security bill," with funding for 1,500 more border patrol agents, customs inspectors and other law enforcement officers at the border, as well as more unmanned aerial 'drones.'" The article notes that when President Obama was campaigning last year, he galvanized public sentiment to support immigrants' rights with such words as these:

"When communities are terrorized by ICE immigration raids, when nursing mothers are torn from their babies, when children come home from school to find their parents missing, when people are detained without access to legal counsel, when all that is happening, the system just isn't working, and we need to change it." Without a doubt, significant change has occurred, but not in the way many had guessed. Rather, the change has amounted to more deportations, more miles of border walls, and more ravaged families.

This political moment has seen many immigrants' rights activists learning more about the extensively unsavory history of the Democratic Party, which has just as vehemently as the Republicans created regional trade agreements that accelerated migration to the United States by debilitating other countries' economies, instituted punitive "bracero" worker programs that allowed workers on both sides of the border to be exploited in tandem, and participated in forming the dizzying current situation in which undocumented immigrant students don't know what rights they have in and outside of the classroom, or whether they can attend college at all. As a recent *Nation* article by Braden Goyette formulated, "Anti-immigrant sentiment today → banning kids from education system → professional segregation → less integration → pundits and politicians blame immigrants for not integrating → rise in xenophobia → less security and social stability for everyone on the whole."

The City University of New York, the largest employer in the entire city, can be poised to produce a monumental shift in wholly, unconditionally protecting its undocumented immigrant students wherever they are in relation to the campus grounds, and aggressively advocating that this shift be enacted nationwide. Real students like Christina want to live openly and without fear, they want to contribute to the exciting scholarship being generated today by immigrant youth and their peers, and they want to be genuinely included in the mission stated at the founding of CUNY's first school, the Free Academy, in 1849: "The experiment is to be tried, whether the children of the people, the children of the whole people, can be educated; and whether an institution of the highest grade, can be successfully controlled by the popular will, not by the privileged few."

Continued vigorous activism and education by students both documented and undocumented alongside teachers and unions to push CUNY to realize this, frankly, sane course of action will be indispensable in the coming political time period. CUNY student governments can recognize that legally vulnerable sections of a student body translates into disunity, apathy, and fear. As for the CUNY Administration, it too can recognize that well-meaning but myopic band-aid efforts have failed and will continue to fail, that some of its current students are perpetually in danger under existing local, state, and federal immigration laws, and that it bears the responsibility to protect its students. As the poet Langston Hughes famously noted, a dream deferred can indeed explode. Contemporary circumstances suggest, however, that it can also be vividly reclaimed and roundly achieved. Ⓐ

art REVIEW

MOMA's Big Pictures


Mark Rothko

▶ *Abstract Expressionist New York: The Big Picture*, Museum of Modern Art through April 25, 2011

VICTORIA ROMEO

The Museum of Modern Art recently opened a blockbuster exhibition, *Abstract Expressionist New York: The Big Picture*. For the first time in its history, the museum has devoted an entire floor to a single show. Drawn entirely from the museum's vast holdings, *AbEx* chronologically traces the history of the movement from its beginnings in the 1940s through the height of its popularity in the 1950s and concludes with works signifying the transition into Minimalism and Pop Art in the 1960s. Works by Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, arguably the stars of the show, are interspersed with the many other artists in the avant-garde circle of this period. Virtually all of the artists on display in this exhibition worked in New York in the 1950s and MOMA was often the first to exhibit their works.

The MOMA's founding director, Alfred Barr, Jr., established collecting practices for the museum that focused on acquiring the most recent and innovative contemporary art. Numerous works entered the museum's collection shortly after their creation, and purchases were frequently made directly from the artists themselves. Walking through this exhibition, visitors can truly see the results of this goal, for it is clear that Barr's early collecting efforts, as well as the many excellent donations from benefactors, have resulted in an unparalleled collection of Abstract Expressionist art.

Moma's great advantage in staging this exhibition, in addition to already possessing all of these works, is its sprawling gallery spaces, which are perfect for exhibiting large-scale canvases and sculptures. Most of the works on display are substantial if not monumental in size. They can be viewed easily even when throngs of visitors fill the space, a welcome fact since MOMA is one of New York's most notoriously crowded museums. The expansive galleries and enormous canvases convey a sense of importance, as if visitors are walking among giants of art history, a fact which would certainly make Barr proud.

AbEx: The Big Picture covers MOMA's entire fourth floor, winding its way chronologically through the history of the movement. Paintings make up the majority of the show, but examples of Abstract Expressionist sculpture and photography are also included. In the first gallery, visitors encounter colorful, abstract lines and shapes in works from the 1940s by Pollock, Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell and Richard Pousette-Dart. The earliest work in the exhibition, Pollock's, *The Flame* (1934-38), and depicts a swirling, thickly painted, near-abstract image of fire. Across the room, a small work by Hofmann, entitled *Spring* (c. 1944-45), depicts colorful, chaotic swirlings of paint, which appear as if they could have been dripped onto the canvas. I overheard several of the viewers nearby commenting on how similar it seemed to Pollack's work, despite having been completed before Pollack began to experiment with his famous "drip" method. Indeed, while each of these artist's unique styles clearly differentiates him or her from the others, they all nonetheless draw on similar techniques and methods, and these frequent similarities of style and technique are on display everywhere in this collection, reminding us that the artists represented here were all working within close proximity to one another and influenced one another's work in sometimes dramatic ways.

Throughout the works on display, we repeatedly encounter large-scale canvases, flat planes of a singular color, geometric shapes and instances of pattern. At the same time, the techniques never produce two works exactly alike, nor do two artists approach their canvases in exactly the same way. Visitors' reactions to a Pollock versus a Rothko versus a Hofmann, are, of course, different as well. What exactly makes us feel strongly about one work over another? Is it the composition? The colors? The calm or chaotic mood within? Without definitive subject matter we are challenged to experience these works on a more subjective level. Even after years of studying art history, one can still have a hard time defining exactly why certain works enthrall us while others are completely uninteresting or even repulsive.

One of the reasons many viewers feel unable to explain their reactions to these canvases is that there

On This Particular Day

This is so utterly a coming to the world
As it is. This is a thought, unrecognizable,
In the tunnels of joy, faces ringed in desire,
As I pass along the drums. Rising, rising

Toward the skin of heaven, the whirr and
Grind of yesteryear is infernal, is beaten
Until it sings. I have been an angel for a
Moment. I'll tell you what I will abandon:

Today, nobody wants the apparition that
Patrols the lines of speech, flooded by scabs
And knowledge's description of it. You
Who adore the chalked lines of the police,

Go into a shining story—man walks into
Steam, man walks into a gleaming gaze
Of highways. Now we fly, fearless, into formation.
The wet fields troubled with stoplights

Are inescapable, though if we listen very
Closely, the percussive wind will breathe.

Noelle Kocot

is a separate language at work in Abstract Expressionism, one that is often easier to understand than speak. The ineffable quality of these works and their impact on the viewer is something that several of the artists in this exhibition, including Lee Krasner and Arshile Gorky, have explored in prose as well as paint. In trying to capture the nature of the quality of abstract expressionism these artists and others in their circle created their own set of symbols, but neglected to provide the code. The curators' wall texts try to explain these concepts to the viewer, but ultimately visitors are left to ponder the artists' intended meaning on their own. An overarching theme of Abstract Expressionism (and of this exhibition) seems to be that there is a greater, unidentified meaning to these works of art. To explain it would, in some way, defeat the purpose, or so we are told.

Although *AbEx* is designed to take visitors on a chronological journey through the movement, there are notable exceptions. Perhaps the two most iconic painters of the period, Jackson Pollack and Mark Rothko, each have an entire gallery devoted to their work. The curators have included early works by each artist to provide a sense of the transition to their mature styles, of which there are many excellent examples on display. These back-to-back spaces are definitely the highlight of the show. Pollock's large-scale drip paintings seem all the more interesting when comparing his different versions side by side. The artist's experimentations with technique and the different choices he made for paintings completed within a short timeframe would be difficult to pinpoint without direct comparison. Likewise, an entire room of Rothko's "color field" paintings, those with large blocks of floating color, only enhances the visitor's experience of his work. These large-scale canvases absorb and reflect color in a most unusual way, a phenomenon that is impossible to capture in reproductions. The opportunity to see eight of these works in one room is a tremendous treat for Rothko fans and should not be missed.

The remaining galleries showcase a large number of artists working in the Abstract Expressionist style, each with their own personal twist. The exhibition (and MOMA's collection) feels encyclopedic, as though nearly every artist and painting from this


Hans Hofmann

period has come out of storage to hang on the walls. With so many different artists in play, visitors may have a difficult time absorbing their distinctiveness and contributions. Yet, it is worthwhile to press forward and to appreciate the comprehensive nature of the exhibition, if not each individual work.

As visitors continue through the exhibition into the works from the 1960s, a perceptible shift occurs in the artworks. Helpful wall texts explain that while some artists continued to work in their favored Abstract Expressionist style, others moved toward Minimalism, a movement characterized by stark simplicity, monotone color and a general lack of visual form. Ad Reinhardt's works prominently showcase this transition within the avant-garde as well as within the artist's own work. In a previous gallery, two of Reinhardt's paintings depicting a colorful pattern of geometric forms provide a stark contrast to his *Abstract Painting,* a monochromatic black canvas of 1963. A final image in the show, Rothko's *Untitled*, (c. 1969-70) consists of a rectangular block of black above a similarly sized rectangular block of grey with a white border surrounding the entire canvas. This work, essentially a minimized version of his more colorful, earlier paintings signifies the transition and the next phase of modern art.

For the average museum visitor who has not absorbed countless hours of Art History lectures (or even for those who have), Abstract Expressionist art is not always the easiest work to understand. Straddling the line between figuration and abstraction, as these artists do, leads to more challenging art. Fortunately, the straightforward and concise wall texts provided by the curators serve the visitor well. Information about individual artists' inspiration, influences and working methods are scattered throughout, and in general, the amount of information feels useful without becoming overwhelming. Every work does not have a descriptive paragraph, nor does it necessarily need one. When attempting to understand these works, just looking is often enough to discern similarities, differences and perhaps gain some insight into the meanings found within. In certain instances, the wall texts point out elements of the painting which might otherwise go unnoticed, such as in Pollock's *Full Fathom Five* (c. 1947). In the accompanying text, we are directed to the fact that the artist has embedded nails, tacks, buttons, keys, coins, cigarettes, and matches into the thickly applied paint. Thinking about the strangeness of this inclusion, and subsequently searching for these items in the painting, adds to the fun of looking at an already mesmerizing image.

AbEx possesses all of the elements of a great blockbuster museum exhibition. An exhaustive collection of works and numerous iconic paintings of the period provide an extensive survey of the movement. With just the right amount of wall text and label information, visitors will come away from the show with a better understanding of Abstract Expressionism and its special place within the museum's collection. Yet, even a casual stroll through the galleries can give a visitor a sense of the type of work that characterizes Abstract Expressionism. The large-scale canvases invite contemplation without words. Ⓐ


Jackson Pollock

book REVIEW

Looking Beyond the "Culture of Poverty"

▶ *The Rat That Got Away: a Memoir* by Allen Jones and Mark Naison

MICHAEL PARTIS

"In the 21st century, the best anti-poverty program around is a world-class education."

When President Barack Obama spoke those words during his 2010 State of the Union address, it marked a profound shift in how education and poverty is handled in the United States. The President made clear (here and in several other remarks and speeches) that poverty reduction was best sought through academic attainment and achievement.

Yet, Obama's statement followed in the footsteps of a political, ideological, and policy approach to poverty which began to be laid down in the late 1960s. It parallels President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society and "War on Poverty" platforms for economic improvement; and as Johnson did, puts education at the center of the social project. When campaigning for the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson said before Congress, "Poverty has many roots, but the taproot is ignorance."

Education and poverty have gone on to be two of the most hotly contested, often-discussed topics in 2010. To understand the ways in which it has been talked about would require a lengthy explanation. The nascent, and most pervasive, themes though have been: who receives the highest quality education in this country, and how does poverty stay entrenched in certain places and certain people for so long.

Bluntly though, the conversation truly focuses on: why do so many schools in poor Black communities perform so poorly by most testing and assessment measures? Why do so many urban Black neighborhoods contain overwhelming economic poverty that sometimes stretches across generations?

Two stars have emerged as the answer to these vexing issues: charter schools and the Harlem Children Zone.

Charter schools have been at the center of a long, protracted battle over the nature of schools—both their educational purpose and organizational structure. Its history is intrinsically linked to desegregation of public schools; battles over community control of school boards and operations; arguments against and for vocational education; and the politics of mayoral control. Charters enter the educational debates of today through what has been two polarizing, divisive topics: teachers and their unions; and the privatization of public education.

And so for the first time since 1983 and the publication of *A Nation At Risk*, education reform has been a central issue in public life. It shook up the media enough that NBC hosted a Fall Education Summit, devoting an entire week to on the subject of education reform. Education has become such a rallying cry that even Oprah Winfrey dedicated two shows in one week to the topic. Casted as protagonists this time have been "crusaders:" advocates that are characterized as tough and taking no prisoners i.e. Superintendants like Michelle Rhee and Joel Klein; and proactive elected officials such as Newark Mayor Corey Booker. There are the wealthy entrepreneurs (i.e. Facebook founder and C.E.O. Mark Zuckerberg) and business moguls like Bill Gates who's money and clout raises the profile of affiliated schools and educators; and entertainers such as R&B artist John Legend who attempt to engage the debate through its social commentary and urgency, while also providing similar clout, publicity, and finance as Zuckerberg and Gates. Legend has stated widely that "education reform is the civil rights issue of our time."

Tying education to fighting poverty, and using charter schools as the model for educational best practices rides this wave of sentiment. Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) and its CEO Geoffrey Canada have become among the most recognizable faces in this "poverty-fighting" work, with its most important affirmation coming from President Barack Obama, who during his campaign said Harlem Children's Zone is "an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck antipoverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children." So convinced is Obama, he included it in his 2010 Fiscal Year Budget Proposal, with $10 million dollars set aside for twenty cities to replicate HCZ's "Promise Neighborhoods" model. Within the HCZ model, charter schools named *Promise Academies* push the organization's academic agenda and are at the center of an important research question famously put forth by recent research from the Brookings Foundation: do social programs make a difference in educational outcomes? Namely, should we spend federal money on them?

Thus the academic performance of *Promise Academies* and other charters are linked to arguments over what should be the social investment that a government makes in addressing inequality. Does a "rising tide lift all boats"? Do we need an activist government to engage and interject in these issues, or is there a need to recalibrate our politics?

This question becomes paramount when looking at the context of a particular social issue. While poverty, "anti-poverty," and education has been weaved together as a framework for lifting those with less, the weaving still resonates with less comfortable connotation: deficiency and pathology namely.

Indeed a work that can inform our understanding of this matrix of social, political, and economic issues is imperative. Especially a work that shines light on the contours of populations much discussed about, but not heard from in their proper context. James Baldwin wrote that "History is not a procession of illustrious people. It's about what happens to a people. Millions of anonymous people is what history is about." To not keep them anonymous, and to recognize that they are not voiceless, has been an important project of the Twentieth and Twenty-First century.

The attention we pay to the lives of individuals, how they tell their stories, and the way we incorporate them into discussions of poverty, education, and other social issues is important.

Allen Jones' story is the type of inspirational, "coming of age" account that inner-city teachers, youth workers, and scholars clamor for. From growing up poor in the South Bronx's Paterson housing projects, Jones finds economic and social success in Europe. A well-known New York City schoolboy street basketball standout, in adulthood he transitions into an accomplished German banker. And after several years as a local drug dealer, and participating in the emerging gangster culture of the late 1960's, Allen shifts his attention back to the moral foundations that were central to his childhood: family and church. The events of Allen Jones' life point to redemptive possibilities that can be achieved in spite of early life mistakes and obstacles. In this way, knowing who he is, can help today's young people know who they can be.

But the totality of Jones' years is more than a collection of life lessons.. Emanating from the Bronx African American History Project's oral history research, Naison and Jones provide an account which is historically true but also intensely personal. The elements that make his memoir so powerful are the poignancy of his experiences and the complexity of his journey. What we learn about the South Bronx and its residents is powerful.

Allen Jones' life in the projects dramatically alters the standard perception of public housing. The projects have become synonymous with the concept of urban decay, and its residents with the underclass—with both placing the blame on the people in public housing for the literal and figurative deterioration of its space into "ghettos." The South Bronx, who according to Jill Jones' *South Bronx, Rising* has the highest concentration of public housing in the United States of America, becomes emblematic of this plight.

The Rat That Got Away successfully resists and complicates that stereotype. Jones' memoir captures a time when the Patterson Projects was a place where families believed they could thrive. The Patterson Community Center, local churches, public schools, and the Police Athletic League ran an assortment of programs that kept kids like Jones "home exhausted" and without "the energy to get into trouble." A group of mentors and professionals all ran these centers and programs. Most importantly, Jones tells us how these people and institutions were of and for the community; all located either inside or in close proximity to the housing projects, and ran by local residents.

The memoir's valuable contribution is its insight on how neighborhoods and communities change. Jones life trajectory brings readers through the complicated and tumultuous decade of the 1960's. Chapters like "The Summer of Unrest: 1964" and "The Streets are Alive: Summer of '65" allude to a well-documented time of strife and turmoil the country endured, and Jones' story tells us how the hardships of the Vietnam War and proliferation of heroin use and sale devas-

Yom Kippur, 2010

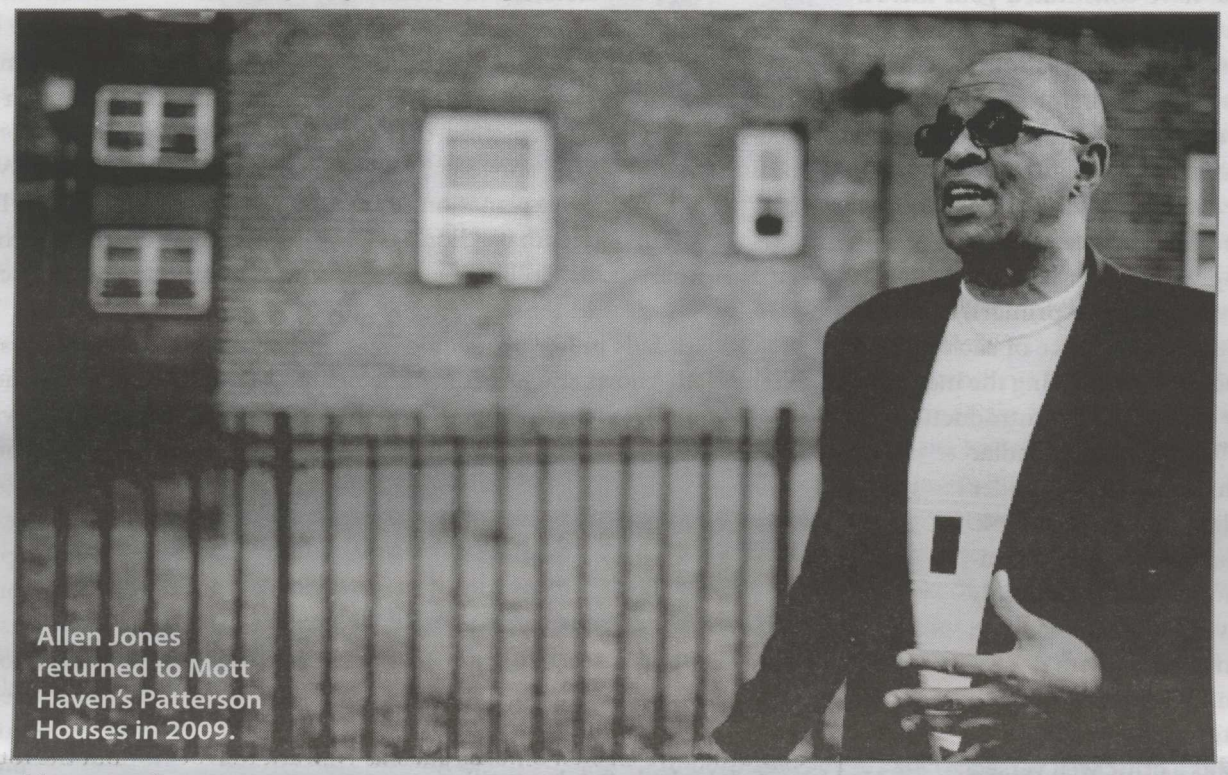
The beautiful prostitute
On the train
Handed me a sunflower.
It was plastic.
I kept it for years.
That was the day
I changed my last name,
Taking his,
After there was no more
Dent in his pillow.
Today, I atone, like
Every day, but this day
By a body of water,
Though I am not Jewish.
It is the same water
Where the woman took
Her last breath a month
Ago, and it is creepy,
Yes, but it is also fitting
Somehow. The Jersey
Air is cool and crisp.
My glasses broke, so
I had to get new ones.
I can see again, hallelujah!
Now I look at everything,
An acorn, my mother's face.
I don't understand anything,
I really don't, but I go
On, reading books that
Are too hard for me,
And somewhere in this
Breeze, I might find
Him in the fossilizing
Murmurs of corn stalks.
Have the stalks always
Been this high? The
Thistles always this light?

Noelle Kocot

tated New York City's Black and Latino communities. The 70's were no different as Jones narrates the tragic toll "Bitch Queen Heroin" takes on places like Patterson; and about people being "unable to resist the forces that were tearing apart black neighborhoods in the 70's." Most sharp is his observation on the matter: "America was killing us, but we were also killing each other." Allen's stories of selling and using drugs attest to this.

But it is here where the book's strength emanates: the social commentary and personal reflection that accompanies the timeline. Allen Jones provides a memoir which speaks to the particular world-view, political consciousness, and life outlook of a Black man who lived through one of America's most significant periods. After traveling through several European countries as a professional basketball player, Jones sees the place race occupies in other social environments. Upon his return, he juxtaposes his U.S. life with his experiences in Europe, and with brutal honesty shares his thoughts:

> "The home I was returning to had treated me, along with all my black brothers and sisters, both living and dead, like slaves, outlaws, second-class citizens, and worse. I knew that part of the reason for this was the history of our country. America had been founded by brutal, self-serving men who were concerned only about gaining wealth and didn't care how they did it. They killed the Indians for their land and enslaved Africans to help them build their empire, and…I was seeing the long-term effects of what they did…Indians were not even seen in most American cities, and the vast majority of black people, when they were working at all, were doing the lowest-paying jobs. Racism was a way of life in America."



Allen Jones returned to Mott Haven's Patterson Houses in 2009.

It is this incredible candor that makes reading Jones' memoir so rewarding. However, his frankness can, at times, be unnerving. . When forced to recount his involvement in such criminal endeavors as drug selling, robbery, and mugging, the author provides detailed reports of his exploits; providing the image of a drug and crime culture very different from that which pervades the media today. Yet while Jones provides plenty of details about his criminal activity (as should be expected in any memoir promoting itself as "honest"), Jones does not give us a full account of his personal decision-making process. He recounts how in his childhood peer pressure and the desire to be accepted by older "down brothers" pushed him to mischief and petty crimes. But those choices, and the serious ones that follow, are often clouded and subverted by claims of a "street code:"

> "While I can't defend my actions from that point, I can try to explain what was behind them. My way of thinking had become shaped completely by the street. I knew the rules I was living by and had gotten to the point where I didn't question them. I knew that Gotham might seem like a high place, but it can become very small when you owe someone money on the streets. And I knew the maxim: 'You pay or you die.'"

Does the way of the street engulf and envelop a person's cognitive processes to the point where nothing outside exists? For those who have been completely immersed, bred, and nurtured in this lifestyle, perhaps. But for those, like Allen Jones, who's frame of reference goes beyond this, and is steeped in parents, Christianity, and a family that taught him "good table manners and basic social graces," the code of the street explanations are not enough. Much like Malcolm X does in his autobiography, or Richard Wright's Bigger in *Native Son*, the decision making processes that informed Jones' choices deserve a greater amount of context.

This is where we as scholars, social workers, community organizers, conscientious citizens, and all the sort need to incorporate *The Rat That Got Away* into our work. The parallels between what Allen Jones faced then and what young, poor people of color are facing today are striking.. How do we cultivate young athletes beyond their physical activities, while also preparing them for their academic and social responsibilities? Can community institutions that train and employ their residents help keep a generation of young people on task and pointed towards success? How can we create organizations and maintain networks that provide assistance, mentorship, and guidance even when adolescents and teenagers stray down the wrong path? And are the prospects for success so dire for Blacks in our current urban landscape that leaving the community where you are from is the only option for success? This memoir gives plenty of fodder for us to delve into these profoundly important and pressing questions.

For these issues are not just important for those looking to "fix the South Bronx." They are crucial for the creation of a more just, equitable society. Jones' life gives testament to the redeeming power that determination, perseverance, and repentance can play in navigating a set of impoverished circumstances; and to the quite vital role that family, mentors, and community institutions play in shaping the lives of young Blacks. But his remarkable individual story is the impetus for questioning why such extraordinary feats are needed for not just success, but for survival; and not for just anybody, but for our society's most racialized, stigmatized, and marginalized. *The Rat That Got Away* forces us to think about how to make this American society a more just place.

What is striking about *The Rat That Got Away* is the degree to which formal schools and institutions touched and affected Jones' life. He is dismissed or transferred from several schools throughout his primary and secondary education, mostly public schools, all in the South Bronx. Yet Jones does not claim that the inadequacy or inefficiency of the schools is what hindered his life chances. He does not blame them. Rather it is the enrichment programs and educational activities that supported him. And further it was the people who ran these programs and facilitated those activities that were the greatest influences in his life.

Jones and a majority of those in his neighborhood were not "Waiting for Superman." Their life-chances were not determined by "The Lottery," but by a comprehensive, concerted set of programs and activities, staffed mostly by people from the local neighborhood, who provided skills and exposed Jones to important lessons that he would use later in his life to negotiate the structural inequalities and social stratifications of America. Disorganization was not a hallmark of his community, and education was not the sole reason he avoided poverty in adulthood.

How we analyze life outcomes; how we understand life trajectories; the ways we formulate indicators, best practices, and solutions; these are three areas where careful consideration must be given. There will not be any one solution to poverty. Indeed any approach will need to be comprehensive and concerted. Schools are vital, education is invaluable; knowledge and learning are critical to understanding, improving, preserving, and accepting a complex set of issues within our society. This is something that often cannot be seen in a two year educational experiment. It cannot be quantified and assessed by analyzing inputs and outputs; and a cost-benefit analysis cannot evaluate all benefits that can and will be gained. Allen Jones' *life* is a good example of this. Real change does not occur over the course of a few years, but over the course of a life. How we problem-solve current issues while keeping sight of incremental improvements needs to be interjected in our present discussions on educational reform.

"Place" situates the geographic dimension to our experiences. Urban neighborhoods with larger Black populations are colored with particular dimensions, which temper the Black urban experience. Indeed it is different, and how we handle difference requires careful consideration. The South Bronx neighborhood and the community of Patterson houses from the middle of the twentieth century Jones describes indeed were multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural; with two-parent families; and residents that were poor, working-poor, and working-class. This mosaic composition is counter to popular generalization about urban poverty and urban communities; further it should provide an important intervention for more diachronic analysis of urban neighborhoods. What's happened over time? While discussions over evolution, diffusion, and the like may seem either cliché or too bounded, the importance of theoretical framework must be emphasized. Histories such as Mr. Jones, ethnographies, and journalism, and all types of "recording" and "capturing" becomes the archive. This addresses one of the most pressing questions for policy-makers and others concerned about poverty—causation. *What causes poverty? Why are people poor?* Reevaluating how we research, think, and analyze these questions is imperative.

Finally, we need to examine cultural explanations, and how the culture concept is discussed and conceptualized. Accepting that our society is pluralistic does not relegate us to accepting relativism. Nor does seeking to understand behavior and thought imply or require being reductional, normative, or heterogenizing. Egalitarian notions of multi-cultural harmony must be tempered and critiqued, but need not be dismissed. Difference and power have the ability to bound and separate. But a polemical stance of unity and togetherness should not be characterized as immature. Does not the work on identity politics, social movements, and human rights provide insight on how to carefully analysis these issues, while still providing some sense how the actors involved see and negotiate the complexities?

As the culture of poverty begins to reappear as an explanation of poverty, it is paramount that these issues of handling difference, boundedness, pluralism, and relativism be thoughtfully and rigorously interrogated. Pathology may be ill-equipped for explaining human behavior. But we must not be afraid to seek answers to why; to look for causes; to provide explanations; to strive to solve the problems of contemporary society, and in this case urban neighborhoods with high poverty and poorly performing schools. But we must not fetishize difference to where it prevents us from looking at a politics of togetherness. And we cannot be so vulgar in solutions that apathy, paternalism, and deficiency mar our way forward. Ⓐ

book REVIEW

The Final Words

Helen Vendler on the Last Books of Five American Poets

▶ *Last Looks, Last Books: Stevens, Plath, Lowell, Bishop, Merrill* by Helen Vendler

In the opening of *Last Looks, Last Books: Stevens, Plath, Lowell, Bishop, Merrill*, Helen Vendler describes an Irish custom called "taking the last look." "When you find yourself bedridden, with death approaching," she writes, "you rouse yourself with effort and, for the last time, make the rounds of your territory. North, East, South, West, as you contemplate the places and things that have constituted your life. After this last task, you can return to your bed and die."

It is precisely the making of these rounds and the contemplation of one's territory before death that concerns Vendler as she examines the last works of five of the greatest American poets to write in the twentieth century: Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Merrill. But *Last Looks, Last Books* is not simply a loose exploration of the last books of these five poets; nor is it primarily an interpretation of final poems as evidence of each individual poet's own psychology when facing the inevitable. As Vendler elegantly explains in her introduction, her topic is really about "the strange binocular style [these poets] must invent to render the reality contemplated in that last look. The poet, still alive but aware of the imminence of death, wishes to enact that deeply shadowed but still vividly alert moment; but how can the manner of a poem do justice to both the looming presence of death and the unabated vitality of spirit?"

Vendler's dexterity as a critic well versed in literary biography allows her to offer a new, original, and singularly productive interpretation of these five last books: *The Rock* (Stevens), *Ariel* (Plath), *Day by Day* (Lowell), *Geography III* (Bishop), and *A Scattering of Salts* (Merrill). In all of these last texts Vendler is concerned with a specific concrete theme: "the poems I cite illustrate with particular distinction both the rewards and the hazards of presenting life and death as mutually, and demandingly, real within a single poem's symbolic system." She identifies a fundamental "problem of style" which poets must face at the end of their life; most simply, how to deal with a "poem that wishes to be equally fair to both life and death at once."

To illustrate exactly what she means, Vendler turns to a poem which demonstrates at least one possible solution to this "problem of style." Her example, "Christmas Tree" by James Merrill [see inset], illuminates beautifully the "binocular style" which is her fixation. Because part of her interest lies in how poets represent the "unintelligibility presented to us by death," it is especially important that Vendler concretely present the moves in these last books which pair up the experience of life and memory, and the trepidation of approaching death. Happily, she bases the exploration of each poet first and foremost in extremely careful and deft close reading.

Merrill's poem actually bookends *Last Looks, Last Books*. It is a concrete poem, meaning the shape of the lines form the symbolic image at the heart of the poem. Most simply, "It is a Christmas tree missing its left half. The forest tree is already dead, because it has previously been cut down. But in the house, it gives every appearance, with its still-green needles, of being alive." Merrill was fatally ill with AIDS for some time before his death, and Vendler reads this poem as a sublimely fitting metaphor for the dying poet, who attempts to reconcile life and death in the "binoculars" created by the poem itself.

Taking yet another "last look," Vendler argues that Plath's *Ariel* rides largely on the tension between dramatizing and understating the traumas of Plath's external and internal life. Vendler identifies how form changes content, not only orders it: "The effects of death on Plath's style were… at times disastrous. Melodrama and the depiction of violence [are] restrained in the poem above only by Plath's sonnet rigidities." Vendler's explanation of the preoccupations in Plath's juvenilia—"honesty of perception, clarity of analysis, discipline of expression, and moral strength"—serves as a useful framework to examine where Plath fails in her own game (and, importantly, where Plath knows she has failed at reaching her poetic potential). When she turns to Plath's later poems, such as "Berck-Plage," she is able to articulate how the abandonment of Plath's previous crutches (especially, for example, her use of the first person narrator) allows her to break stylistically wide open in her last poems. In examining her use of tessitura, noun phrases, adverbial sentence fragments and what she calls "antiphonal shadow play," Vendler offers Plath the type of reading which she deserves but rarely gets; one focused on the remarkable prosodic dexterity and edge fitting one of America's most important poets.

One advantage of Vendler's approach—which foregrounds the stylistic problem of uniting celebration and mourning, and how the "binocular style" resolves this problem lyrically—is that it allows Vendler to explore the work of these poets in nontraditional, complex ways. While Vendler acknowledges the fame of a poem like Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death," in which the speaker imagines death coming to her house like a suitor, and driving her through a landscape which symbolizes her life, she is actually much less interested in poems which successfully represent the powerlessness or terror of mortality, than she is with those which are struggling to capture the connections between life and death, how, as Stevens wrote "Death is the Mother of Beauty." For this reason, she takes up discussions of poets like John Donne, for instance, less than one might expect. As she acknowledges, Donne's oeuvre is dominated with powerful poems about death, largely marked by spiritual crisis, but she demonstrates that, in their morbidity, Donne's poems fail to achieve the "binocular effect" she is exploring in this book). Rather, she writes with admirable clarity that Donne's efforts in a poem like "Hymne to God My God, In My Sickness" is to "obscure the enormous differences between the sickroom and God's room"; essentially, that he is too afraid to make the backwards look required for a stylistically successful elegy of one's own.

It may seem odd to describe the poetry of a dying poet as primarily an attempt to navigate the "stylistic difficulty" of exploring one's own feelings and imaginings around death while still alive. It is easy to concede that creatively depicting the intersection of one's own life with death must be difficult emotionally. But what does it mean to say that first and foremost, the intersection represents a "stylistic difficulty"? Does this differ from any other poetic topic which involves the confrontation of two different paths—love and loss, for example, or fortune and calamity? Vendler convinces us this is so, and thus the foundation for this book ultimately is very successful; for the language of mourning and the language of celebration are markedly different, both in sound and in meaning (consider the funeral dirge versus the marching band). We use the same word, "luck," regardless of its preceding adjectives "good" or "bad." But the same can't be said for the language of living and of grief; in particular, one's own life and one's own death. Most fundamentally, *Last Looks, Last Books* attempts to understand and explain poems which arise out of "a creative predicament faced by poets unable to assume an afterlife"; Vendler's collection makes admirable strides toward that project. Ⓐ

Christmas Tree

To be
Brought down at last
From the cold sighing mountain
Where I and the others
Had been fed, looked after, kept still,
Meant, I knew—of course I knew—
That it would be only a matter of weeks,
That there was nothing more to do.
Warmly they took me in, made much of me,
The point from the start was to keep my spirits up.
I could assent to that. For honestly,
It did help to be wound in jewels, to send
Their colors flashing forth from vents in the deep
Fragrant sable that cloaked me head to foot.
Over me then they wove a spell of shining—
Purple and silver chains, eavesdropping tinsel,
Amulets, milagros: software of silver,
A heart, a little girl, a Model T,
Two staring eyes. The angels, trumpets, BUD and BEA
(The children's names) in clownlike capitals,
Somewhere a music box whose tiny song
Played and replayed I ended before long
By loving. And in shadow behind me, a primitive IV
To keep the show going. Yes, yes, what lay ahead
Was clear: The stripping, the cold street, my chemicals
Plowed back into Earth for lives to come—
No doubt a blessing, a harvest, but one that doesn't bear,
Now or ever, dwelling upon. To have grown so thin.
Needles and bone. The little boy's hands meeting
About my spine. The mother's voice: Holding up wonderfully!
No dread. No bitterness. The end beginning. Today's
    Dusk room aglow
    For the last time
    With candlelight.
    Faces love lit,
    Gifts underfoot.
Still to be so poised, so
Receptive. Still to recall, to praise.

James Merrill

Puccini for the People

The Project Opera of Manhattan Takes on the Met

▶ *coópera: Project Opera of Manhattan.*

JEREMY RAFAL

New York City is undeniably the center for the arts. With over 2,000 arts and cultural organizations, there is never a shortage of events at any point of the year. It is no surprise, then, that artists from all over the world flock to this cultural center to take part in the vibrant cultural scene the city has to offer. Many young artists and performers move to the city to work on their craft and pursue their dreams. A select few land roles at major opera companies like the Metropolitan Opera or an art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, but most spend years, sometimes decades, trying to establish themselves. But there are also some that create their own opportunities. For soprano Miriam Browning-Nance and mezzo-soprano Laura Virella, this is exactly what they did. Instead of waiting for an opportunity to happen, they decided to be daring and started their own opera company called *coópera: Project Opera of Manhattan* designed for emerging young artists like themselves to collaborate on producing full operas.

Miriam and Laura are two of the many opera singers that came to the city to study and eventually audition for opera companies. They were the typical students in the voice program at Manhattan School of Music. In 2006, they planned on spending their summer break with an opera program in Italy to work on their Italian language skills and study an operatic role. Laura was getting ready to work on the role of Cherubino from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and Rosina from Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Seviglia.* Miriam was working on the role of the Countess from *Le nozze di Figaro* as well. Although the Italian opera program featured reputable teachers and excellent coaches, the program did not offer the students a chance to perform the operas in a full staged production. Yet, Laura and Miriam longed to perform their roles as part of the complete opera.

Before long, the two artists sat down together and thought of a radical idea. They decided to combine

Mezzo-soprano Laura Virella, who's also *coópera*'s artistic director.

the money that they were going to spend for the summer program and put together a full production of the operas themselves. The first thing they did was to put together a cast. Meagan Brus, who played the role of Susanna in *Le nozze,* says "I was sitting in the computer lab at Manhattan School of Music when I first heard Laura talking about an opera company that she and her partner were thinking of starting. She asked me if I wanted to sing in their summer production and I was so excited that I basically begged!" Miriam and Laura quickly found that Meagan was not the only one that was excited about the idea. Many of their colleagues were enthusiastic about the new opera company, and they were able to put together a cast for both of the operas in no time. Putting together the orchestra was also a breeze. "I stood in front of my Music History class asking the students if they would play for an opera. I passed around a sign up sheet and the response was overwhelming," said Laura. Other artists were also very willing to join forces with Miriam and Laura. Randall Stewart, founder and artistic director of the Baltimore Sinfonietta, became the conductor for both operas. When they approached playwright and director Chris Levya, he immediately was on board without any second thoughts. Even their neighbors became involved with the production including publicist Kathleen Reynolds, graphic designer Nancy Sylbert, and the world famous professional opera and theatre photographer Ken Howard.

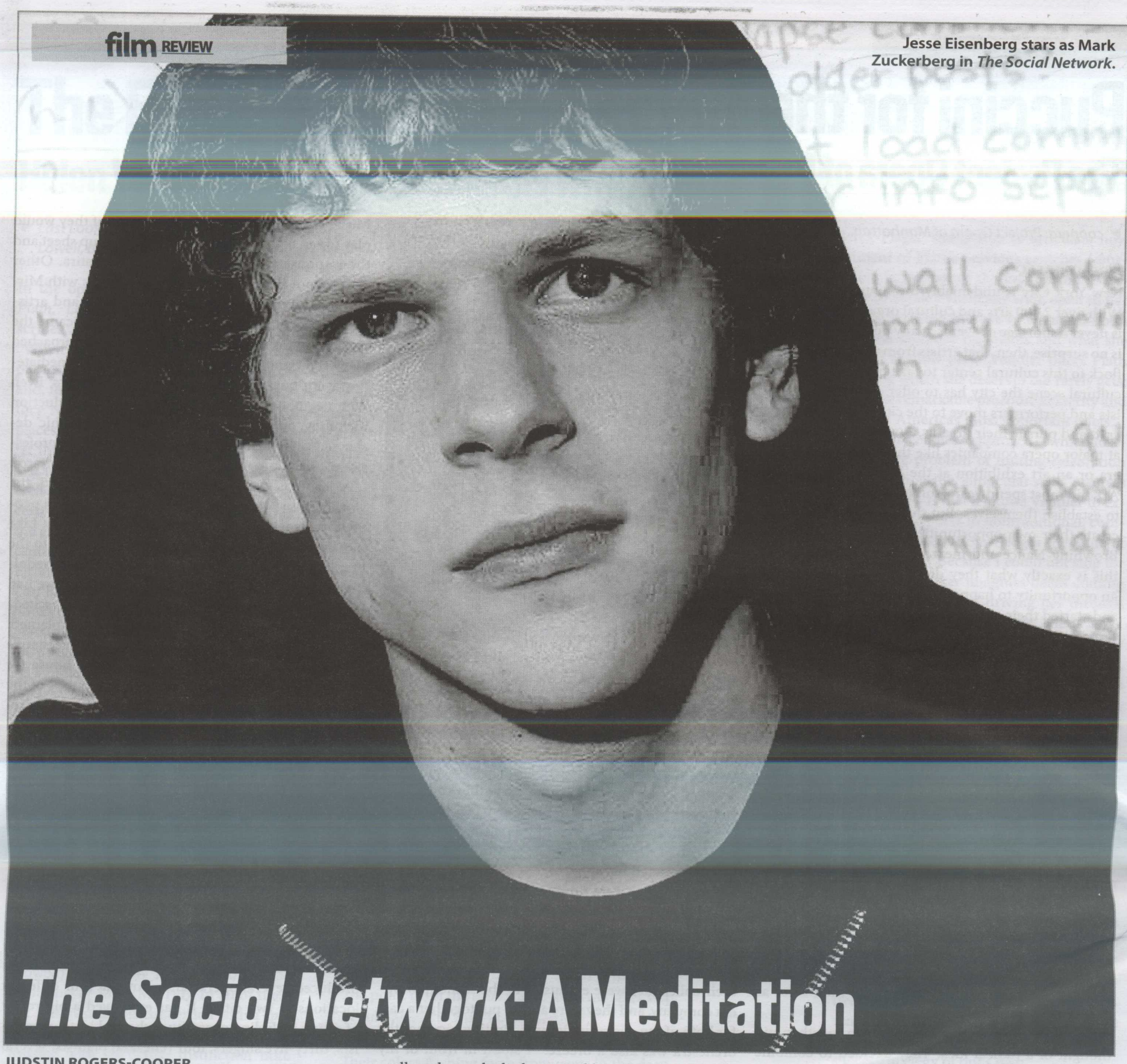
As soon as everybody agreed to be on board, the work began. The music rehearsals were held in people's apartments throughout the whole summer. Like most productions, there were some challenges to the preparation process. "There was always the scheduling problem. People had their own lives, and we had to work our rehearsals around everybody's schedules. But we made the best out of it," Laura explained. Meagan Brus said, "I remember rehearsing recitative sections for hours in Laura and Miriam's house for *Figaro,* and we had to compete with the sounds of the trains and the NYC summer heat." All the music rehearsals for the singers were done in a couple months. But the staging rehearsals were all done within a week. "I remember staging *Figaro* in four days, one day for each of the acts," said Laura. The orchestra also had a couple days to put the music together before the opening night. Despite the challenges, the preparation process was a memorable and rewarding experience for everyone. Flutist and bassoonist Dirk Wels said, "I enjoyed meeting and collaborating with talented and enthusiastic musicians and crew members in a professionally organized setting."

Since then, *coópera: Project Opera of Manhattan* has flowered into a very active opera company. It has produced several operas and shows at four different locations in two cities. It has employed a big roster of artists including over fifty orchestral instrumentalists, thrty-five singers, four rehearsal pianists, several directors, stage managers, conductors, graphic designers, a movement coach, production designers, costume designers, publicists, reporters, and even middle-schoolers as part of the opera chorus. Every year these artists keep coming back for more and have formed a small community of artists working together. The company also became the resident opera company of The Players' at Gramercy Park and often worked closely together with John Martello, the executive director of The Players' Foundation. They have also expanded their productions beyond opera by putting together vocal and instrumental recitals, and most recently, a cabaret. In addition to their upcoming production of Bernstein's *Candide* next year, the company plans to launch a performing arts series featuring the beautiful Bechstein grand piano that The Players' has recently acquired.

Adam Cavagnaro and Laura Virella in a scene from the *coópera* production of Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, 2009.

Despite the success and growth of the company, Laura and Miriam want to keep the company rooted

Continued on page 23



Jesse Eisenberg stars as Mark Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*.

The Social Network: A Meditation

JUDSTIN ROGERS-COOPER

One of the first glimpses of *The Social Network* came in July, when an early trailer appeared on YouTube. It was a music video of sorts, featuring a children's choir singing Radiohead's first single, "Creep," over images of typical Facebook photos and status updates—the latter typed into the blank text box in faux 'real time,' as in the recent Google ads. The pictures were the standard utopian scenes of youthful recreation that mark the many related genres of online photos: all-too-perfect snapshots of daytrips, candid clips of backyard BBQs, careless grins showcasing the finest balance of composed spontaneity. We see anonymous smiling faces frozen in scenes resembling an Urban Outfitters catalogue, which is what Facebook photos have essentially become.

They pop on-screen and disappear the way you click through a friend's party. *Click, click, click*, and entire chains of happy days blossom and fade in split seconds. What takes hours to plan, document, sort, and upload then provides your third-grade best-friend with less than twenty seconds of entertainment on their iPhone, 2000 miles away and twenty years later.

A cursor arrow clicks on "add friend" and "confirm friend," while recent graduates smile, arms wrapped around each other. Then a moody profile shot appears, with a hand reaching toward the camera lens and covering it. This is the other genre of the social network: the solo pose of self-representation, as tired as a freshman year art project. It signals an interruption to the fun. Suddenly someone types on a friend's wall, and reveals the burrowed longing nestled in the heart of Facebook users everywhere: *where are you*?

Instructively, the choir answers through the point-blank confession of Thom Yorke's stripped down loner: "I want you to notice when I'm not around." What was grunge pathology becomes a prescient analysis of the emotions fueling the dot-com boom still to come. One asks to know, one wants to show, and billions of dollars follow. Time, distance, and desire converge in new wires that no longer require real-time communication between the curious and lonely, such as a phone-call, but instead function like a mass email to everyone. Connecting everyone is Facebook—a corporation that, as founder Mark Zuckerburg exclaims mid-way through the film *The Social Network*, takes the entire experience of college and puts it online.

The Radiohead lyrics overlaying these otherwise ubiquitous images are beautiful and eerie. They stamp what is perhaps a central and controversial theme of the film: that Facebook is not a technology of communication and connection, but one that exists to exploit alienation and exclusion. Any brouhaha about the truthfulness of the film's representation of Zuckerburg is completely beside the point. Alienation and exclusion are the subjects of *The Social Network*, directed by David Fincher, and what appear again and again in the brilliant performance by Jesse Eisenberg, who plays Zuckerburg as the film chronicles his years before and after Harvard earlier this decade.

The riveting opening scene is an awkwardly dark conversation about social status between Zuckerburg and his date, Erica (Rooney Mara). Zuckerburg wants to join the elite Harvard social clubs where the children of the rich and privileged mingle, party, have sex, and build the affective bonds that will connect their professional and social networks for the rest of their careers. Erica is incredulous and more than a little disturbed by Zuckerburg's open and cynical ambition. Over the course of the discussion they break up, and Zuckerburg return to his dorm to humiliate her in a blog, and subsequently invent a "hot or not" Harvard website with the help of his only friend, Eduardo Saverin. The site crashes the server.

The desire that Zuckerburg first channeled into a hierarchy of hotness is the same that animates the arrows that click "add friend." Behind the spectral glow of screens and photos are the missing bodies that these images and updates represent and display. This desire has many gradations and circulates with different intentions. It flows and morphs far beyond the urge to peek through the binoculars at the neighbors. Facebook isn't about looking at strangers. Weirdly, it's about looking at your friends and family, and also the people you only kind of know. It provides intimacy where intimacy is desired.

This desire for intimacy doesn't necessarily come from lonely people. It doesn't expose an overflow of information. It reveals the infinite desires that bodies create. It connects a disconnected, insatiable generation. It reveals that we can never be connected enough, despite our protests that we are too visible.

Zuckerburg's loneliness and isolation inadvertent-

ly produced a technology to distribute the infinite waves of desire that flow through all relationships. This is in part because users themselves extended the logic of college friend profiles and began using them to mediate all social relationships. This caused some weirdness a couple years ago, when recent graduates found friend requests from their parents, or from "friends" they made in dance class the summer after eighth grade.

Discussions about the flattening of the past, the meaning of "friendship," or the impracticalities of contemporary privacy miss the essential point of Facebook's expansion. The growth of this entire company was propelled almost entirely by the desires of people everywhere to connect to one another. The company's sole task, as Zuckerbug realizes in the film, was merely to provide channels to define, categorize, and capture that desire. It didn't need advertising or need to convince anyone to join, aside from a few recalcitrant and independently minded individuals.

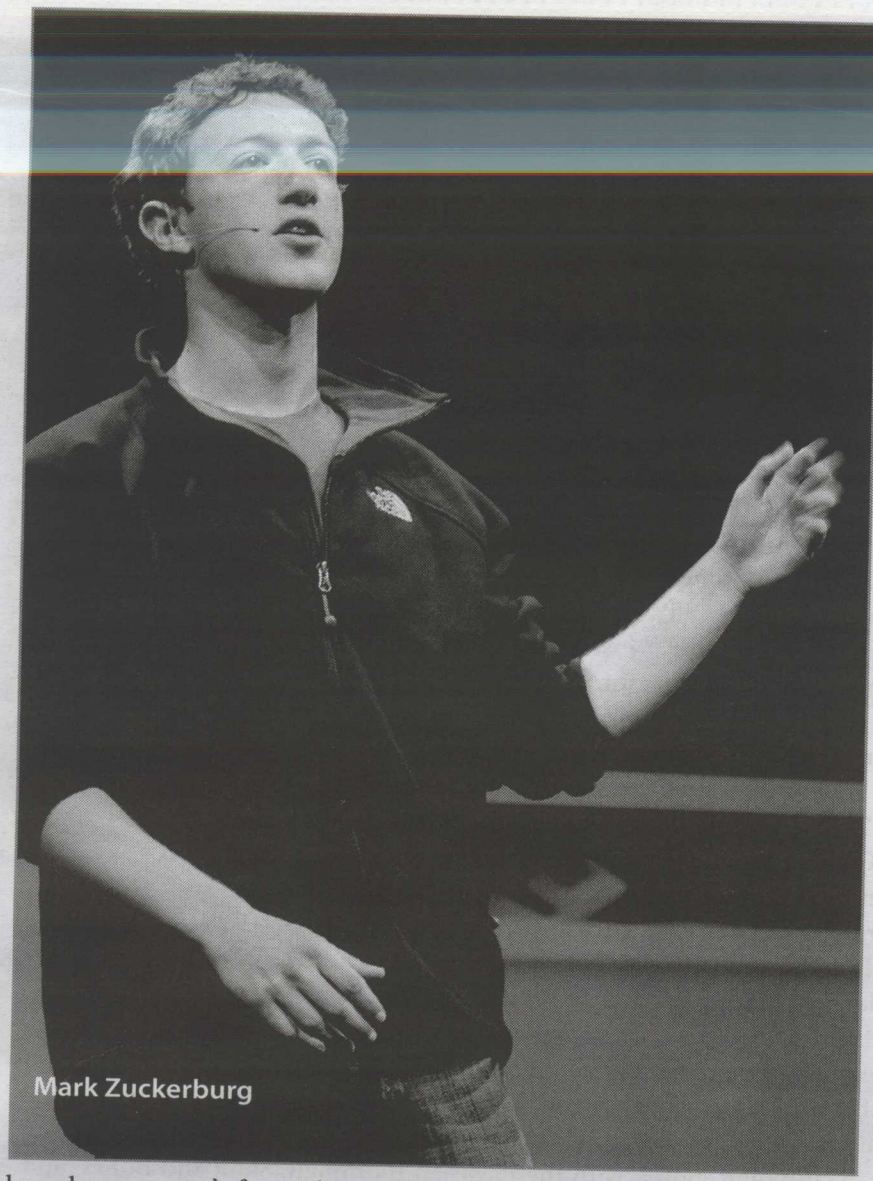
No one had to sell anyone else on Facebook, or Myspace, or even Friendster. The purpose of social networks was and remains obvious. People need to connect because they feel disconnected. They're alienated. They're distant from the people they love and care about. We live in a culture and in an economy that demands we act in our own self-interests. At best, some of us are able to live with people we love. Many don't, or can't.

Facebook—like communications technology in general—reflects a need that goes beyond putting the experience of college online. In the film, Zuckerburg uses Facebook to make friends, even as it alienates him from the one or two he already has. Facebook, then, isn't so much a technology of connection as it is a revelation about the fractured and mediated nature of contemporary friendship.

It's not a sign we're more connected than ever—not quite. It's a sign our bodies have never been more isolated from the bodies we want to be with. At the same time, the bodies we want have never been so visible. Facebook has more in common with porn than one might think. Not coincidently, Zuckerburg stumbled onto the idea only after he created a "hot or not" site that crashed the Harvard servers. And that site came only after he was dumped.

In the film, Zuckerburg wants to be inside the Harvard clubs, and he wants to be with the girl he offends in the opening scene. The other half of that desire, however, is the desire for status, since it's also *status* that makes the otherwise undesirable desirable. Zuckerburg can't rely on an athletic body, and he doesn't have the charisma that is so valuable in a US social culture that more and more resembles US corporate culture, where who you know, how energetic you are, and how positive you seem has as much to do with your success as talent or hard work.

The most important function of the "status update" is that it literally signals a *status* update. One's friends


Mark Zuckerburg

have become one's fans. The psychology of celebrity has been democratized – it's no accident that the site rose to fame alongside the success of reality television and Youtube. Facebook is the logical extension of MTV's *The Real World*. It's a site where status and desire intersect, and those intersections are also where the film engineers its plot.

Status and desire are inseparable and fickle—and profitable. And so it's impossible to separate what's creepy and desperate about Facebook from its utility as an instrument of self-production and self-promotion. As an instrument for self-production, Facebook primarily encourages users to promote themselves and their way of life. Its function is in that sense reproductive of status, of class life, and of the digital architecture that provides actual maps to the bars, apartments, houses, concerts, and restaurants that physically sustain and excite the body. It's one giant "app" for friendship.

To the extent that friendship accompanies the rituals that nourish and pleasure the body, Facebook is the prosthetic skin that envelopes collective relationships. It's become the digital skin of friendship that allows us to graze each other from afar, like a touch in the hall.

As such, the site is perhaps the ultimate product of the neo-liberal era of privatization and modern corporate power. Facebook has privatized social communication, class status, and, at the extreme point of this logic, all the human relationships that use it. It's done this by monetizing friendship itself. It has turned the last location without corporate branding into a space of corporate intervention. Facebook is the first privartely held company to capitalize on relationships between people in such a way, and not simply the relationship between people and products, or between people and celebrities that sell products.

Embedded too within the company's 25 billion dollar value is also the free promotion of products, companies, and businesses that people can "like," and thus promote for free. It's a site that captures the entire ethereal chain of viral marketing and solidifies it. Facebook has digitized desire. It's channeled affections into categories. It has discovered how to formalize relationships by setting up a system for their public legitimation: one is "in a relationship" or "engaged to," or "married to."

In addition to providing a space for individuals to upload their lives—to digitize their values and desires and turn them into usable information and media for other companies—Facebook has allowed consumers disconnected from the production, promotion, and even consumption of products to push those products for free.

People push for what they "like" as naturally as they push to promote themselves and their friends. This is the privatization of advertising, propelled by human desire, and thus inaugurates the creation of a new kind of consumer-producer. One has become the ad for oneself. In one's pictures one can create an ad campaign for his or her own lifestyle. One links this lifestyle to products. In some sense, Facebook has become the marketplace for selling our lives to each other. This is how we reproduce ourselves: we make ourselves desirable, and we link our affections to sites that ultimately make money.

Mark Zuckerburg turned his desire to be intimately close to desirable bodies into a technology that allowed everyone to do the same. He made billions turning friendship into a brand. Using that technology, we made profiles that essentially function like brands. Our profiles link to businesses and ads and companies. This is the synergy of US-style capitalist democracy. We are all Mark Zuckerburgs. Ⓐ

Music Review

Continued from page 21

in its original missions. "The company was founded by young artists for young artists, and we want to keep it exclusively for emerging artists. It provides a daring creative outlet for young artists and audiences alike. It is a company where there is an equal collaboration between the artists rather than running it through a hierarchy of power.

It has a sense of community and everybody takes care of each other," said Laura. Laura also stresses that opera is for everyone, and wants the company to "empower the local community by offering affordable and accessible live art, and inviting collaboration." She wants the productions to be very welcoming to everybody, where parents can bring their kids, eat or drink during the performances, and make all the noises they want. Accessibility and audience participation is very important in these productions, therefore program notes, translations, and subtitles are always provided for each of the shows.

Miriam and Laura have responded boldly to the opera industry machine by creating a company that "returns opera to its roots: a conversation between artists and their audience," as they have elegantly put it. Yet, in the bigger context, they are competing with the big opera powerhouses in New York like the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Opera, as well as many other smaller opera companies in the city like Dicapo Opera Theater, Regina Opera, Opera Company of Brooklyn, Chelsea Opera, Opera Manhattan, among many others. Many of these smaller opera companies have similar missions and goals: by providing affordable and accessible opera productions to the local community. Like any other non-profit organization, there are no guarantees that these small opera companies will continue to exist especially when they rely on donations and ticket sales in the midst of economic troubles.

The bigger grants and donations usually go to the well-established opera houses first, and that is not even a guarantee that these are enough to continually sustain them. This makes it especially difficult for many smaller opera companies to put on full productions while making it accessible to the community. When asked about their sources of funding, Laura and Miriam said, "We have relied mostly on individual donations and ticket sales. We have also used social networking sites like Facebook to raise funds for our productions. And this year, since we are better established as an organization, we plan to apply for bigger grants out there." But the most important key to the success of a company lies in the perseverance and the dedication of the people behind it. Miriam recently went back to school to get a Masters degree in Strategic Communications from Columbia University in order to refine her skills necessary to run the business side of the company. Laura has recently resigned from her full-time job to focus her efforts on the company and start a remarkable undertaking to become an excellent musician: to put in approximately 10,000 hours of practice time within the next few years. With this kind of commitment and dedication, *coópera: Project Opera of Manhattan* is certainly on its path to a strong run for years to come. Ⓐ

For more information about *coópera: Project Opera of Manhattan,* visit their website at **http://projectopera.org/** or email **info@projectopera.org**.

Graduate Center Privatizes Public Events

MATT LAU

In Economics 101, every high school student who hasn't wisely decided to drop out learns the well-known motto: There is no such thing as a free lunch. The Graduate Center has finally passed this course and enrolled in the popular elective called neoliberalism. In this course you learn a new motto: There is such a thing as a free lunch, if you can force someone else to pay for it. Thus there are free lunches all around for Graduate Center administrators these days thanks to a new policy: there is no such thing as a "public" public event.

"The idea occurred to us one night at the New York Society for Ethical Culture's free screening of the inspiring 2003 documentary *The Corporation*," said Mark Schiebe, The Graduate Center's privatization spokesperson, who looked fetching in his new Ferragamo suit. "When we heard those philosophers from the Cato Institute talk about the wisdom of privatizing every inch of land on the planet or even the air we breathe, something just clicked. 'Hey,' I said, 'why don't we charge money for all the free events at the Graduate Center?"

Yes, beginning this fall, in addition to the usual college class structure of students, faculty, and staff, the Grad Center now has "Members." What are the benefits of Graduate Center membership? A library card and the ability to smoke cigarettes on the roof? No, those are the perks of being a student. A salary and a windowless office? No, those are the perks of faculty and staff.

"To fully answer your question," said spokesperson Schiebe, "one first has to distinguish between different levels of membership. At the first level, one becomes the Graduate Center's 'Friend with Benefits.' Those benefits include 25 percent off all "Public Events," including lectures and forums in the "Great Issues" and "Perspectives" series. These events will cost you only $15 instead of the $20 that the Graduate Center's acquaintances and friends of friends will have to pay. Plus, this level of 'Membership' is on sale now for 50 percent off the original price of $50, for a recession-friendly $25, less than the price of the average grad student's monthly library fines."

"At the second level," said a female and much more telegenic spokesperson, who identified herself as Erika Nilsson, a student at CUNY's School of Journalism, "one is not only friends with the Graduate Center, but also a 'Contributor' to it. We landed on the term 'Contributor' because we liked how it makes them sound like they are some kind of artistic or intellectual adviser when in reality they are just giving us $100 for the privilege of bringing a friend with them to the annual 'Members" party. Plus, this insures that there will be at least two people at the party, I mean gala.

Society swell and "Banker-level" Member Geoffrey von Hohenzöllern leaving a GC event with his escort, Mindy O'Leary-Metzger (maiden daughter of Economics professor Saul O'Leary-Metzger), to continue the night's festivities at a more private venue.

"At the higher levels of 'Membership,' 'Donor' and 'Patron,' one gets to finally meet our extraterrestrial overlords who originally founded CUNY along with the Bavarian Illuminati, Skull and Bones, and the Free Masons. Plus you get four tickets to any formerly free public event and the chance to eat dinner in the same giant banquet hall as noted public intellectuals Kim Phillips-Fein, James Sanders, and Peter Beinart.

"There is even a super-secret 'unofficial' level of 'Membership' known as 'Banker,' where you receive the proverbial *droit de Seigneur*, better known as 'the right of the first night,' which includes the maiden daughters of any Graduate Center faculty, staff, or student, along with eight free tickets to any public event, a subscription to *GC* magazine, with its monthly "Who wears it best?" photos of President Kelly and Provost Robinson, and an application for web browsers that blocks *The GC Advocate* website. Due to the controversial nature of these 'benefits,' we thought it best not to advertise the 'Banker' level to the general public. Instead we've decided to buy space for a new CUNY ad campaign in most major subscription financial newsletters. The campaign is of course entirely consistent with the tasteful nature of most CUNY advertising. Its motto is: 'Look who's eligible for right of the first night at CUNY!!' Despite its secretive nature, this has proven to be our most popular level of Graduate Center 'Membership.'"

Of course, like any bold new idea, Graduate Center "Membership" has attracted a fair number of critics, most predictably those left-wing cranks at *The GC Advocate*, who pretty much complain about everything at the Grad Center except the free printing and the free food at DSC meetings. Common criticisms include the obvious: this plan is contradictory. Are events really public anymore when they aren't free? As if "words" like "public" can't actually mean their opposite.

Advocate editor and the Graduate Center's resident expert in left-wing cant, James Hoff, voiced another problem with the proposal. "Look, if they start charging for these boring talks with self-important moderates and Jurassic-era artists, what's next? Is it going to cost fifty cents to use the bathroom at school or a dollar to take a nap in the library? These are our basic freedoms, man."

But even "The Oracle of *The Advocate*" has been unable to foresee the truly terrifying problem that the "Membership" plan could lead to: NPR-style membership pledge-drives and fundraisers. Indeed, Brian Lehrer's TV show broadcasts from the CUNY TV studios in the building are already the Trojan Horse of this nightmare scenario. Ⓐ

ph.d. comics BY JORGE CHAM