

# CUNY GRADUATE CENTER **Advocate**

May 2011

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Rooms  
with a View  
(p. 19)

EXCLUSIVE



## **Tony Kushner**

**on Wiesenfeld, CUNY, and Academic Freedom**

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**FROM THE editor's desk**

# Democracy Now!

## Reinventing the CUNY Board of Trustees

"Underlying recent attacks on the university is an attempt not merely to counter dissent but to destroy it and, in doing so, to eliminate all of those remaining public spaces, spheres, and institutions that nourish and sustain a democratic civil society."—Henry Giroux, *The University in Chains*

The recent controversy over an honorary degree for acclaimed playwright Tony Kushner has once again revealed the highly undemocratic and ideologically-charged nature of the CUNY Board of Trustees. And once again, the members of the board, especially Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, have demonstrated that they cannot be trusted to defend or uphold even the most basic principles of academic freedom and the exchange of ideas upon which all academic practice is founded.

The board's refusal on May 4 to grant an honorary degree from John Jay College to Mr. Kushner was, to put it bluntly, a stupid decision. This decision was made worse, however, by the fact that none of the members of the board seemed to understand the importance or the potential repercussions of their failure to properly discuss and debate the issue before rushing to a vote. Instead, the board members, including Chairman Benno Schmidt, seemed merely eager to be finished with the business at hand so that they could adjourn and, as they must have imagined at the time, put the matter behind them. Their blatant disregard for due process, their utter lack of intellectual curiosity, and their seeming inability to muster even the most perfunctory defense of Kushner against Wiesenfeld's ridiculous and politically biased accusations, were not just stupid, but represented a real dereliction of their duties as trustees.

Although the board later reversed its decision in an emergency Executive Committee meeting on May 9, the damage to the reputation of CUNY and the climate of intellectual inquiry at the university was already an accomplished fact. As long as Wiesenfeld is on the Board of Trustees, you can bet that he will do everything in his power to remove or silence the opinions of those who fail to conform to his narrow political views. Because of this, and the many other abuses of his position to date—including his extraordinarily inappropriate meddling in the hiring decisions of Brooklyn College last January—it is clear that Wiesenfeld should immediately resign. Any failure to do so must be met with a vigorous and sustained campaign to force his resignation. But the issue, unfortunately, is much bigger than Jeffrey Wiesenfeld; and although it would be nice to see him go, his Zionist rants and racist characterizations of Arabs are unfortunately just the public face of a much deeper problem inherent in the structure and functioning of the board itself, a problem that can only be fixed by either abolishing or radically reimagining its structure.

To begin with it should be clear to everyone at CUNY by now that the BOT is an inherently anti-democratic institution. Composed almost exclusively of political hacks and corporate raiders—the great majority of whom received their appointments as awards for political loyalty from Republican Governor George Pataki and billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg—the board does not represent the interests of the electorate or of any of the university's core stakeholders. Instead, it represents only the needs and ideological interests of the right-wing politicians who have made most of the appointments. Indeed, a quick survey of the board's website reveals that of the fifteen current appointed members, nine were appointed by Pataki, and four were appointed by Bloomberg. Together, that means that thirteen of the sixteen voting members of the board were appointed by just those two. Allowing two ideologically right-wing white men to essentially choose the entire governing board of a university as economically and racially diverse as CUNY is an insult to any theory of democracy and cannot possibly be good for the institution or the many hundreds of thousands of people whom the university serves.

Perhaps worse than this lack of democratic representation, however, is the fact that the board's members simply do not seem to care about the vitality or health of CUNY and do not take their charge seriously. Indeed, most of the board members have little or no experience teaching or working within academia, and none of them seem to have any real under-

standing or appreciation of the value of the intellectual work that is done at the university. Their clear and continued negligence and their utter lack of vision, intellectual curiosity, and foresight is an insult to all of us who work, study, and teach at CUNY and who do our best to improve the university on a daily basis. From the several merely ignorant, to the many passively and actively apathetic, to the few downright malicious and venal, these board members have displayed an inordinate lack of leadership, and as the Kushner affair has made plain, are incapable of even holding a debate within their own ranks, much less capable of considering, debating, and acting upon the many pressing issues that impact the future of the university.

The CUNY Board of Trustees is not unique in this regard, however. It turns out—no surprise!—that boards across the country are packed—just like CUNY's—with politically appointed corporate managers, who see the university as just another kind of corporation. Indeed, over the last three decades, university governing boards have played a vital and enabling role in the slow destruction of the American system of higher education. Rather than using their political influence and connections to fight for the institutions which they have been charged to defend, they have instead done what comes naturally to business elites and have used their skills to remake their respective universities into models of corporate efficiency.

By simultaneously increasing student tuition and drastically reducing the costs of instruction through the use and exploitation of low-paid, part-time instructors, these boards have helped their right-wing counterparts in government shift the costs of higher education from the public back to the individual students and employees of the universities they govern, effectively undermining, through this process of privatization, the very principles, and often the very charters, of the institutions they were tasked to uphold and honor. In part because of these boards, the once great promise of the American university system, which made it possible for so many underprivileged and economically disadvantaged Americans to better themselves through the pursuit of higher education, has been reduced to a mere shadow of its original self. From California to New York more and more students are being priced out of the chance to get a decent education, even as those who can are forced to take larger classes taught by increasingly underpaid and overworked adjuncts.

Clearly it is time that the students, faculty, and staff at CUNY, and indeed, at all the nation's universities recognize that any struggle to improve their schools has to include a strategy to change the institutions that govern them. The students, faculty, and employees of CUNY should naturally have a voice in the decisions that directly affect their well-being and the future of the university. Towards this end the CUNY community, including the Professional Staff Congress and the student and faculty senates, must come together and begin to demand serious and extensive reform of the Board of Trustees. Such reform should, no doubt, involve a significant amount of discussion and debate, but should include at the very least a radical increase in the number of student, faculty, and staff representatives on the board. As I proposed back in February of 2010, in addition to the current seventeen members of the board, there should be at least one elected faculty member, one elected staff member, and one elected student representative from each of the University's current seventeen campuses. This would significantly shift the balance of interests from the politicians to the stakeholders, while still allowing for a significant amount of public representation on the board in the form of some kind of reformed public appointment system—perhaps one in which trustees are chosen by the state legislature instead of the governor and the mayor. Such an expanded, democratic, and diverse board, representing all of the major stakeholders of the university, as well as the interests of the state taxpayers, would be much better prepared to find intelligent and creative solutions to the problems that face the university while still respecting and nurturing the true pursuit of intellectual excellence that defines any great university. **A**

# Kushner and Liberalism's Climate of Fear

RAYYA EL ZEIN

The buzz since the CUNY Board of Trustees' increasingly infamous meeting that tabled John Jay College's nomination to award an honorary degree to Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright Tony Kushner has been remarkable, for a few reasons. The speed with which the news spread and the reach of interest in an administrative decision at CUNY have turned heads. On Wednesday evening, I met Mr. Kushner at the memorial for murdered theatre artist and activist Julian Mer Khamis, at which time he told me CUNY administrators remained flippant about his case. Less than 48 hours later, his assistant called me with news that the head of the Board of Trustees had called an emergency meeting for the following Monday. Facebook Revolution? I don't think so. News spreads. And yes, New York cares about its public institutions, CUNY included. The speed and spread of this news may be remarkable but ultimately perhaps should not be surprising.

I want to focus on two other reasons why media reactions to the tabling of Mr. Kushner's nomination are noteworthy, especially in relation to an understanding of free speech and activism in our universities. The first starts even in Mr. Kushner's own response to the Board's actions. While the playwright defends himself by highlighting his right to his own opinion, much of the letter is spent in qualifying and defending his political positions on Israel. It is totally understandable that Mr. Kushner felt he needed to clear his name from false accusations; elsewhere, however normalizations of his political beliefs, often coupled by restating his religious identity, or by a reflection on his illustrious career have a dangerous effect. Ben Brantley's op-ed in the Times on May 5, 2011 is an especially good (meaning problematic) example of this type of a public reaction. His article opens with an example of a kind of side-stepping I will elaborate on further below: "I have neither the background nor the inclination to hold forth on Tony Kushner's political views on the Middle East" and continues, "One of our most high-reaching dramatists, Mr. Kushner is a writer of rare intellectual scope and reading in both art and politics."

I'm not confronting Brantley on his assessment of Kushner. However, this type of reaction completely ignores that Kushner's case is but one in a series of devastatingly problematic decisions made by CUNY administrators against faculty or syllabi that don't espouse the same conservative stances on Israel as held by some CUNY trustees, students, or alumni. By highlighting Kushner the illustrious playwright, we advocate empathy for his person instead of attacking an institutional problem. What happened to Mr. Kushner during that May 2nd Board meeting was shameful. Mr. Kushner at the very least deserves an apology from the Board. But the Board's action *would not be less problematic* if Kushner was a failed playwright or if his views actually were as "radical" as

board member Jeffrey S. Wiesenfeld claimed them to be. If we believe in free speech, then we believe it to be free, whomever is speaking, not just for our most successful citizens, or our most moderate thinkers. How will we defend adjuncts—up for different positions but similarly accused—whose books are still in the process of being published? How will we garner public support for faculty who dare to stimulate alternative thinking on the Middle East but who Broadway theatre-goers have never heard of? This is a case about free speech at academic institutions. But it's also about free speech about Israel at these same institutions, something we must assert we also believe in.

The second remarkable feature of the buzz around Mr. Kushner's case is, it seems to me, how much of it completely misses the point of why this defamation of Mr. Kushner is an issue academics, artists, and citizens of New York should be concerned with. I have overheard or read countless instances of skepticism over the past few days expressed in variations of "What's an honorary degree, anyway?" "Who even cares if he gets it?" and/or "Yes, but it's the board's right to give the flimsy piece of paper to whomever they want." This obsession with the really superfluous details of what is actually an alarming defamation of an individual for his alleged political beliefs is indicative of a grave problem within our academies and within the larger culture of liberalism in our contemporary moment, indicative of a culture of apathetic stagnation. Instead of remembering that holding one's own political opinions is supposed to be a sacred right, we make excuses for why this case is specific, why this board's actions are excusable, why this playwright may have needed a light slap on the wrist. Instead of saying, "Holy shit. How did this happen? Who is the Board? They disqualified him for having once had an idea? Fire them." We stutter. We wonder instead if Kushner's stance on Israel is problematic. We debate whether or not BDS (which anyway Kushner doesn't support) is sound political strategy. We talk about the merits of the founding of a national political entity 3,000 miles away 60 odd years ago. What are we doing?

These efforts to "understand" the situation—driven by an increasingly brittle instinct to "contextualize," to "check" source material, to "imagine" (in the most blasé ways possible) every subject position—are symptomatic of an increasingly frightening inability of the Left and "liberals" in the US to take stances, to state opinions, and to act. The inability to decide (in this case) whether or not one agrees with Kushner's views on Israel and the concurrent misconception that one must do so before one states an opinion on the issue is paralyzing us from demanding the basic tenets required for healthy universities, stimulating classrooms, and educational integrity. Instead of jumping to defend a basic right we all believe in, we sit on our thumbs, waiting for other "experts" to weigh in. We are "unqualified" we don't know enough

"to say." (See Brantley's introduction above.) So we stay quiet. Or we say, "Oh, an honorary degree? Who cares about that anyway? How silly."

But the truth of the matter is that Mr. Kushner was publicly defamed for a misinterpretation of his political ideas—ideas he had and voiced long before his nomination by the John Jay faculty. And these alleged *opinions were the only reasons cited* for why he was ineligible. There is no other way of putting it: the CUNY Board of Trustees decision on Tony Kushner is simple blasphemy for an institution of higher learning in the city of New York in the United States of America. I don't care if the honorary degree amounts to a piece of cheese he has to share with the recipients of the same honorary degree at the 22 other CUNY colleges.

It is true that an extraordinary number of people: faculty, students, administrators, associated with CUNY and not, have already spoken up in defense of Mr. Kushner. Which is to be commended. Yet, on this and on hundreds of other examples of complicated discussions, I fear we as intellectuals, as students, and as "empathetic" citizens in a complex world are not speaking, not acting, not demanding, because *we fear* being labeled misinformed or worse, homophobic, racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, or any combination, as the case may be. This arm's-length identification of the complicated world in which we live in (which, yes, is the direct result of an institutional attempt to correct for centuries of devastating violence), is nevertheless decimating the efficacy of an engaged political Left. I am not advocating rash decision-making or misinformed knee-jerk, emotional re-activism. Simply put: we must be able to recognize the often scary world in which we live and act in it. This takes courage. We *must* reclaim the right to speak, to make mistakes, and to pontificate. *This will mean that we will offend each other, on occasion. But we must remember how to disagree, publicly, to debate, privately, and to teach each other the truths individual experiences have taught us.*

Whichever side of the Palestine-Israel conflict we find ourselves on, not hearing from others will not evaporate the existence of that disliked viewpoint or the experiences that shaped it. Restricting opinions voiced on this conflict in the Middle East will undoubtedly have the effect of fewer creative solutions to some of the most complex international problems of this century and the last one.

We are the students and faculty of CUNY. A grave problem in our administration is our problem. Censoring faculty, students, or invited guests based on their political beliefs, or interpretations of their political beliefs is not for us. Every such instance, no matter the position, degree, or award in question, intimidates others from voicing opinions on contentious material, from addressing complicated subjects, and from encouraging difficult dialogue. This cannot be the climate in which we choose to teach and to learn and in which we invite others to do so. ☺

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# BOT Gone Wild!

## Harvard Sucks

Turns out that after all is said and done, the massive price tag attached to elite universities doesn't give you much bang for the buck in the business world, literally. In a joint study carried out by the University of Hawaii and the Institute for Business and Finance Research, researchers found that while name brand institutions produce a disproportionate number of major-player CEOs, it's CUNY graduates—and specifically City College and Queens College alums—that make a disproportionate amount of the money.

Of the country's richest CEOs, Queens College boasts the highest-paid among its graduates. On average, QC alums made a whopping \$59.2 million a year in salary, though the research wasn't clear on whether those numbers were skewed due to enormous paychecks being collected by just a handful of graduates, or if the numbers are broadly applicable across the board. Despite that eye-popping finding, it was actually City College that emerged as having one of the stronger lists of alumni success. CCNY grads collect annual salaries that are generally twice as high as those being earned by one-time Harvard students, and their alumni pool is quite big.

In fact, CEOs that attended the elite Ivy programs made some of the lowest salaries on average. This is not to say, of course, that they are hurting; quite the contrary. According to the research, Harvard-trained CEOs pull in a cool \$9.4 million on average, just below UPenn grads and Stanford alums who each net over \$11 million per annum.

To be sure, the Ivies do a great job of churning out large numbers of private industry leaders. According to CBS News, "of the 6,000 plus CEOs in the survey, 722 hold a Harvard degree, 240 hold a degree from University of Pennsylvania (including Wharton). Next came Stanford, with 239, Princeton University, with 183...Most of the CEOs with grad degrees came from top-50 ranked schools."

But importantly, the research finds that the supposedly elite training on offer in the top-ranked schools had exactly zero impact on how well companies performed in the marketplace. Thus, while it seems as if name educations offer easier access to elite business circles (certainly no secret), they do nothing for shareholders when it comes to beating the competition.

This news presents a number of conflicting emotions. On the one hand, it offers confirmation that CUNY students are just as talented, if not more so, than their Ivy league counterparts. It also underscores the long-held suspicion of many that elite business programs are nothing more than elaborate scams in fancy packaging. On the other hand, it's distressing to consider that CUNY churns out so many of the very people ruining our economy and

driving our politics into the ground. I would be...

Bah! Who are we kidding? Suck it, Harvard!

## PSC Calls for Jeffrey Wiesenfeld's Resignation

In the wake of outrage at the Board of Trustees' (BoT) decision to deny Tony Kushner an honorary degree from John Jay College, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) has officially called for the resignation of Jeffrey Wiesenfeld. Wiesenfeld's remarks sparked debate amongst the board that led to the trustees' original decision to remove Kushner's name from consideration for the degree, a decision that was later overturned at a special meeting of the BoT on May 9.

"Reversing the decision on Tony Kushner's honorary degree is good, but it does not address the fundamental problem," Barbara Bowen, president of the PSC, said. "The attack on Kushner represents an attempt to narrow public debate, disregard recommendations of the faculty, and limit the range of views that CUNY students are entitled to hear. In bowing to that attack, the trustees' decision was an offense against open intellectual discussion and freedom of thought, and it is essential that it be reversed."

But Bowen went on to argue that Wiesenfeld's behavior in the Kushner affair was hardly an isolated incident. Quite the contrary, she argued that it is simply the latest outrage in a long string of inappropriate actions by Wiesenfeld since he has sat on the BoT, and that he has to go.

"Jeffrey Wiesenfeld has abused his positions as CUNY Trustee on numerous occasions," said Bowen. Indeed, the list of Wiesenfeld's outrageous behavior is extensive. After 9/11, he vilified students and faculty participating in a teach-in to help contextualize and understand the unfolding events. Said Wiesenfeld, "They're fortunate it's not up to me. I would consider that behavior seditious at this time." Then, in 2005, Wiesenfeld publicly weighed in on a battle to remove a Brooklyn College department chair for his left-of-center political views, ultimately leading the academic in question to remove his name from consideration for the department position. Wiesenfeld has also been at the center of the recent, heavily reported scandals at Brooklyn College, first involving Moustafa Bayoumi and then Kristofer Peterson-Overton that need not be rehearsed here.

Beyond this, Wiesenfeld has made clear his animosity to the idea of organized labor which borders on illegality. The PSC leadership has made clear that "Mr. Wiesenfeld's hostility towards the representative of the CUNY instructional staff, the PSC, is one more instance of his destructive rather than constructive presence on the Board of Trustees. In July 2005, he told the *New York Sun* he hoped faculty members



Assemblywoman  
Deborah Glick

would replace the union's leadership, and that they could find 'a specific issue that reminds them why they hate these people.' Such a comment is not only inappropriate, it is also potentially in violation of the National Labor Relations Act, which prohibits employer involvement in union elections."

"He should resign immediately," said Bowen on Monday. "The trustee selection process should be reformed so that the board is composed of qualified people with genuine expertise in higher education, who will respect the faculty, staff, and students in whose interests they serve."

Others agree. A coalition of four Jewish groups led by Jewish Voice for Peace (JVFP)—an organization for which Kushner serves as an advisory board member—voiced their determination to oust Wiesenfeld from the BoT. But as Rebecca Vilkomerson, executive director of JVFP, pointed out, "Even more disturbing than Mr. Wiesenfeld's unfounded and vicious attacks was the complicity and silence of the remaining trustees—some of whom voted to oppose the slate if Kushner's name remained on it, and none of whom spoke in his defense."

Vilkomerson's observation leads still others to call for the very abolition of the BoT. Sandor John, representing the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Class Struggle Education Workers, told the *Advocate* that he believes that the entire roster of trustees must go. "It isn't a matter of restructuring the board to be more representative," John argued. "The whole thing needs to be abolished

altogether. CUNY should be run by elected representatives of faculty, students, and workers."

## CUNY Strains Under \$40 Million Deficit

CUNY finds itself facing a staggering \$40 million deficit this coming semester after the New York State Senate refused to release funds collected from the 5 percent tuition hike approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees last fall. At issue is the state's argument with itself about whether the legislature should have the power to raise public university tuition, or if greater decision making autonomy should be granted to the CUNY and SUNY systems.

In defense of its decision to raise tuition, the trustees argued that "to preserve academic programs and meet high enrollment demands in the face of continuing state and city budget cuts and a difficult economy, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved a tuition schedule that includes a 5 percent tuition increase beginning with the Spring 2011 term." The trouble is, the legislature does not have to spend that money on enhancing anything in the CUNY system if it so chooses.

The legislature has frozen the nearly \$40 million in revenue while it debates the extent to which it should control tuition costs throughout the state. As the politicians battle it out up in Albany, students, faculty and staff at the CUNY campuses continue to suffer. If the issue isn't settled soon, CUNY workers will face massive layoffs come fall, as schools will have to take drastic action

to bridge the gap between projected operating costs and actual money in CUNY's checking account.

This crisis is connected directly to an evolving situation between the state and the University of Buffalo, which has asked New York State to grant it autonomous control over its tuition policies, as well as decision making authority concerning the physical property of the university.

Supporters of the plan point out that the move would increase protection of students through regular tuition hikes as opposed to the radical increases imposed during moments of fiscal crisis. Selma Mustovic, a senior researcher at the Citizens Budget Committee, argues that among other things, greater autonomy would allow for differential tuition programs to be implemented at different colleges. "Differential tuition would enable the universities to recognize variation in costs among programs and campuses, and to maximize tuition revenue by taking into account demand for programs and regional costs. The current uniform tuition policy is perhaps the main reason why New York's public system lacks flagship schools and programs, in stark contrast to many of its peers."

Critics of the plan warn that the proposal opens the door to greater private sector influence over university life through public-private partnership programs. And at least in the case of Buffalo, the concern is also that these relationships will allow the university to increasingly encroach upon downtown residential areas.

These worries are real. Just this week, word came that the Koch brothers, made famous for sparking the crisis

in Wisconsin earlier this year, have recently purchased the right to control faculty hiring decisions at Florida State University. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, "A foundation bankrolled by Libertarian businessman Charles G. Koch has pledged \$1.5 million for positions in Florida State University's economics department. In return, his representatives get to screen and sign off on any hires for a new program promoting 'political economy and free enterprise...' The contract specifies that an advisory committee appointed by Koch decides which candidates should be considered. The foundation can also withdraw its funding if it's not happy with the faculty's choice or if the hires don't meet 'objectives' set by Koch during annual evaluations."

Needless to say, Andrew "Don't Call Me David Paterson" Cuomo supports the plan. But the proposal faces stiff opposition in the state assembly. Deborah Glick, democratic assemblywoman from Manhattan, has raised significant concerns about the plan. "Why a fully independent operation of the Buffalo campus is required for this to take place has never been fully explained, nor is it clear if the tuition increases are in any way linked to the downtown development proposal or how revenues from land leases and/or public-private partnerships would be distributed," Glick recently wrote to other assembly representatives. She also labeled the proposal to regularly hike tuition levels by \$750 per year, "aggressive."

This fight will likely be resolved before long. Cuomo has vowed that all issues pertaining to the matter will be resolved before state lawmakers go on summer vacation in June.

## Transfer Row at Two- and Four-Year Colleges Divides CUNY Faculty

The trouble with transfer credits for students transitioning between junior and senior colleges has taken on new urgency at CUNY. A new proposal being considered by the administrative powers since the start of 2011 would institute "a common general educational framework across its two- and four-year colleges," according to *Inside Higher Ed*, "which would cause many institutions to significantly trim their current requirements." Included in the proposal is a credit-transfer scheme wherein any credit bearing CUNY courses in the arts and sciences would be universally accepted at any other CUNY college.

As it stands now, the lion's share of junior college transfer credits are accepted by senior colleges as electives, leaving transfer students heavy on credits but running in place toward their degree, and forced to take required core courses upon accession to their new school.

On the face of it, the need to figure out a more workable system of credit transfer makes a certain amount of sense. States across the nation have devised similar programs to ease the transition for community college students making the leap to four-year institutions. Currently, the State University system in New York has such a system in place, and these developments have been encouraged by some education experts and governmental institutions. Generally, common frameworks stipulate that a given number of credits be

held in common amongst all system colleges, and then that two- and four-year colleges will each be able to stipulate their own additional general education requirements.

But the proposed changes to the CUNY system have faculty up in arms who claim that their curricular control and autonomy are being taken away. *Inside Higher Ed* notes that opposition to the plan is widespread. "Faculty leaders at four-year institutions generally agree that the general education changes would dilute the quality of baccalaureate degrees. Of course, to some community college faculty members, the idea that giving more credit to their courses would dilute quality comes across like a slap at their institutions. Faculty senates at six of the senior colleges within the CUNY system have in recent weeks passed resolutions to condemn the planned changes. None of the faculty senates at CUNY's community colleges have taken such a stand." In other words, the concern is that by speeding the graduation of community college transfer students, the integrity of the institutions to which they transfer will be under threat. But from the perspective of the community college faculties, the proposed changes would advantage the students that have faced uphill battles in gaining educational advancement.

A compromise solution is currently in the works, though it is being held up by fights over how many common credits suffice to provide needed advantage to transfer students without diluting the quality of the course offerings at the four-year campuses. Ⓐ

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# "What Do You Mean I Can't Strike?!"

## CUNY Students, Teachers & Workers Consider the Taylor Law

CINDY GORN, CARL LINDSKOOG  
& ALYSON SPURGAS

### What is the New York State "Taylor Law"?: Legal History and Origins

One of the foundational principles of labor organizing and collective bargaining is that workers can and should withhold their labor if their job situation or environment is threatening to their health and livelihood or inadequate to their needs—herein resides workers' ultimate source of power. A variety of different laws implemented throughout the twentieth century have affected American workers in myriad ways, and it is helpful to consider the trajectory of these laws in order to understand our contemporary labor climate—particularly as it concerns public sector workers (most of us at CUNY), and specifically for *contingent* workers like adjuncts and graduate assistants who have very specific needs and interests due to their precarious situation.

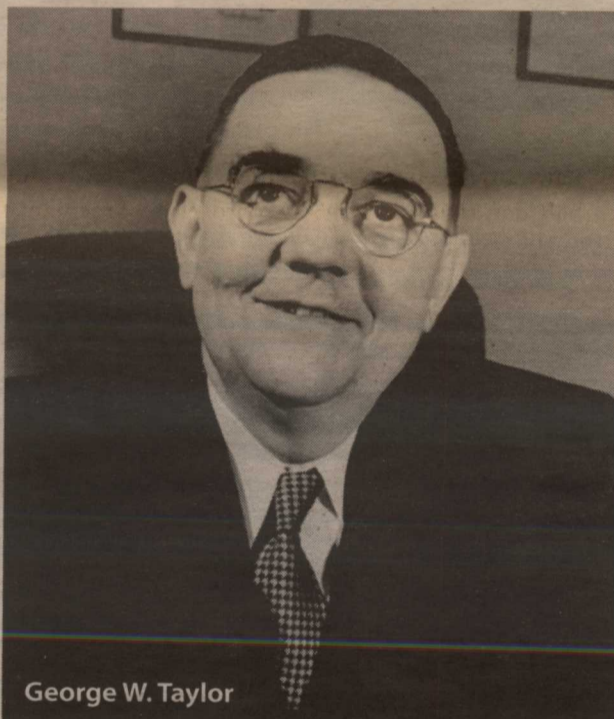
Some of the most important laws and acts passed during the twentieth century include the National Labor Relations Act or Wagner Act of 1935 (which gave private sector workers the right to bargain collectively, but did not address the rights of public sector workers), the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 (which demobilized labor by imposing limits on workers' ability to strike, by applying strict penalties to public sector workers who went on strike, and by prohibiting communists or other "radicals" from union leadership), the Condon-Wadlin Act of 1947 (which, in its initial incarnation, expanded on Taft-Hartley by imposing very specific sanctions on striking public workers such as immediate dismissal from the job, a three-year ban on raises for re-hired public sector workers, and probation without tenure for five years), and the very complex and multi-faceted Public Employees Fair Employment Act of 1967—Article 14 of the New York State Civil Service Law. This act—which came to be known as the "Taylor Law"—governs and constrains New York's public sector workers today.

To understand the complexity of the Taylor Law and the controversies surrounding it, it is useful to look at the immediate postwar period. In 1947, after a strike by public school teachers in Buffalo, lawmakers in Albany created the Condon-Wadlin Act, which outlawed strikes by public workers in New York State and did not provide them with any statutory means to collective bargaining. Despite the new law, however, the postwar period featured a steady increase in labor's strength in the public sector, which was accompanied by a rising militancy among New York workers. According to Joshua Freeman, Graduate Center professor and author of *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*, by the early-1960s, job actions by municipal workers were on the rise. The newly formed United Federation of Teachers (UFT) initiated a brief strike in 1960 and led another one-day work stoppage in 1962. In 1965, eight thousand welfare service workers and members of the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU) went on strike, closing city welfare centers. To break the strike, the city fired five thousand of the striking workers and jailed nineteen of the union's leaders, but because the SSEU had included welfare recipients' issues in their demands, they had strong support from the community and went back to work after the city conceded and pledged not to seek penalties under Condon-Wadlin.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a series of strikes by teachers, welfare workers, and transit workers ultimately evidenced the unenforceability of Condon-Wadlin, and in 1963, the legislature revised the pen-

alties to water the law down with an eye to making it more enforceable. This modification of the law proved ineffective; the transit workers strike of 1966 ultimately shut the law down, when anti-labor Republican Mayor John V. Lindsay succumbed to the TWU, granting them a fifteen percent pay increase which exceeded federal anti-inflationary wage increase standards, and was thus denounced by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The TWU strike and its aftermath also forced Governor Nelson Rockefeller to step in and wrest control of the situation from Lindsay.

In 1967, Rockefeller created an advisory panel to assess the legal situation of public sector workers. This panel, headed by labor researcher George W. Taylor, recommended a replacement for Condon-Wadlin, which would create both a formal process for collective bargaining for public sector workers and legally take away their right to strike. Rockefeller claimed this was the best way to balance the purportedly conflicting interests of New York citizens who required vital public services (and thus were negatively affected by public worker strikes) and the public sector workers who supplied those vital services (but who needed a way to secure their own rights). The Public Employee Relations Committee that made the recommendation



George W. Taylor

ultimately became the Public Employee Relations Board—the agency charged with officially overseeing the process of negotiations between labor and management, and with formally implementing and interpreting the new law.

The Taylor Law is a complex piece of legislature, with fourteen different sections, addressing a variety of different aspects of negotiation. Central to the law is the interpretive role of the Public Employee Relations Board or PERB (addressed in Section 205), which consists of three members appointed by the governor, and which can be involved at any stage of negotiations between the state and the union, at the request of either party or at the agency's own behest. The PERB functions solely as a mediator between the state and the union's bargaining agents and can impose penalties on either for engaging in improper practices, such as "bad faith" negotiations, but it does not have any control over the contract that results from the negotiations that it oversees.

The mandates of the Taylor Law regarding the collective bargaining process concern both local governments ("public employers") and municipal unions ("employee organizations"). Under the law, employers are required to determine bargaining units within public sector unions, to recognize employee organi-

zations for each bargaining unit (and also the rights to organization, representation, recognition, and certification of municipal unions, all of which are covered in Sections 202-204), and to determine (or allow for debate regarding) what will be considered "mandatory bargaining issues" during negotiations. Mandatory bargaining issues are determined by the PERB in the case of conflict between public employer and union leadership, and the decision can be appealed in court. Although what constitutes "bargainable issues" is not explicitly defined by the Taylor Law, "terms and conditions of employment" are explicitly defined as negotiable, and the law states that it is up to the PERB and the negotiating parties to determine what falls within this category. In subsection 4 of section 201 on "Definitions," "terms and conditions of employment" are defined as "salaries, wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment provided" (retirement benefits are excluded from explicit coverage). Under New York case law, wages, medical benefits, sick/vacation/holiday leave, reimbursement for expenses, severance pay, disciplinary policies, and work rules are all considered terms and conditions of employment, so these are generally negotiated as mandatory bargaining issues when the union goes to the bargaining table with the municipality.

The Taylor Law is best known (at least by labor organizers and activists and by many public sector workers today) for its "no-strike clause"—Section 210, "Prohibition of Strikes." In an earlier section of the act, Section 201 on "Definitions," a *strike* is defined as "any ...concerted stoppage of work or slowdown by public employees." The "Prohibition of Strikes" section details a variety of strict penalties for violation of this prohibition, including payroll deductions in the form of twice an employee's daily rate of pay for every day he/she is on strike, legal sanctions including imprisonment and/or firing of members and officers of the union who are deemed to be involved in the strike or who are believed to be the instigating parties, and, for the union as a whole, the loss of "dues check-off" (the automatic deduction of and delivery to the union of dues from members' paychecks by the state) and loss of the right to charge and collect an agency fee from all members of the bargaining unit. Although it could be argued that these penalties are not as strict as those designated under Condon-Wadlin, Condon-Wadlin's draconian sanctions were very rarely applied during its twenty-year history. In contrast, the sanctions under the Taylor Law are understood to be more enforceable, and have been applied forcefully in recent cases. It is interesting to note however, that some labor lawyers, such as Staughton Lynd, argue that the no-strike provision in the Taylor Law is actually cancelled out by the previously mentioned NLRA, particularly section 7. This section states: "Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection." Section 8 of the law lists ways that the boss (in the case of public employees, the state) is not allowed to interfere with this organizing process, and defines "concerted activity" as strikes and other job actions.

### Confronting the Taylor Law

While the Taylor Law is well known as the primary legal prohibition on strikes and other job actions by public sector workers and unions, what is less well known is that, at its origin in 1967, the Taylor Law was, from labor's perspective, an improvement in New

York State labor law. By lessening the harsh penalties for public sector job actions that had existed under Condon-Wadlin, and by granting new recognition to aspects of public sector collective bargaining, the Taylor Law in some ways strengthened the position of public sector workers and unions in New York State. However, the passage of the Taylor Law was also state lawmakers' attempt to create labor peace at a moment of particularly intense class conflict by crafting legislation that offered new carrots to labor while holding onto the stick which outlawed public sector strikes. This tactic did not prove effective, particularly in the years immediately following the law's institution, and examining a variety of historical events during this time can help us understand how and why.

Just as Condon-Wadlin had failed to quell public workers' unrest, the Taylor Law did not deliver labor peace. One year after the law's passage, sanitation workers in New York City went on strike. In 1968, the UFT also carried out a series of bitterly divisive strikes after the dismissal of teachers by a community-elected governing board which sought to increase community control of schools and to promote racial integration in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district of Brooklyn. While sanitation workers and teachers were challenging New York State's new labor law, workers in other sectors were also engaging in actions, with strikes by Consolidated Edison and United Postal Service workers as well as by painters and longshoremen.

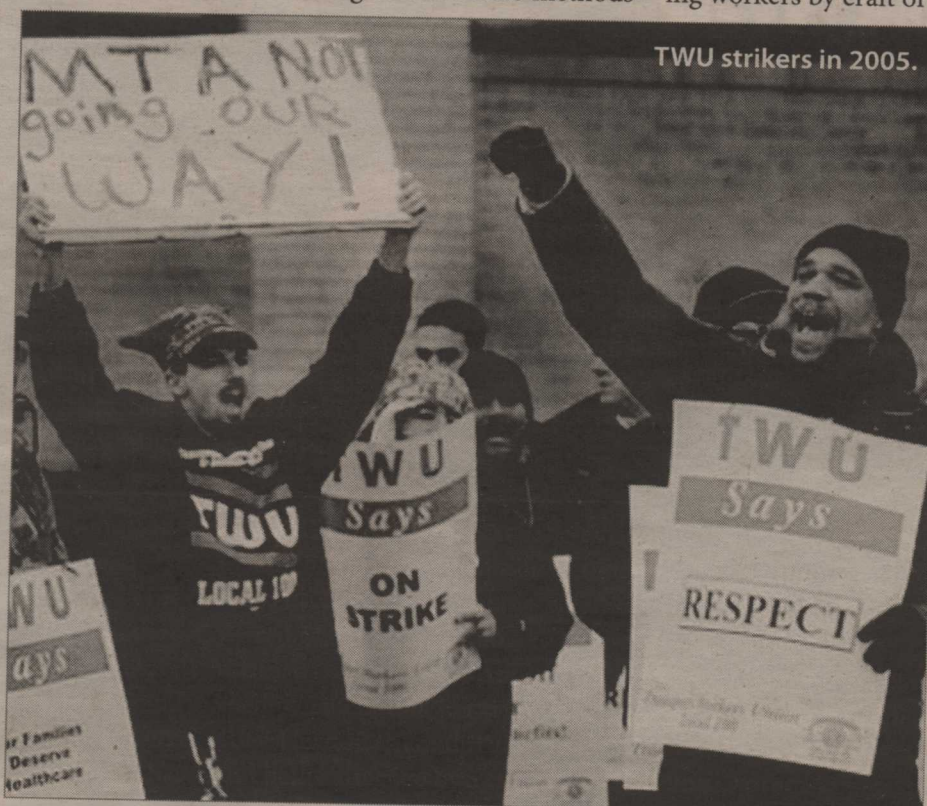
As the 1960s came to a close, strike action was reaching a peak in the United States. Much of it involved "wildcat strikes" which featured workers taking action without the approval of their union leaders. In 1970, postal workers, employees of the federal government who were also barred from striking, launched what Freeman calls "the largest public employee strike and the largest wildcat (or at least semi-wildcat) strike in U.S. history." The following year featured a slowdown by New York City firefighters in which they refused to carry out anything but emergency services, and a six-day wildcat job action by New York City police officers.

In the early-1970s, faculty members of the City University of New York were also finding new ways to advance their position as public sector workers. In 1972, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), formed after a merger of the United Federation of College Teachers and a faculty organization called the Legislative Conference began bargaining its first contract. As negotiations seemed to gridlock, union members voted to strike if no contract agreement was reached by October 1973. CUNY responded to this vote by threatening to impose a contract under the terms of the Taylor Law. The conflict was averted, however, when the union and CUNY reached an agreement before the October deadline.

The New York City fiscal crisis of 1975 ushered in a new era for public sector workers, and stimulated intense debate about how to respond to the attacks on labor that the economic crisis had precipitated. To resist the mass layoffs imposed by city officials during the fiscal crisis, some union leaders proposed a general strike, an action which failed to materialize in part due to opposition by UFT President Albert Shanker and other New York City municipal labor leaders. At CUNY too the fiscal crisis threatened the jobs of faculty and staff. A segment of the PSC favored launching an immediate strike to resist faculty layoffs and budget cuts, but the referendum was defeated 58-26 in the union's delegate assembly. Opponents of the strike argued that the Taylor Law would have a devastating impact on a union as small as the PSC, and that this might include loss of tenure rights and a fine of two days pay for every day on strike. The next year, when the city claimed to be unable to meet CUNY's payroll, the PSC responded that its members would carry out a work stoppage if they were not paid. Then-CUNY Chancellor Robert Kibbee met this threat by shutting the university down for two weeks. According to Christopher Gunderson, "the dramatic action left faculty unpaid and postponed the graduation of thousands of students as well as the issuance

of grades." And when CUNY reopened, members of the university's Board of Higher Education voted for the first time in CUNY's long history to impose tuition on its students.

After the many intense labor battles of the 1960s and early 1970s, direct confrontations to the Taylor Law became more and more rare and city and state officials seemed more willing to use severe methods



TWU strikers in 2005.

to break strikes by public workers. In 1979, prison guards and other security and law enforcement workers, all members of Council 82 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) went on strike. The union was fined, its Executive Director was sentenced to thirty days in jail, and its dues check-off was temporarily suspended.

The Transport Workers' Union (TWU) also launched two more direct challenges to the Taylor Law: an eleven-day strike in 1980 and a two-and-a-half day strike in 2005. According to Freeman, the 1980 strike "represented the last major effort by New York workers to challenge the postulates of austerity." The fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s had so transformed the political terrain of the city and weakened labor's position that former allies now openly opposed the union. Mayor Ed Koch encouraged businesses and employees to keep the city working despite the strike. As Freeman observes, "having a Democrat like Koch position himself as a cheerleader for anti-unionism reflected the changed, post-fiscal crisis power relations in the city and the dramatic weakening of pro-labor sentiment." Though the 1980 transit strike ended with some considerable gains for workers, the union was also fined heavily and lost its dues check-off system for four months. Twenty-five years later during the transit strike of 2005, as labor's power in New York City had eroded even more, the penalties applied to the union's illegal job action were even greater: the union's work stoppage earned the TWU a \$2.5 million fine, dues check-off was suspended, and union president Roger Toussaint was jailed for ten days.

### Why Confront the Taylor Law? Students, Workers, and Self-Organization

As is shown through this history, the Taylor Law was not just a one-sided defeat for labor, but is instead tied up in a dynamic set of contradictions. Acts such as the Taylor Law, which formalize and standardize negotiations between management and labor, have emerged from certain historical conditions that are rooted in the early days of the US labor movement. Since the turn of the century, different methods have been used by different sectors of the working class to secure gains. Historically, there has been much debate over the best way for workers to approach winning gains: should we make deals with management to maintain "bread and butter" demands such as wages, hours, and benefits, or should we attempt to confront the contradiction between bosses and

workers inherent in capitalism head-on and take control over the means of production? From the late-nineteenth century, this split was animated in part by the antagonism between the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and advocates of industrial unionism, an approach which favored organizing all workers in a workplace into a single union rather than separating workers by craft or job type (which was the AFL's

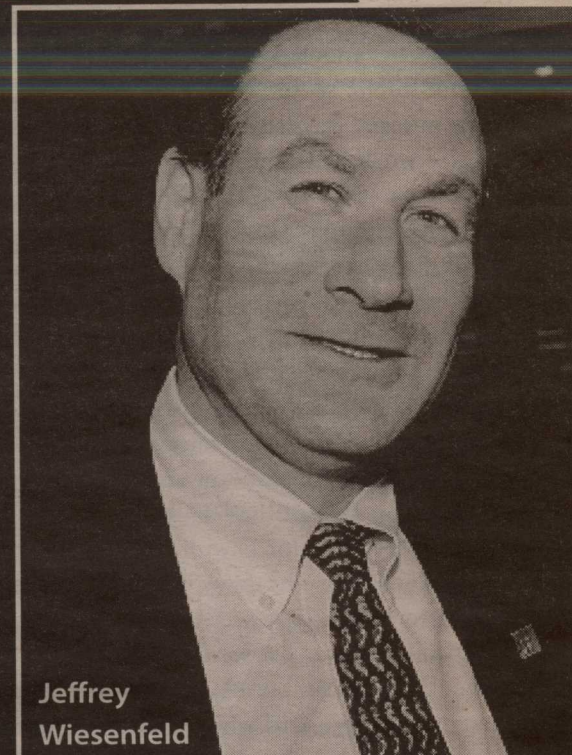
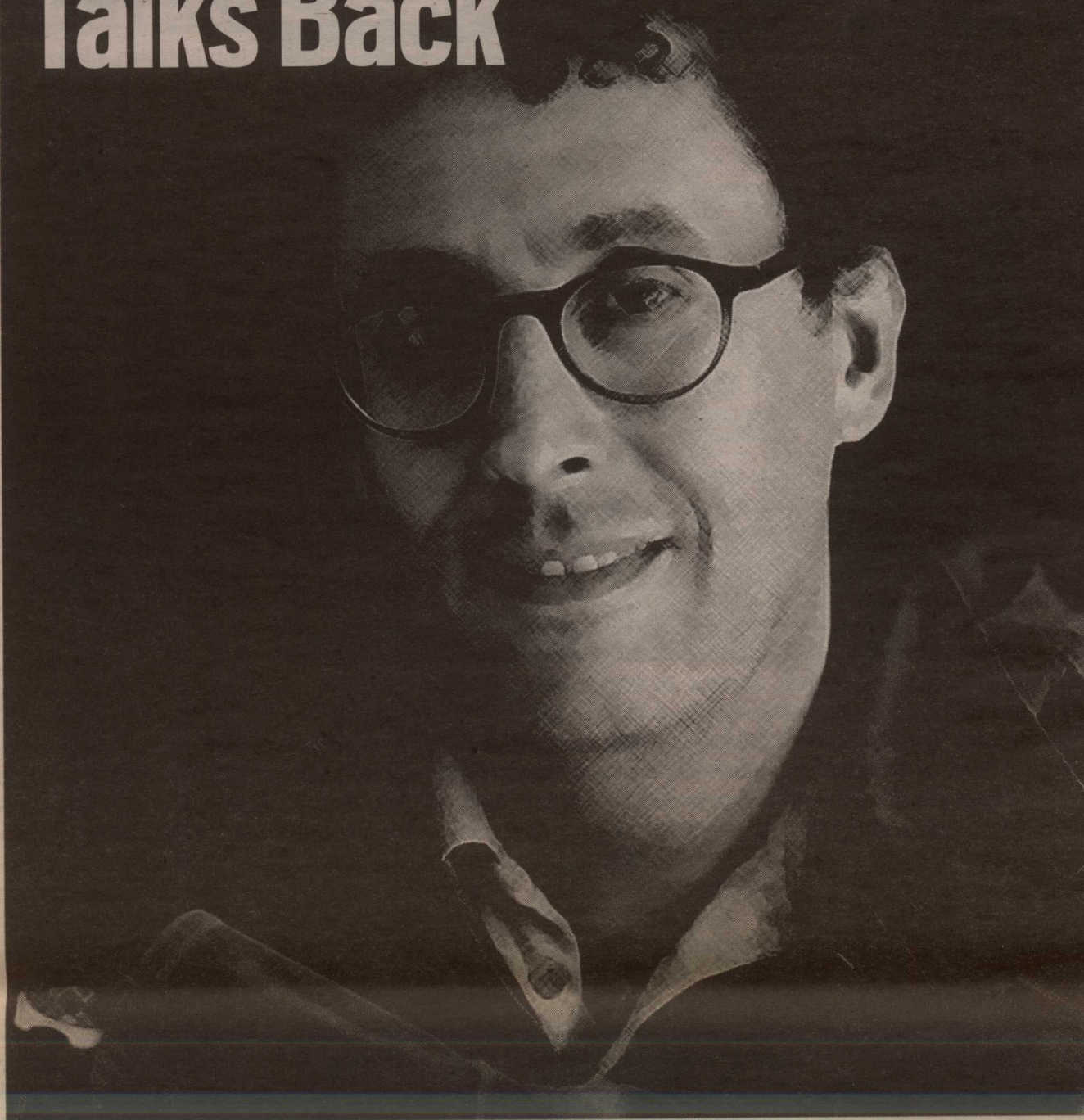
model of organizing). Labor historian Marty Glaberman illustrates this contradiction by discussing the sit-down strike of 1936-37 by General Motors workers who were members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, a part of the recently formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). At the end of this strike, workers had a one-page contract, which simply gave them the right to bargain collectively. All other workplace dynamics were negotiated between workers themselves, or through direct action against the bosses. Workers had control over the means of production,

and the bosses knew that workers were the ones with the real power.

The institution of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) was and still is seen by many as both a gain and defeat in labor organizing, and is recognized as a strong corollary to state laws that constrain gains by limiting workers' ability to struggle in the long-term. The model of negotiating through a bargaining approach that is separate from the everyday workers themselves stands in contradiction to the way workers actually won many of the gains we think are so important today, such as the eight-hour work day and maternity leave. These gains were won not by union leaders bargaining behind closed doors, but by workers withdrawing their labor and taking control of their workplace. The codification of these rights into legal agreements with the state (such as the Taylor Law) or management has implications which are two-fold. Glaberman describes the contradiction like this: "A contract is a compromise. It establishes that no matter what union gains are recorded, the right of the company to manage production is also recorded... The union officials become the enforcers of the contract and the union becomes the agency by which the worker is disciplined." The danger of relying only on the kinds of gains that are afforded by CBAs and through federal and state labor law is that unions can (and often do) become organizations above and outside of workers, instead of groups of people fundamentally working together to change the very tangible conditions under which they work.

What we can see by looking at the past experiences of working New Yorkers, from the 1950s teachers' strikes, to the 1966, 1980, and 2005 TWU strikes, is that public sector workers in New York haven't just treated labor law as something they automatically have to follow; in fact, the biggest changes in working conditions, and even in legislation itself, came from direct and militant disregard of these laws. The Taylor law was a revision of a more draconian law which was busted through direct action and the explosion of resistance by working people, students, and teachers. Moving forward, it is clear we cannot change the Taylor Law simply by asking legislatures; we have to prove the law and all other oppressive labor laws and working conditions irrelevant by and through our own struggle. This struggle may include but is not limited to both wildcat and union leadership-sanctioned work stoppages, pickets, slow-downs, and other creative methods of building alternative institutions in our own workplaces. A

# Tony Kushner Talks Back



Jeffrey Wiesenfeld



Benno Schmidt

**T**ony Kushner's latest play, *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism With a Guide to the Scriptures* opened this month in New York to critical acclaim. But praise for Kushner, whom many consider the greatest living American playwright, was drowned out by outrage at the CUNY Board of Trustees' decision to deny him an honorary degree from John Jay College. On May 2, the board met to rubber-stamp the entire group of notables slated to receive honorary degrees from the various CUNY campuses. Before the vote was taken, trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld—no stranger to controversy—voiced his objection to Kushner's nomination based on what he considered the playwright's unacceptable political views as regards Israel. The Board of Trustees ultimately removed Kushner's name from consideration.

In response, thousands of students, faculty, and others from around the country mounted a campaign in Kushner's defense. The angry chorus of voices demanding that Kushner be restored to the list of honored nominees ultimately forced the CUNY's hand. Benno Schmidt, the chairman of the board, called an emergency meeting for May 9, where the executive committee of trustees voted unanimously to overturn their previous decision and grant Kushner the award. The *GC Advocate* spoke with Kushner just hours after the emergency meeting to discuss the momentous

reversal, the politics of free thought and expression in higher education, and the playwright's close connections to the CUNY community.

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**To begin with, can you give us a sense of your immediate reaction to today's events? Were you happy with the Board of Trustees' decision to reverse their earlier vote, and grant you the honorary degree from John Jay?**

Yes, absolutely. I am happy they reversed the decision that they made last week. I recognize it was exclusively the result of the enormous protests mounted by the faculty and students of CUNY and of people all over, and I am very, very grateful to

everyone who protested. I realize that it has a lot to do with things that are bigger than me. But I think the protests held the board to account, and really made them change their decision and I think that it is appropriate that they did that.

**You originally said that you wouldn't accept the degree even if the board reversed course. Is this still true? And if so, do you plan on speak-**

I would have had a lot less trouble with what happened to me had anyone at the board said, "Wait a minute, did you bring supporting evidence? If you are going to do this, why didn't you print out a complete interview this guy has given, or an essay that he has written that shows us what a terrible person he is?"

**ing at the commencement ceremony?**

I've been contacted by several people on the faculty of John Jay, the president of John Jay and Karen Kaplowitz, president of the faculty senate, who have all asked me to accept if I am offered the degree, or I guess I should say accept for the second time, since I had already accepted the first time, and I intend to do that, yes. I am

really looking forward to being at the commencement ceremony on June 3, and celebrating everyone who is graduating. My understanding is that we are supposed to deliver a speech at commencement. Certainly Mr. Wiesenfeld was under this impression, and as we know he's always accurate, so I

am assuming that I will.

**Jeffrey Wiesenfeld made very clear today that he has no intention whatsoever of resigning his seat on the Board of Trustees. What do you think about this? Would you like to see him removed?**

My feeling is that his behavior both during that meeting and in the many interviews he has given

since represents a misuse of his position as a trustee of the City University of New York. Whether or not a level of misuse that mandates his stepping down or being removed from the board of trustees, the mechanics of removal is not really for me to say. That's a decision for the CUNY community to make. I don't believe his behavior is in any way appropriate and actually I think it had very little to do with any legitimate business of CUNY and had only to do with his own personal and political agenda. I don't think that's what a trustee should be about. I am eager to see what happens, and I guess now that I am an honorary graduate of the John Jay School of Criminal Justice I am part of that community, and will be able to participate in those discussions.

**Stanley Fish argued in the *New York Times***

**this week that the politics of honorary degree candidates should be considered by boards of trustees in deciding whether to grant the awards. Do you agree?**

That's a really complicated question. Do I think that any political opinion is acceptable? No. I believe that there is such a thing as hate speech, I believe that there is a kind of articulation of ideas that can lead to appalling crimes. I think that we have to be very careful in parsing that kind of speech because it's a very complicated business. In other instances it is sort of clear. I am not an absolutist in this regard. But I believe that in the university, freedom of thought and expression is paramount and that the trustees and the administrations, the faculties, and the students themselves at the different colleges should all be vigorous in preventing any kind of atmosphere that seems to preclude by a threat the expression of the free exchange of ideas.

I didn't read Mr. Fish's column. But when someone is smeared the way I was by Mr. Wiesenfeld, I do know that the board has certain responsibilities. My name was in that room entirely because I had been selected as an honorary degree candidate. I know that Fish says it's the right of the board to consider any person's politics in voting on honorary degree candidacies. So there is that question. But the second question has to do with that word, "consider." I would have had a lot less trouble with what happened to me had anyone

I think we have very good reason to be anxious about public debate about Israel, and yet that anxiety, no matter how understandable or grounded in history as it is, shouldn't stand in the way of saying out loud the things we believe are true.

at the board said, "Wait a minute, did you bring supporting evidence? If you are going to do this, why didn't you print out a complete interview this guy has given, or an essay that he has written that shows us what a terrible person he is? Why are you coming here with a bunch of scattered quotes." I think then that it would have been a whole other issue, and it would have reflected a much better light on the board if someone had just said, "I don't think this is the appropriate way to level an accusation of this kind," if they had said "Mr. Wiesenfeld, if you're not coming better prepared, you can't really be serious." In fact, I think he wasn't. If you listen to the podcast of the original meeting, he doesn't seem to have intended to do anything more than register a complaint.

**Your new play, *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism With a Guide to the Scriptures* opened in the midst of all this controversy surrounding the trustees' original decision to deny you an honorary degree. I'm wondering, is it easier in today's America to be a socialist than it is to be a critic of Israel? If so, why do you think this is?**

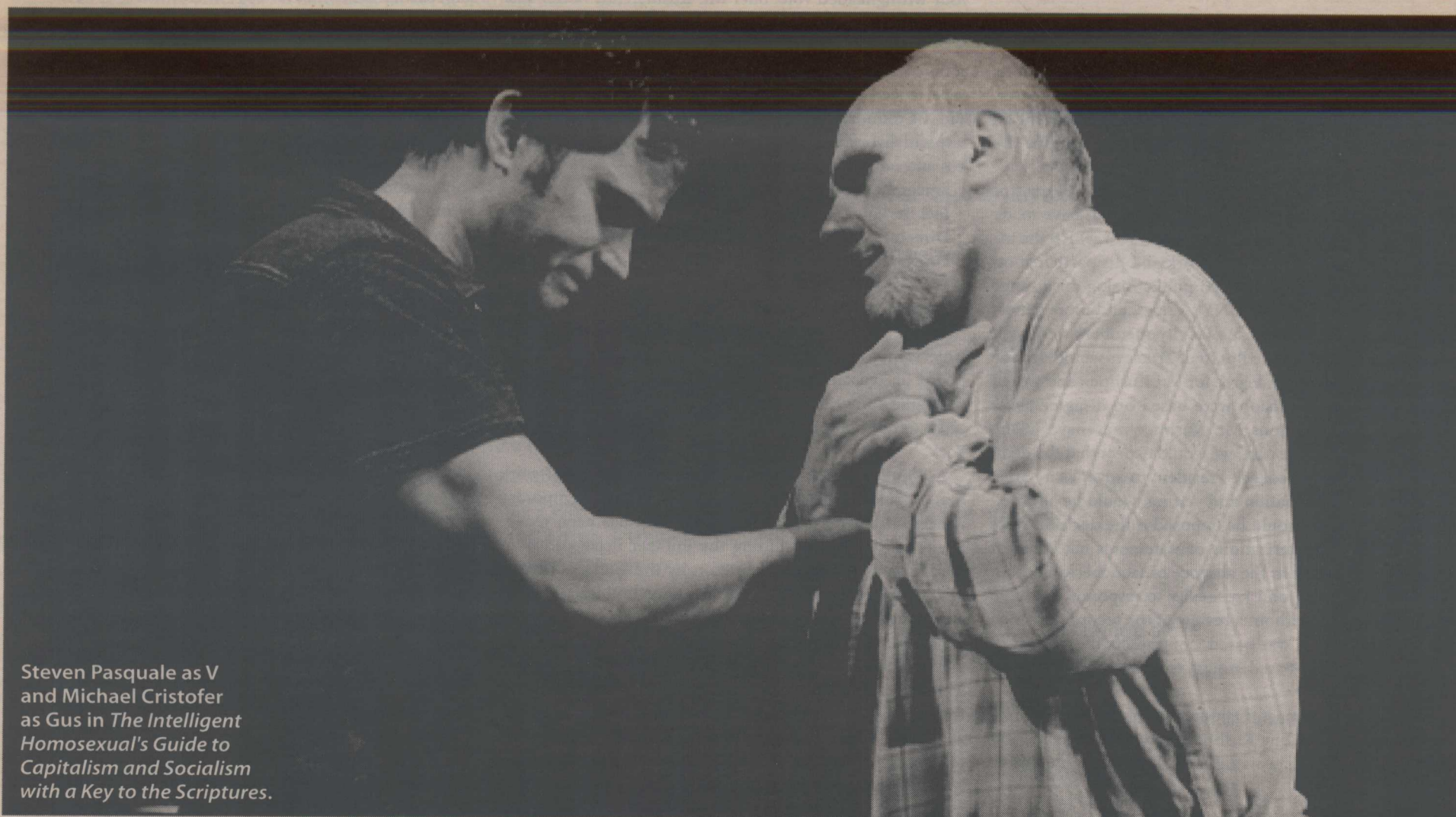
Well, I would not characterize myself as a critic of Israel. That isn't my job. I don't feel like I am any more critical of the state of Israel than I am of

many other countries including my own. I think every responsible adult has a responsibility to hold to account their governments to pay attention to what's going on. I think what's happened here is an interesting thing. The expectation of Mr. Wiesenfeld is that when he says "This guy is anti-Israel" that the entire world will rear up in horror and run in the other direction. And that didn't happen this time, because people who really care about Israel, and I include myself in that number, realize it is enormously important now to start to build a policy towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on reality, as to what has actually happened, based on history and not on right-wing fantasy. That's the hope for that region, and really for the world.

It's always been tough about this primarily because of the long and horrendous history of oppression and suffering of the Jewish people. As a result, I think we have very good reason to be anxious about public debate about Israel, and yet that anxiety, no matter how understandable or grounded in history as it is, shouldn't stand in the way of saying out loud the things we believe are true.

**Finally, can you talk about your evolving feelings concerning CUNY? Has your view on the university changed through all this?**

Well, it's only gotten better, and it was already incredibly high to begin with, which is why I agreed to accept the degree in the first place. I gave a speech last year at John Jay and I was just dazzled by the students. I've talked to students at Queens College, at the Graduate Center, at City College. I have aunts and uncles that went to City College in the 1930s. I have always believed that this is an incredible institution of higher learning and a paradigm for what a public, urban university ought to be. The way the students and faculty responded to this whole thing has been incredibly impressive, incredibly courageous and vigorous, and I think this speaks beautifully of the university. And so, I am really proud of the affiliation. Ⓐ



Steven Pasquale as V and Michael Cristofer as Gus in *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*.

# Letters Responding to the Kushner Decision

Dear Mr. Schmidt:

I read with considerable distress the New York Times article of May 4 reporting that "the trustees of the City University of New York have voted to shelve an honorary degree that one of its campuses, John Jay College, planned to award Tony Kushner." The reason given that Mr. Kushner "had disparaged the State of Israel in past comments, a characterization that the writer attacked..."

I can't think of a dumber action. What does Kushner receiving an award have to do with criticism of the State of Israel? I am a well-known supporter of the nation. What if I were denied an honorary degree because of my strong support for that state? That would make as much sense as denying Mr. Kushner a degree.

Mr. Wiesenfeld and the trustees who followed his request and immediately reverse their action and urge Mr. Kushner to forgive them. I consider Mr. Wiesenfeld's action so outrageous as to be an abuse of power on his part requiring his resignation or removal from the Board of Trustees.

Edward I. Koch

Dear Dr. Schmidt:

Like many others, I was shocked and dismayed to hear about the treatment Tony Kushner received at the hands of the CUNY Board of Trustees on May 2. Jeffrey S. Wiesenfeld's opposition to Kushner's honorary degree was not only malicious and inappropriate, it was based partly on untruths and partly on phrases taken out of context. The fact that a majority of the board members—the fact that any board members at all—supported Wiesenfeld turned an unfortunate incident into a shameful one.

An academic institution as generous and venerable as CUNY should not countenance the public humiliation of any artist, let alone one of Kushner's caliber and courage. Kushner has done more than most of us to combine high art—many of us consider it great art—with profound and vital socio-political sentiments. Kushner's plays have done what so few of us have managed in our own work: it has helped raise public consciousness, without ever descending into agitprop or screed. To deny him an honorary degree because certain members of the board disagree with some of his political views is a chilling indictment of the freedom of expression CUNY has always championed.

I was on the faculty at Brooklyn College for six years, and have always felt honored to be a member of a great institution. I received an honorary doctorate in 2009, of which I have been enormously proud. I feel, however, that in the light of the incident on May 2, I have no choice but to return it. I do so with real regrets.

It is a sad day indeed.

Sincerely,

Michael Cunningham

Dear CUNY Trustees:

We write as members of the CUNY Law School faculty, in support of the faculty of John Jay College and its nomination of Mr. Tony Kushner for an honorary degree. Specifically, we support the John Jay faculty's request that the Board's Executive Committee meet and approve the degree.

Honorary degrees are intended to serve as a means of recognizing the achievements of persons who have made significant contributions to the principles for which the institutions stand. Mr. Kushner's work and his participation in public debate have advanced public dialog on a range of issues that are core to CUNY's values, and more generally, to its academic work. As faculty members we find it deeply disturbing that the Board of Trustees would decline to approve an honorary degree for Mr. Kushner, and would be opposed if the decision were based on disagreements with particular positions Mr. Kushner may have taken. Absent a very extreme case, we would expect that the decision of a faculty and college President to advance a name, after fact-based evaluation and vetting, would be afforded deference. We also would be opposed if the decision were based on mischaracterizations or statements taken out of context, particularly in the absence of fact checking or an opportunity for the John Jay faculty to respond. That type of decision, made without a review of the record on which the faculty decision was based, contradicts the pursuit of knowledge and fact-based inquiry to which CUNY is dedicated.

We ask you to respect the judgment of the John Jay faculty and allow Mr. Tony Kushner to join the students and larger community as a member of John Jay's graduating class of 2011.

Sincerely,

Penny Andrews, Sameer Ashar, Beryl Blaustone, Paula Berg, Caitlin Borgmann, Rebecca Bratspies, Angela Burton, Janet Calvo, Douglas Cox, Frank Deale, Dave Fields, Raquel Gabriel, Mercer Givhan, Astrid Gloade, Julie Goldscheid, Natalie Gomez-Velez, Victor Goode, Yasmin Sokkar Harker, Babe Howell, Carmen Huertas, Jeff Kirchmeier, Donna Lee, Stephen Loffredo, Degna P. Levister, Susan Markus, Alizabeth Newman, Ruthann Robson, Joe Rosenberg, Rick Rossein, Nicole Smith, Richard Storrow, Liliana C. Yanez, Deborah Zalesne, Steve Zeidman

Dear Board of Trustees:

I am writing to object in the strongest terms to your appalling decision to overturn a vote to award an honorary degree from John Jay College to Tony Kushner, one of this country's most distinguished playwrights, essayists, and public intellectuals. You will by now have received many letters reminding you of Mr. Kushner's numerous accomplishments and awards, the fine institutions of higher learning that have seen fit to bestow similar awards on him, and his vigorous public support of the CUNY system and its mission. Rather than reiterate those important details, I'd like to offer a personal anecdote to illustrate what a champion CUNY has long had in Tony Kushner.

When *Angels of America* made its Broadway debut in 1993, I was an adjunct instructor of English at the College of Staten Island, and working on my PhD in Theatre at the Graduate Center. Like countless others, I was dumbfounded by that play, and when I had the chance to meet Mr. Kushner that summer at a conference, I invited him to visit one of my fall classes to speak to students about it. His reaction could not have been more gracious, and though it took some doing for his assistant to find a free evening in Mr. Kushner's schedule, he ultimately came to campus (after refusing the modest honorarium I was able to get from my department chair). A colleague's class joined mine for the visit, and Mr. Kushner was, unsurprisingly, eloquent, funny, and insightful. That evening remains one of the high points of my thousands of hours in the classroom, and I have no doubt that it was similarly memorable for my students.

This is the person whose honor you have now rescinded. However painful this episode may be for Mr. Kushner, I am sure it will do him no long-term damage. I cannot say the same for CUNY. What you have voted to do puts politics over ideas, and gets the educational mission of the CUNY system exactly backwards. It is also a slap in the face to someone who does not feel that his long list of accolades, honors, and prizes makes him too important to take time to talk to a group of typical CUNY students.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconsider your wrongheaded vote, offer Mr. Kushner the honor that he so richly deserves, and try to restore the piece of CUNY's reputation that you have so badly tarnished by your actions. Though the graduate education and professional experience I gained during my years in the CUNY system laid the foundation for a successful career, I will no longer respond favorably to requests for alumni contributions unless and until this vote is reversed.

Sincerely,

Joel Berkowitz

Director, Sam & Helen Stahl Center for Jewish Studies  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Dear Chairman Schmidt:

We are writing on behalf of the 3,400 members of PEN American Center regarding the decision of the CUNY Board of Trustees to remove our esteemed Member and colleague Tony Kushner from the slate of candidates to receive an honorary doctorate from John Jay College in New York.

As you know, Mr. Kushner has created a body of work that is among the most distinguished in contemporary American theater—a body of work that has been recognized with awards including the Pulitzer Prize and honored with a two-week celebration by the Guthrie Theater in 2009. He is manifestly deserving of an honorary doctorate; indeed, he already has fifteen honorary degrees, from institutions including Columbia, NYU, Northwestern, Occidental, Wesleyan, Julliard, Pace, SUNY, the University of Minnesota, and Brandeis. That he would be so honored by the City University of New York seems especially fitting: as a writer who was born in Manhattan and who has risen to the highest ranks of American literature and gained international acclaim as a powerful and compassionate

voice willing to challenge political and cultural taboos, he embodies both the highest aspirations of many New York City youth and one of the bedrock values of all institutions of higher education, not least the proud and inspirational campuses of the CUNY system.

We were therefore deeply troubled to learn of the decision to remove Mr. Kushner from the list of those who will receive this year's honorary degrees. We are especially concerned that the decision was apparently made after one trustee denounced the political views of the former UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Mary Robinson and Mr. Kushner, particularly as they relate to the history and politics of Israel. You already have before you a letter from Mr. Kushner in which he describes this denunciation as a "grotesque caricature of my political beliefs." But that Mr. Wiesenfeld presented an incomplete and distorted version of Mr. Kushner's views is almost beside the point: there is nothing even in Mr. Wiesenfeld's description of those views that is outside the bounds of legitimate questioning, discussion, and debate by scholars and ordinary citizens alike, in both the United States and Israel. The spirit with which Mr. Kushner has engaged these questions is the same spirit which has produced such memorable and justifiably-acclaimed theatrical work, and indeed it is very likely the spirit the John Jay College community sought to honor by nominating Mr. Kushner to receive an honorary degree. It is a spirit that you, as CUNY Trustees, must surely recognize and value, and which the CUNY system most surely wants to foster.

We therefore ask you to review the decision to set aside Mr. Kushner's candidacy for an honorary degree as a matter of urgency, canvassing the entire CUNY Board with an eye toward reconsidering and approving the degree. We believe nothing will send a stronger message to the students of John Jay College and the entire CUNY system about the importance of free and open debate in the university community—and in the country as a whole.

Sincerely,

Kwame Anthony Appiah, President

Steven L. Isenberg, Executive Director

Larry Siems, Director

PEN Freedom to Write and International Programs

Dear Board Members,

I literally gasped when I read this morning that you had decided not to proceed to grant an honorary degree to Tony Kushner as a result of the partial and misshapen report of his views about Israel by one member of your Board. As Board members, you have a responsibility to proceed based on reasoned considerations and assessments of an individual's achievements in scholarship and public life, as well as a responsibility to sustain and protect vibrant speech about subjects that are controversial. Mr. Kushner's views fall well within the legitimate spectrum of democratic discussion. Of course, no one need agree with him or like the prose he uses or find his political engagements praiseworthy. These are matters for legitimate debate.

But as university trustees you are duty bound to secure and honor free expression, pay tribute to individuals for their accomplishments, and eliminate from consideration only persons who traduce the commitment to open inquiry and spirited discussion on which all decent universities depend. So as a proud citizen of this wonderful city, full of diverse persons and views, I am ashamed, as you should be, of the course you have taken. On reflection, I hope you will see the harm you have done to your institution. I very much hope you will show the courage to acknowledge and rectify a serious error.

Sincerely,

Ira Katznelson

Ruggles Professor of Political Science and History, Columbia University

Dear Board of Trustees:

It has been my privilege to serve on the faculty of Brooklyn College for nearly four decades, and in all those years I cannot recall a time when the university to which it belongs has done more damage to the core values of higher education. The scurrilous, half-baked accusations against Tony Kushner were bad enough; that they were brought by a trustee who reportedly believes that some people are less than human is outrageous, appalling, and contemptible. In the name of simple decency, please make this right.

Sincerely,

Edwin G. Burrows

Distinguished Professor of History, Brooklyn College

# GC Advocate Poetry Competition

The GC Advocate is pleased to announce the winners of the first annual GC Advocate Poetry Competition. Out of the several excellent entries received last April, our Judge, the poet and writer **Ammiel Alcalay**, chose four winners.

## Steven Alvarez

► First Prize & winner of a \$250 cash award

In a moving geography that jogs a reader's expectations, these are poems that sing with intellect and emotion, crossing linguistic, chronological and conceptual borders. By creating an "outside" to the poem (in the form of an abbreviated apparatus of sorts, pointing to "found manuscripts" or fragments, and dates of a perhaps yet unknown chronology), the reader is led or sometimes even forced to a concentrated reading that demands the pieces of the text be put together. This appeal to the reader creates a participatory space in which the actual poems hover and readers can begin to familiarize themselves with the new terrain that has been created, a terrain of pre-Columbian Americas transplanted, for example, to 'Times Esquare' or a fragment about "Messicko" found, apparently, on "painted deerskin" in Jackson Heights. This sense of the larger sphere of AZTLÁN embodies an imagination hurtling across a world of "Xicanos / working for la migra" where New York can suddenly become "Manhatitlán." With linguistic and musical dexterity, these poems embrace a world that, though unfamiliar to many, clearly need to be known by more. One can hear echoes of such classic and emerging classic writers as Gloria Anzaldúa, Juan Felipe Herrera, Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Sesshu Foster, as they intercept signals of dissonance across the North South divide of land and imagination.—*Judge Ammiel Alcalay*

### [1595 / 12 wind]

A: GEOGRAPHY: legit copy / MS 47152h-1 Paper ink draft / Londres / March

Yorope is a great place of verdure / of freshly fishy green / of wind / of windy places / windy—a cold place . . . it becomes cold . . . much frost / a place which freezes—a place from which such misery comes / where it exists / a place of afflictions / a place of lamentations / of afflictions / of weeping—a place of sadness / of compassionate sighing / which of course spreads misery . . . of gorges in places / of crags—of craggy places / a place of stony soils & souls / of hard soils & souls / but of soft soils & souls / a most moist & fertile place / a place of peaks / of stone jungles / of dry treestumps / a place of valleys / & a place as well of hollows—

a disturbing place . . . fearful & frightful—of love / a dwelling place of serpents & rabbits & deer / a place from which nothing departs / nothing leaves & nothing emerges / a naturalist jacket of nothing place / not a place of ocelot / the cuitlachtli / the bobcat / or the spider of prickly shrubs / nor of mesquite / but yes of pine / a place where the earth is owned by faceless beings / where the poor are felled / of moats & kings & playwrights & torture

a place of crashing wind / of whistling wind / whirlwinds of ice / gliding winds / a place where misery abounds / a valley of hollows / a place where misery abounds / emerges / spreads / is edible—[manuscript ends]

B: GEOGRAPHY: legit copy / MS 47152h-2 Painted deerskin / Jackson Heights Queens / Assumed August [highly contested as exact continuation of previous passage]

. . . forget Amurka [i !] & looky here at this sad Messico:

Messicko is a place of hunger—where hunger is born / a home for hunger / death from hunger / a place of trembling / of teeth chatter / of green glass bottles clinking together & broken shards used as wire fencing / a place of cramps & stiffening bodies / of fright / & flight / constant fright / where one's devoured / slain by stealth / abused—brutally put to death / kidnapped / a place where one is put to death in the jaws of the wild beasts of the land of the dead / a place of torment & where misery abounds / & a calm place—of continuing calm—

skies: miserly / rains there rot soils / & lions small & cowardly / there horses pigs & dogs become dwarves / where Yndios cold as serpents have no souls / hairless despicable men / flabby degenerate beasts / make children w/ their mothers

[manuscript ends]

### [1992 / 5<sup>th</sup> sun / our present]

honkey-tonk gringo corrido Gila Bend Corridor Bar / Gila Bend / AZTLÁN

s t r u m [sic]

"for Chaley Chastitellez  
"that brave ballsy fellow  
"told those Xicanos  
"working for la migra  
"los vendidos agringados:  
"in Makesicko love  
"germinates w/ the mouth  
"begins w/ the mouth  
"& her mouth the size of Puebla  
"w/ lips shaped like horizontal Sinaloas  
"& how beautiful her hips / two Chihuahuas—'  
"¡ Z á s !  
"& he proceeded to snap each of their necks  
"one by one w/ swift judochops  
"¡ Z á s ! ¡ Z á s ! ¡ Z á s ! ¡ Z á s ! ¡ Z á s !

"qué hombre"

brasstipped snakeskin boots tap  
& a pouncing taxidermed bobacat lunges  
away from woodpanelled wall

"man's man / & for his Tío / a hero  
"& for his Tía Amaryca the salvador himself . . ."

accordion accordion accordion

### [1962 / 5<sup>th</sup> sun / our present]

MS 44765d-145 (Private Collection) / typescript signed by Francisco "Pancho" Chastitellez Sr / grandfather of Chaley Chastitellez / songs gathered in shoebox at Pancho's Tuxson barrio apartment / December:

Radio AZtlán Amp & Alternator airwaves / Gila Valley

SONG: TransHistoricoOntological Honkey Tonk Blues

"... an empty bottle / a broken heart  
"& ye're still on mah mind"

goddamnit San Avabiche / hijo de la chingada a su puta madre turn up that  
radio goddamnit I love this one—

"yes: me vale verga all this mess:

"& bueno: mahs:  
"alone & forsaken  
"so blue I cd die  
"I jes set here drankin  
"til that bottle run dry  
"to tryn forget ye  
"I've turned to th wine

"an empty bottle / a broken heart  
"& ye're still on mah mind"

S T R U M [sic]

"sd an emptyempty bottle & mah broken heart  
"& yeee're still on mah mmmind"

spoken voice over music / & strummin strumm strummin

"w/ a little devotion now / steady: GO  
"casul day like any other  
"jet aircraft rippin a noisy sky

"& I sd to ye goodbye ye cruwel  
 "cruwelllll girl ye've scorned this  
 "delicate boy ye've murdered  
 "somein truly fine wit-in im  
 "dulled im completely & left  
 "im alone in a dumb dilemma  
 "w/ his martini before im  
 "& another jet screaming  
 "more in some future imperfect later  
 "yes smart as ye somethin rare  
 "indeed some true pillar  
 "of sun rightly so rightly so"

up S T R U M M      órale thas um charp chit

"singin ever since those Greeks  
 "found earth a spherical body  
 "found emselves preoccupied  
 "by determinin its size  
 "& a calculatin its circumference  
 "smartly & blessedly from Zoos  
 "what they reached stonishinly  
 "accurate considerin their means  
 "& methods vailable tecknologically  
 "then / / / WELL"

strum strummm strum strummm

"well when I fin mahself here  
 "spendin mah last dime getting drunker  
 "all the time & ye know ye just caint  
 "forget yr western civilizaaaaation  
 "& gods bless ye Yoropayin baby I love ye  
 "& I miss ye & yr amakin this Amurkan boy cry"

applause somewhere / yea get along li'l doggy hoppalong /  
 clear on thru clear on thru li'l lugnut alright alrighty turn  
 that down now pinches cabrónes get ta work en chinga pues

# [2008 / 5<sup>th</sup> sun / our present]

& so Tío & Chaley  
 penetrated Manhatitlán deep  
 sloppy July humidity tangling  
 them until 'Times Esquare'  
 as Tío used to say  
     tho he'd never been  
 & so his Sinaloan destiny linked  
 w/ web to this eastern place & so  
     Chaley Chastitellez  
     wd dump his Tío's  
     ashes wherever he  
     thought best here in Times Esquare

Chaley looked down at his Tío's new shell / then sd  
 pero oye listen oye  
 & ¡ look ! Tío—LA LUZ / sd Chaley to his Tío  
     whom he toted in black plastic sack  
     cinched at top &  
     ... how long & hidden  
     Tío in his dreams followed clinking cloud rolling  
     curtains / gas green neon  
     billowing / crowd furrowed /  
     strange brows—

SURE: mighty torrent / sure as its might / crowd /  
 & calmate Tío—hush yr thunder sd Chaley clearly speaking his Tío  
 —shun what's common & mean  
     6,982,488 lights flashing fury thoughtbulbs & another  
     6,982,488 & noise

& his Tío from beyond: "para el tiempo to boot" & these lines:  
 COSMOS black blanket star speckled planets / nebulae / constellations of  
 Suns

¡ LEND YR EARS ! thought Chaley to the folks  
     exiting Planet Hollywood &  
     to some beautiful fifty-foot tall pouty-lipped  
     white young man or maybe woman O Tío

away alone along on forty-two Chaley walking  
 solo west w/ Tío's ashes in this sack / plastic /

watchale / walking Tío's ashes north / past  
 Swatch  
 hugged sideways O / servicio hear Tío  
 here time's money Tío / Chaley sd to his uncle's ashes / sack cinched  
 time y movement / in Ethiopia time metaphors / sd  
 Chaley to his  
 uncle's ashes / of movement don't exist WELL

buckle no arrow  
 buckle no fleeting

y ¡ SENSE !

& Chaley Chastitellez reckoned here en Nueva Yor lights / lights & folks  
 who  
 ask C for money  
     & ask say / b the b / ¿ wha'sin thet bag boss ?

& / ¿ canna git some ?  
 & C: no / es mi tío en esta bolsa

¡ BASTA !

y know forever sus primos no tienen su papa not now nor forever Chaley  
     & the body just disappears  
     becomes dirt dirt dirt  
 well his ashes anyway / never to have visited Times Esquare w/ blood  
     mixed w/ his flesh

O TÍO / dead / dead / dead / first blind as a bat in political matters  
     racist / como Ezra Pound

racist Tío / fearful Tío / hatred / hardhearted / contra women / Jews / homo-  
 sexuals

Puerto Ricans—evil Tío of different worlds really  
     refracted bigtime      ¿& he wanted Times Esquare?  
     no manches:  
     he'd die from selfhatred selfpity selfdread

all these lights Chaley looked up  
     always electric day here in this place  
     Chaley needed a dark place & he  
     eyed a green flowerpot  
     sweat in his eyes pot  
 over yonder & sd to the box  
 there are two things in this dirty dirty world  
     up he looked at groups of students chaperoned  
     by workingclass folk from Wax Museum / J-LO  
 second: visible thru the window: two things: brute facts & social facts  
 Tío: brute facts exist w/o man      Chaley still speaking to cinched bag:  
     but objex in relation to time: after the lantern yard loss of God  
 (absence of meaning & Chaley speaking faster  
 / rambling:

raveloe: space w/o time ...  
 repetition instead  
 cyclical time HALLO QUETZALCOATL  
     I order ye universe / TIMES SQUARE  
 ¡ zsTOP !  
     & nothing / nothing

look Tío: here he spoke to the ashes in the box:

shells.

(Steven Alvarez is a candidate in the English program at the Graduate Center,  
 CUNY. His dissertation research is an ethnographic study into the languages and  
 literacies of immigrant Mexican families living in New York City. His poetry has  
 appeared in Fence, Drunken Boat, Shampoo, and In Xochitl In Kuikatl. He is  
 originally from Safford, Arizona. )

## Perrin Carrell

► Second Prize and Winner of a \$75 cash award

### OAK CREEK, NW 60TH ST

Another day in outer space.  
Backpacking mad man  
crackhead pushing weight out of the corner store

door. Section eight up late on Christmas  
Eve. Red light special on the  
fifth floor. Thank

God this is only temporary (even if I never wanted to leave). Someone is shot.  
Homeward bound. Everyone is black or Mexican except us.  
I am too young to understand our

jingle-jangle apartment complex. No matter my size, I am still a  
kracka. Single parented, two jobs, pre-puberty, I walk myself home,  
learning to live in middle America.

Mom reads to me for half an hour every  
night. Six straight years in 500 square feet until I start kindergarten.  
One day a knock at the door. Somebody's

parent drops a blue kid on our floor,  
quiet, not breathing. Kid's parent leaves. Mom, like with  
everything else,  
resuscitates him. So many fuck-ups at the

swimming pool. Trash in white lawn chairs. We are all poor and chlorinated  
together. We drink RC Cola under Bud Light  
umbrellas. Camaraderie is born of hot dogs and

violence. It took so long to get a fix on my own  
whiteness. This is where I write my poem. This is where I  
Xerox the stages of my upbringing using combinations of  
primary colors for

your entertainment. Presentation is everything. You are only as good as your  
zapatos.

## AMERICANA

I need you to understand my Americana  
to see a deer over the fence from cheap lawn chairs  
emerging from the thicket  
between the deck and the expressway  
the sound of small tomatoes  
bursting in her mouth  
as she carefully destroys the garden.  
It is full of backroads, fields  
of dead cars overgrown with fescue.  
I imagine it unpopulated  
except for the 8 or 9 of you  
I really love. All of you  
are yellowgreen. Some of you forever stuck  
in turning lanes. The cycle of life and death  
in its miniaturized form: back yard  
slowly filling with family pets.  
This is how we learn. I see it best with a beer  
from the seat of a refurbished golf cart  
finally running after years of trial and error  
not so good on hills. Even here we find the mountains.  
When we are tired of mountains we drive endlessly  
to find the ocean. Or something like it.  
A few people were killed in stairwells  
but I prefer to think of the locusts  
violining in the hot familiar dark.

## Jeremy James George & Avi Kline

► Third Place and Winners each of a \$50 cash award

### Study #2: So Often, So Far, So I Say, So Then

Jeremy James George

—26 July 2000

So often I've wanted to be the man announcing  
weather—off-site, a distant presence, a voice  
relaying late satellite translations. So often,  
I write it down, then I say it, & this is true.  
Often, when the weather comes, it is our mother  
country. So often I've looked out my window,  
wondering & saddened by knowledge of barriers,

the land that rebukes us, yet faithful to bones  
that wear cold like an invincible coat. So then  
I rename myself *pisugtooq*, what the eastern  
Eskimo call the white bear, "the great wanderer."  
So far I've been able to damper any serious doubts,  
but the ones that get through feel like phone calls  
in the night, a wrong number, inexplicable silence  
in the wire. So often I've felt like a threadbare man  
shuffling over stones in a cold & driving rain,  
when all I've wanted was to be the man in bed,  
looking out the window, yawning & thinking,  
seeing summer out, inviting darkness in, turning,  
returning, knowing what it is to choose sides, choose  
life over death, choose *want*. So often I've heard  
that love is hard, music short. So I say: *today, partly  
cloudy turning to showers in the late afternoon,  
possible thunderstorm, high of 35, winds NE 12-15  
knots, & then: Holy Shit! It's the 26<sup>th</sup> of July!* &  
I know: *a man has to begin over & over*. My voice  
is an answer to a question never meant to be asked  
outside the body of the house. So then I walk outside,  
over the road, beyond the houses, out on the tundra,  
past an oil drum impressed w/ rust & bullet holes,  
a sense of autumn in the tussock grass around it,  
past the world going on inside it, bugs & shadows,  
remnant snow & a tiny pool of water, the nuptials  
of barren dirt. And I kick it. And beyond it I see a snowy  
owl like a beacon atop a rise. She swivels her head  
around, unstartled, full of returns, on guard. This is her  
place. And I kick again & I hear thunder caught in far-off  
mountains. Again & the earth opens up before me, one  
blinking eye, a centerpiece in some byzantine triptych.  
Again & god knows I don't want to stop. Again &  
I remember Asia. Again & again & again & all I hear  
is the most beautiful rain in the world.

(Jeremy James George is a PhD candidate in art history writing on Inca spatial practice.)

## Chicago

Avram Kline

This canal moves crockery and little saxophones,  
things that need a smooth ride. We tunnel into  
a great lake when we feel celebrity wearing off.

A porter knows my thighs, says they are movable  
properties. Chicago is a hub, a bovine place for  
bodies. Slaughterhouses release wild onions

and Indians trade the trees for a satellite. Natalie  
Cole arrives at Hotel Burnham late in the night.  
The bed in her suite hasn't been turned down

so I pull the duvet, fold the corner of the sheets  
into a triangle, place a mint on the triangle, fluff  
the pillows and restack them decoratively. I dim

the lights too. She proffers a hand and asks my  
name and says to me, You don't have to leave me,  
you can stay with me, you can touch my nimbus.

Little Richard is at the podium of a stockcar.  
The bulls await his final order. They want to breed  
while they still can, but Little Richard is rattling.

Rail tracks are sleeves and I am undressing again.  
We pass Jean Baptiste Point du Sable beside his  
lakeside cottage where he learnt the native tongue

and felled the trees and settled the mouth of the  
river. He is reaching his hand into an ox. He is  
saying, I'm done with Indians. I'll do as I please.

This is my beast, this is my beast, this is my beast.  
Recognize me? The aquifer holds every name.  
Brittlebush feeds the current, then comes piñon.

(Avram Kline lives in Northampton, MA. He attends the MFA Program for Poets and Writers at UMass-Amherst, and plays washbasin bass for the Cunningham Quartet.)

# Accomplish the Mission: Bring them Home

AMY GOODMAN

On May 1, the U.S. president addressed the nation, announcing a military victory. May 1, 2003, that is, when President George W. Bush, in his form-fitting flight suit, strode onto the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln. Under the banner announcing "Mission Accomplished," he declared that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended."

That was eight years to the day before President Barack Obama, without flight suit or swagger, made the surprise announcement that Osama bin Laden had been killed in a U.S. military operation (in a wealthy suburb of Pakistan, notably, not Afghanistan).

The U.S. war in Afghanistan has become the longest war in U.S. history. News outlets now summarily report that "The Taliban have begun their annual spring offensive," as if it were the release of a spring line of clothes. The fact is, this season has all the markings of the most violent of the war, or as the brave reporter Anand Gopal told me Tuesday from Kabul: "Every year has been more violent than the year before that, so it's just

continuing that trend. And I suspect the same to be said for the summer. It will likely be the most violent summer since 2001."

Let's go back to that fateful year. Just after the Sept. 11 attacks, Congress voted to grant President Bush war authorization. The resolution passed the Senate 98-0, and passed the House 420-1. The sole vote against the invasion of Afghanistan was cast by California Congresswoman Barbara Lee. Her floor speech in opposition to House Joint Resolution 64 that Sept. 14 should be required reading:

"I rise today with a heavy heart, one that is filled with sorrow for the families and loved ones who were killed and injured in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania. ... Sept. 11 changed the world. Our deepest fears now haunt us. Yet I am convinced that military action will not prevent further acts of international terrorism against the United States. ... We must not rush to judgment. Far too many innocent people have already died. Our country is in mourning. If we rush to launch a counterattack, we run too great a risk that women, children and other noncombatants

will be caught in the crossfire. ... As a member of the clergy so eloquently said, 'As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore.'"

Ten years after her courageous speech, Lee, whose anti-war stance is increasingly becoming the new normal, wants a repeal of that war resolution:

"That resolution was a blank check. ... It was not targeted toward al-Qaida or any country. It said the president is authorized to use force against any nation, organization or individual he or she deems responsible or connected to 9/11. It wasn't a declaration of war, yet we've been in the longest war in American history now, 10 years, and it's open-ended."

Lee acknowledges that Obama "did commit to begin a significant withdrawal in July." But what does troop withdrawal mean with the presence of military contractors in war? Right now, the 100,000 contractors (called "mercenaries" by many) outnumber U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Gopal says, "The U.S. is really a fundamental force for instability in Afghanistan ... allying with local actors—warlords, commanders, gov-

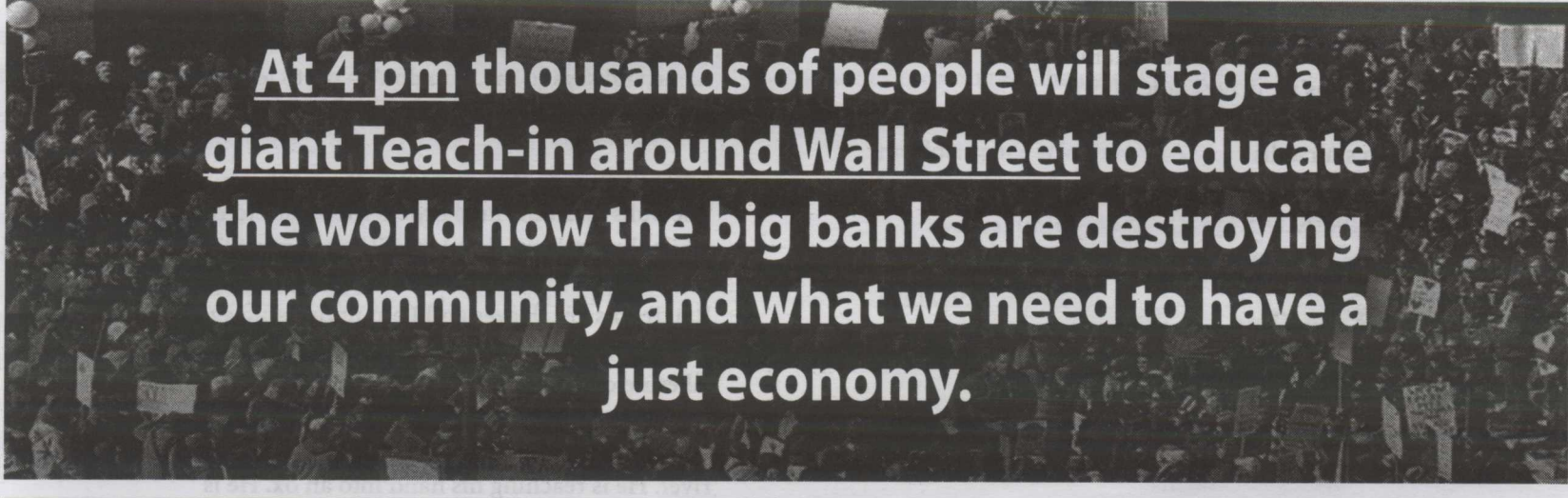
ernment officials—who've really been creating a nightmare for Afghans, especially in the countryside, [and with] the night raids, breaking into people's homes, airstrikes, just the daily life under occupation."

Filmmaker Robert Greenwald has partnered with anti-war veterans to produce "Rethink Afghanistan," a series of films about the war, online at rethinkafghanistan.com. In response to bin Laden's death, they have launched a new petition to press the White House to bring the troops home. Lee supports it: "I can't overstate how important this is for our democracy—every poll has shown that over 65, 70 percent of the public now is war-weary. And they understand that we need to bring our young men and women out of harm's way. They've performed valiantly and well. They've done everything we've asked them to do, and now it's time to bring them home." A

*Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column. Amy Goodman is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 900 stations in North America. She is the author of "Breaking the Sound Barrier," recently released in paperback and now a New York Times best-seller.*

Mayor Bloomberg's budget will lay off thousands of teachers, close firehouses, and cut funding to human services, schools, childcare, student aid, senior centers, and more. **There's an alternative.** Mayor Bloomberg can save \$1.5 Billion if he stops the corporate welfare, tax loopholes, sweetheart deals, and subsidies for the Big Banks and super-rich.

## ON MAY 12 MAKE BIG BANKS AND MILLIONAIRES PAY



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# A Spirit of Youth in Everything



► *Springtime: The New Student Rebellions* edited by Clare Solomon and Tania Palmieri (Verso 2011)

TRISTAN K. HUSBY

*Springtime: The New Student Rebellions* wasn't intended to be analyzed but rather thrown through an administration window. A smorgasbord of history, theory and art, this book is a chorus of voices chanting at a protest, and they want you to join in.

Running through seven countries, *Springtime* intends to smash assumptions about what is possible and inspire actions that go beyond what is permitted. As Solomon describes the protests over the tuition increases in Britain in 2010, "The students who marched on the streets to protect their rights are fighting for something larger." With Tunisia included as the last chapter of the book (and the postscript about what was then still Mubarak-ruled Egypt), it is clear that while *Springtime* writers value education, they think that education struggles are intended to spill beyond the borders of the university.

Like education, the editors Clare Solomon and Tania Palmieri take history seriously, not simply because they want to avoid past mistakes, but because it is impossible to understand the present without understanding the past. Realizing that the grassroots' greatest weapon is mass, they urge readers to avoid seeing any action or person as isolated. Continuously trying to see the whole by listening to many different and divergent voices, Solomon and Palmieri's book doesn't make any conspicuous attempt to unite

their various writings. However, several investigative themes throughout the book are obvious and a common analysis of higher education and how it is related to revolution emerges quite quickly, and is intriguingly repeated throughout Book.

The most obvious investigatory lens in *Springtime* is history. Part of Solomon's and Palmieri's anxiety about the limited nature of any one viewer's analysis results from their own understanding of the overwhelming influence of outside forces in the creation of subjectivity: "As this book reveals, it is experience, the society in which we live, the lives we lead, that determines consciousness." In an attempt to escape the primacy of the present for our understanding of the present, various Flashbacks rupture the first four sections of the book, popping up randomly among the accounts of current struggles to remind us that all these struggles have occurred before. These flashbacks range from a snippet of Hobsbawm on France in 1968 to the lyrics of the Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man." Solomon and Palmieri wish not only to connect student and youth movements across the world to each other, but to connect past movements to the present: "These islands have a radical past, after all, one that is not being taught in the history modules on offer."

*Springtime* is divided into six sections: UK: December Days, Italy, Occupied California, France Again, Simmering Greece, and Tunisia, the Toppling of a Despot. The choice of these particular student movements is unclear, other than that all places are names

that a student activist in America or Europe would immediately recognize. My methodological quibble may be academic, but by merely celebrating the student movements which are already widely known, the editors abandoned the opportunity to uncover and share student movements that are broad based, strategic and successful, but not necessarily well known. For example, do the campus occupations in California warrant their own section? More importantly, why is the arguably more compelling story of the student strike at the University of Puerto Rico in the section titled "Occupied California"? While the argument that California is California has some merit, I would have loved to have seen something on either the student syndicalism in Canada or Mexico, both countries in which student unions have been significant political forces for over forty years and have demonstrated the ability to organize student strikes on multiple campuses in order to defeat, successfully, national proposals to increase tuition.

Furthermore, while it is clear that the editors themselves would be more than willing to critique a text through the lens of Euro-Centrism, unfortunately they themselves seem to have been unable to escape this trap, and leave out entirely any mention of student movements in South America, Asia and the Antipodes, all places which have a rich history of student organizing and student syndicalism. The lack of flashbacks and in depth history pieces in the sections on Greece and Tunisia give the impression that these

Continued on page 18

# Poe Boy

► *Pym: A Novel* by Mat Johnson.  
Spiegel & Grau (2011).

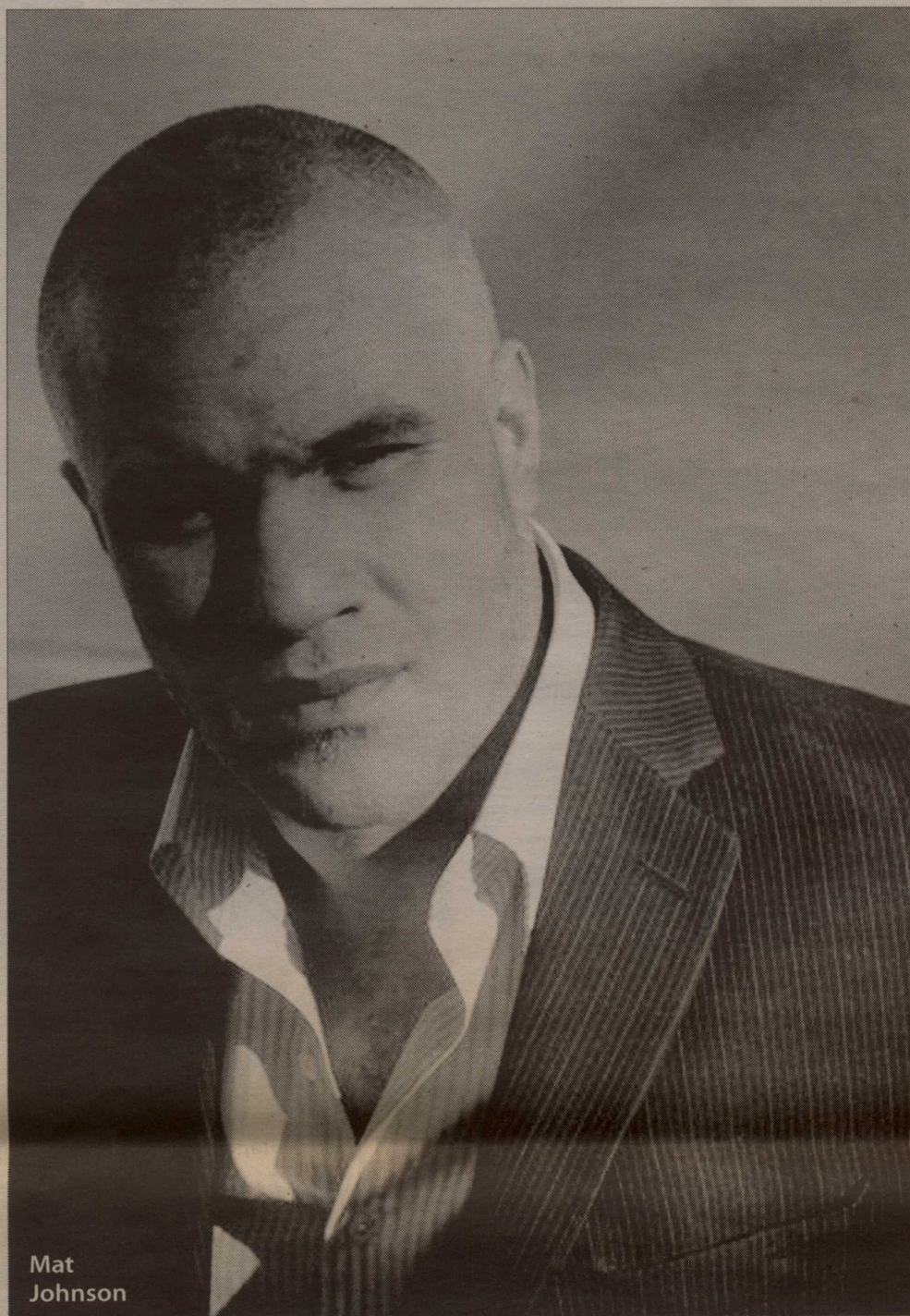
## LAVELLE PORTER

When the first reviews of Mat Johnson's *Pym* began circulating online, a couple of friends emailed me links about the book. They knew that I am working on a dissertation about academic novels, and they figured (correctly) that this novel would be right up my alley. The narrator of *Pym* is a self-described "blackademic" named Christopher Jaynes, the only black professor in the English department at a Northeastern liberal arts college. Mat Johnson is a professor of creative writing at The University of Houston, and the author of four other novels, including the historical fiction work *The Great Negro Plot* about the 1741 slave revolt conspiracy in New York City.

My own research is on academic novels written by black writers and/or featuring black characters. Some other examples in this genre include Percival Everett's *Erasure*, Ishmael Reed's *Japanese by Spring*, and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*. Writers of black academic novels have used the device of fiction to comment on the state of higher education and also to address political questions about the role of the black intellectual. At some point in all of these novels, there is some discussion as to whether the black intellectual does or does not have a specific obligation to apply their knowledge and talents to the social and political problems facing the African-American community. The characters are also forced to confront, in one way or another, the idea that black intellectuals do or do not act as representatives of the entire race. Then of course there is the very idea of "race" itself which complicates matters even further with the contested boundaries of identity, skin color, and ancestry. In *Pym* Mat Johnson uses an inventive blend of satire, literary criticism, and even a bit of science fiction to examine how the idea of race continues to bedevil us in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

The quest for tenure is a staple of academic novel plots. True to form *Pym* begins with Christopher Jaynes being denied tenure, in part because of his refusal to sit on the "Diversity Committee." His argument is that "The Diversity Committee has one primary purpose: so that the school can say it has a diversity committee...People find that very relaxing. It's sort of like, if you had a fire, and instead of putting it out, you formed a fire committee." Another reason why Jaynes is rejected for tenure is because his colleagues don't think his research interests are quite black enough. Though he's competent in black literature, Jaynes is also interested in the proverbial Dead White Men, and the one that fascinates him most is Edgar Allen Poe. He is particularly obsessed with *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), the only novel Poe ever published, and by all accounts a highly idiosyncratic mess of a work. We can assume that at some point, probably in a graduate school seminar, our man Jaynes got his hands on a copy of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (Morrison's book is never mentioned outright in *Pym* but it looms large in the background.) In that influential work of literary criticism Morrison argued that there has always been an "Africanist" presence in American literature, even when the authors may not have consciously written about black subjects. For Jaynes this theory helps to explain some of Poe's wacky racial characterizations.

In Poe's novel, Arthur Gordon Pym is a sailor who, in a series of wild events, ends up on a ship in the



Mat Johnson

South Seas. Eventually the ship nears Antarctica where the crew comes upon a strange tropical island called Tsalal populated by a group of dark-skinned natives. Among the crew of Pym's ship is a man named Dirk Peters. He is identified by Poe as a "half-breed Indian," but Jaynes thinks that Poe's description of him sounds awfully Negroid, especially compared to the way Poe had described black characters in his other stories. Jaynes's big intellectual breakthrough comes when he stumbles on to the holiest of holy grails for an American literary scholar—an unpublished pre-Civil War manuscript, and finds out that it was written by an African-American man named Dirk Peters who, it turns out, was a real person and not just a fictional character in Poe's novel. He tracks down a descendent of Peters in Gary, Indiana named Mahalia Mathis who is none too happy about her ancestor being called an African-American. She professes to be a proud "Native American" who belongs to an organization of other delusional black folks claiming to be way more Indian than they obviously look. Jaynes's investigations eventually lead him on his own wild expedition to Antarctica. The trip is arranged by a cousin named Booker Jaynes, described as "the world's only civil rights activist turned deep sea-diver." Chris is joined by his childhood friend Garth Frierson, a tubby black bus-driver from Detroit with a weakness for Little Debbie snack cakes (a habit that ends up coming in handy on their trip in the most improbable way). Of course there's a romantic storyline involved, and in this case the romantic interest is Chris Jaynes's ex-girlfriend Angela Latham, a businesswoman who has just remarried, and whose new husband unexpectedly joins them on the trip. I won't ruin too much about their trip to Antarctica,

but the excursion turns into a mad cap adventure that involves: a group of weird humanoid snow creatures, the secret Biosphere-style compound of a neo-conservative American painter, "Arthur Gordon Pym" himself, and maybe even the end of the world.

The closest literary cousin to *Pym* is Percival Everett's 1999 academic novel *Erasure* which deals specifically with the discourse of racial authenticity in American cultural and literary history. In *Pym* Chris Jaynes feels that he has been rejected by his academic colleagues because he was working on a project that was not "black" in the most immediately legible way. It is no mistake that he ends up being replaced on the faculty by a self-anointed "Hip-Hop Theorist" named Mosaic Johnson. Jaynes insists that he wasn't being evasive by studying white writers. In fact he was staring deep into the heart of whiteness itself to try to understand the race question. As he says, "It wasn't that I was an apolitical coward, running away from the battle. I was running so hard toward it, I was around the world and coming back in the other direction." By the end of the novel Jaynes has done just

that—and in a more literal way than he ever imagined when he started out.

Through some clever bits of literary criticism inserted in the novel, Jaynes discusses the importance of the slave narrative to all forms of black literature that have come after it. But he also admits to some feelings of exhaustion about the subject. "I am bored with the topic of Atlantic slavery. I have come to be bored because so many boring people have talked about it. So many artists and writers and thinkers, mediocre and genius, have used it because it's a big, easy target." However, he goes on to acknowledge that the topic is simply unavoidable in American history. "It is the great story, the big one, the connector that gives the reason for our nation's prosperity and for our very existence within it." The history of slavery and the racial codes that evolved out of it have thoroughly infiltrated the American psyche, and race continues to permeate American politics. We're all getting the ultimate object lesson in this right now with the ongoing saga of our first black president and the controversies over his racial identity, religious beliefs and place of birth. Mat Johnson's *Pym* is one of many examples of how black artists have tried to use humor and satire to ease the sting of racism, or to undermine the idea of race itself by exposing its absurdities. There is a long and celebrated history of this kind of irreverence in black stand-up comedy. (Johnson cites the comedian Paul Mooney in one of his footnote digressions.) But even with the best efforts in humor, or scholarship, or activism, the specter of race will not be so easily exorcised. And it certainly won't be removed just by uttering the word "post-racial." If there is one big, corny, clichéd lesson to take from a novel like *Pym*, it is that the only way out is through. ☺

# "New Music" Comes of Age

NAOMI PERLEY

Last weekend, several of the country's leading performers of contemporary music gathered to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of American composer Steve Reich. The festivities began on Saturday night with a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall of four recent works, three of which received their New York premieres that evening. On Sunday night, (le) Poisson Rouge hosted a screening of Eric Darmon's new documentary about Reich, titled *Steve Reich: Phase to Face*; afterward, Darmon and Reich took part in a Q&A session.

Steve Reich first gained fame in the 1960s for a technique he discovered called phasing. At that point in time, composers were just beginning to experiment with incorporating tape samples into their works. As Reich tells the story, one day he tried to play the same loop on two tape decks at once. Over time, the two loops got out of sync with each other, creating complex patterns that gradually changed over time. After writing several pieces using tape loop in this fashion (*It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) have become particularly well-known), he transplanted the concept of phasing from tape back to acoustic instruments.

By the time Reich started writing his tape pieces and experimenting with phase music, the most renowned composers both in America and abroad, many influenced by Schoenberg's method of twelve tone composition, were writing incredibly complex, dissonant music that many musicians had difficulty understanding or playing. But by the late 1960s, Reich, along with such composers as Terry Riley and Philip Glass, were trying to create music that wasn't exactly simpler, but whose form and structural processes could be grasped by listening to the music, rather than by sitting down and studying the score. This new style, which featured techniques such as phasing, repetitive rhythmic figures, and fairly consonant, simple harmonies based on major and minor scales, became known as "minimalism."

Half a century later, Steve Reich and the other so-called "minimalist" composers seem to have taken the hegemonic place of the mid-century serialist composers, who now seem to have fallen out of favour with both audiences and the press. Steve Reich, whose first performance at Carnegie Hall met with vociferous boos, can now fill all 2800 of Carnegie's seats. Philip Glass has received widespread fame as a film score composer. And I challenge you to find a music student who hasn't "performed" Riley's *In C* or Reich's *Clapping Music* for fun with a bunch of friends.

This last point goes to the heart of how and why these composers, especially Reich, have become so popular. They are attracting a demographic of both performers and audience members that many classical music institutions have given up on: young people. This is no small feat for a composer who is currently celebrating his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. The concert lineup on Saturday night was a who's-who of the under-40 contemporary music scene: Bang on a Can featured several young musicians, including Graduate Center DMA student Kelli Kathman; eighth blackbird began performing together as students at Oberlin in the 1990s; So Percussion met as students at Yale in 1999. Flip through the program booklet for the concert and the closest you will come to seeing a photograph of a musician in a tux is So Percussion's ironic deconstruction of the look, with bowties askew, suspenders and formal white shirts paired with jeans, and so on.

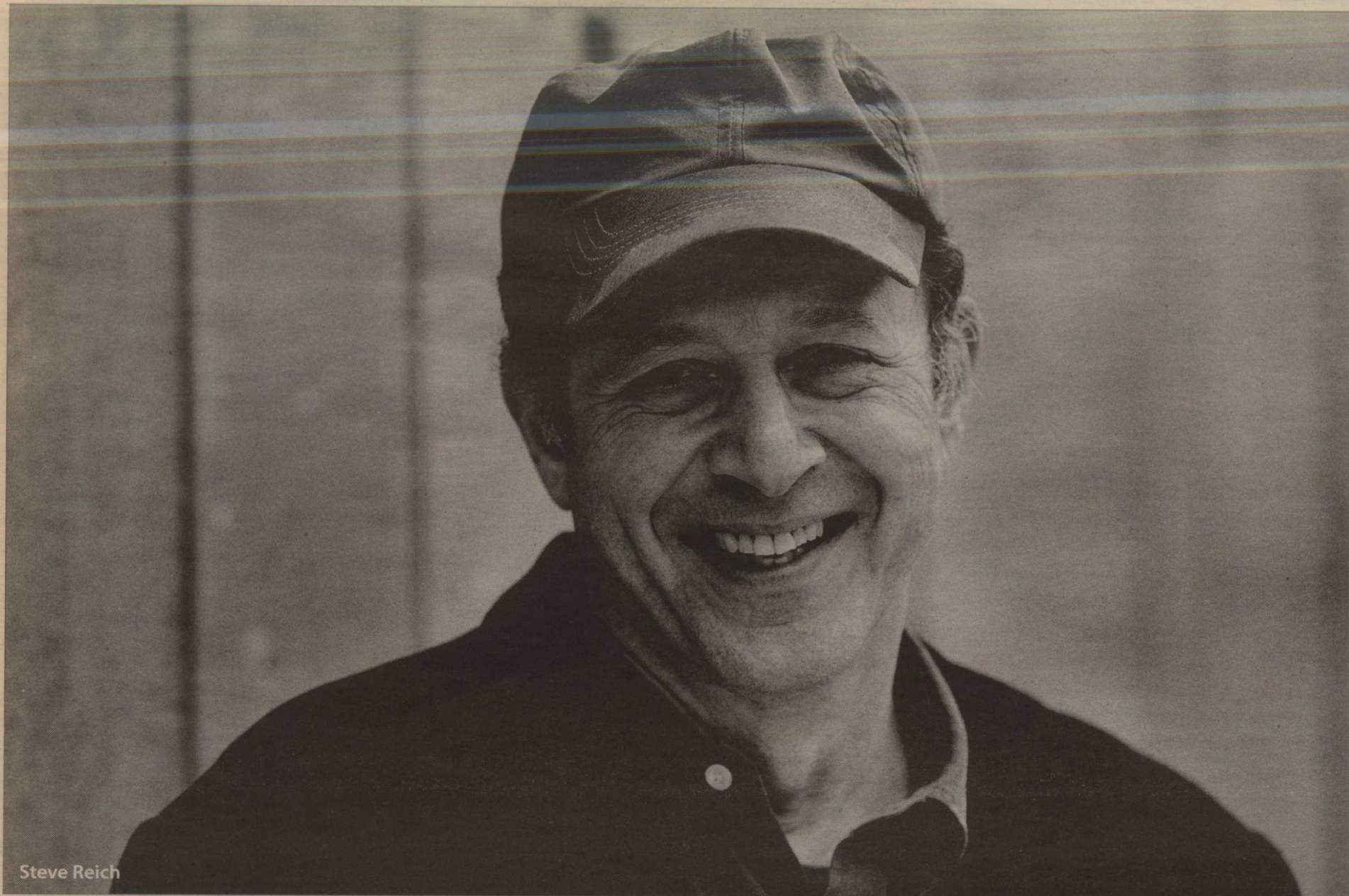
In addition to actively seeking out young performers to collaborate with, Reich takes much inspiration from the worlds of jazz and rock music. One of the pieces that received its New York premiere on Saturday night was *2x5*, written for two rock bands each consisting of piano, two electric guitars, an electric bass, and drums. Playing alongside members of Bang on a Can were members of the bands The National and Wilco.

The concert, which consisted of four works writ-

ten over a four-year period, showcased Reich's most recent work, allowing the audience to get a sense of where Reich is going and what he is currently most interested in. However, the underlying similarities between three of these four pieces (*Mallet Quartet*, *2x5*, and *Double Sextet*) left me wondering whether it was really a wise idea to program all these works together.

All three pieces feature a double ensemble of sorts: two marimbas and two vibraphones in *Mallet Quartet*; two rock bands in *2x5*; and two flutes, clarinets, violins, cellos, pianos, and vibraphones in *Double Sextet*. All three pieces contain three movements that follow the basic pattern of fast-slow-fast (then again, so does at least 80 percent of all classical music). All three pieces begin with a lively ostinato in the lower instruments (piano or mallet instruments, usually), over which the higher-pitched instruments weave more or less intricate melodic lines. All three feature some modal-jazz-inflected harmonies. All three end with the instruments coming together on one pitch or one ostinato and then stopping suddenly. In short, all three pieces tell the same basic story.

Of the three works, *Double Sextet* tells this story the best. When eighth blackbird first asked Reich to compose a work for them, he was reluctant because the group's instrumentation is that of Arnold Schoenberg's 20<sup>th</sup>-century chamber-music masterpiece, *Pierrot lunaire*, with the addition of percussion. However, he agreed to write a piece for a doubled version of the ensemble. Having twelve instruments of such varying timbres at his disposal seems to have made all the difference. While *Double Sextet* follows the same general outlines as *2x5* and *Mallet Quartet*, it contains a diversity and richness of melodic and harmonic writing and orchestration that is absent from the other two works. The level of craftsmanship and musical control that Reich exercised in composing this piece paid off: the *Double Sextet* won the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 2009.



Steve Reich

WTC 9/11, the other work on the program,, was starkly different from the other three. Co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, this work commemorates the events of September 11, 2001. The work was written for three string quartets (in this performance, the Kronos Quartet performed live to two pre-recorded string quartets) and tape. The first movement featured recordings from the archives of NORAD and FDNY. The second movement sampled interviews from Reich's neighbours—his family lived only four blocks from the World Trade Center. In the last movement, Reich used recordings of Jews who kept vigil over the dead bodies, singing psalms until they could be buried.

The musical language that Reich employs in *WTC 9/11* is much darker and more dissonant than anything else he has written lately. Throughout the first movement, the violins imitate the sound of a phone being off the hook—a reference to the fact that he and his children kept the phone line open between his house upstate and the apartment downtown, where

the rest of his family was, for six hours on September 11 until they could drive out of the city. The three total string quartets weave a dense, chromatic texture around the recordings. The resulting sound is a departure for Reich, to be sure, but wholly appropriate to the subject at hand, and incredibly affecting.

On Sunday, (le) Poisson Rouge screened director Eric Darmon's new documentary, *Steve Reich: Phase to Face*. The film, distributed by Naxos, is now widely available on DVD. After leaving the Saturday night concert feeling a little ambivalent about Reich's latest efforts, watching the film restored my confidence in Reich. The film provides an overview of his career, and features video clips of such classic works of his as *It's Gonna Rain*, *Piano Phase*, *Music for 18 Musicians*, and *Different Trains*. In short, it reminded me of just how much he has accomplished, and how varied his musical output has been, over the course of his whole life.

The film should appeal both to those who are Steve Reich fanatics, and those who know little or nothing

about him. For those who already know Reich's biography and his music, the film features video clips of several performances and rehearsals which otherwise might be difficult to get one's hands on, all carefully labelled with subtitles. It also captures some priceless Reich moments on film, most notably the phone call in which he was told that he had won the Pulitzer for *Double Sextet*. For those who are less familiar with Reich's career, he recounts some of the touchstone events in his career: his education at Cornell and Juilliard; how he discovered phasing; the stories behind landmark works such as *Different Trains*.

The most impressive moment in this beautiful film was when *Music for 18 Musicians* played as the camera fixed on a busy intersection in Tokyo, full of pedestrians and cars and neon lights. Hearing Reich's music as a soundtrack for a busy intersection in one of the most exciting cities on the planet put his style in perspective: it is music for today's world, plugged into the cities and events and sounds of twenty-first century urban life. Ⓐ

## Book Review: *Springtime*

Continued from page 14

countries, the first lying on, the second lying just outside the periphery of Europe, lack a radical history (now that the Arab world is in a post-Mubarak era, the essays on Algeria in this section seem more like a forgotten promise than anything else). This erasure of history on the periphery is increasingly problematic as the recent revolutions in the Arab world, frequently called the Arab Spring, are held to be an example for the student movements; for as Jo Casserly extrapolates from the UK student movement, "Defeating the cuts will mean bringing down the coalition government." But how can European and American students follow Tunisia if their history is ignored?

The consensus of the writers in *Springtime* is that due to the role of students and higher education in society, America and Europe will sometime soon face similar upheavals as Tunisia and Egypt. In the United States and Europe, more people than ever are entering colleges and universities. As Giulio Calella remarks on the Italian university system, the problem isn't access to the university directly, but that the university is increasingly called upon to serve the interests of

capital. Calella notes that the implementation of the 3+2 education reform "resulted in a massive increase in the number of first degree courses: from 2,444 in 2000 to 5,517 in 2007, including 'linguistic mediation science for television and cinema dialogist translators' in Turin, and 'Dog and cat breeding, wellbeing and hygiene' in Bari." This specialized education in television dialogue translation and cat breeding means that employers no longer have to pay for their own training programs, a transfer of responsibility from private employers to their workers and the increasingly underfunded state-based education programs, a process perhaps best exemplified by CUNY's proposed High School and Associate Degree program, which is specifically designed to land students jobs at Microsoft.

While students are promised well paying jobs as a reward for the sweat of their studies, the economy is shifting in a different direction. While a college degree was at one point a gateway to a stable job with a pension, now "college graduates increasingly tend to get the jobs that were previously reserved for matriculants, or even for workers with no formal education." Calella further notes that the sleeping pill that still keeps graduates quiet is the assumption that "sooner or later, your salary will grow." But will this bargain remain, in lieu of the financial crisis of 2008, that as Peter Hallward points out, since the banks successfully blocked meaningful reforms, could strike again at anytime? *Springtime* suggests that when students feel that their social contract—study hard at school and you'll get into the middle class—falls apart, they're willing to take to the streets and rebel.

But *Springtime's* analysis is not strictly structural; explanations for the success of the revolution in Tunisia are often explained also as the result of the bravery of the revolutionaries. In their essays, Leila Basmoudi, Sadri Khiari come to the conclusion that it was as much by their courage as by their political and economic conditions that the Tunisians became ungovernable by the tyrant Ben Ali. Not that bravery precludes sacrifice: over two hundred and fifty Tunisians died in the weeks preceding Ben Ali's downfall.

The physicality of bravery is emphasized in the accounts of the UK anti-cut demonstrations. The recollections of organizers and participants make clear that politics is more than talk and more than even collective action: politics is location and enduring pain. Hallward, a former philosopher at the now philosopher-

less Middlesex University (the entire philosophy department was dissolved due to budget cuts in 2010), recounts how police almost killed his former student Alfred Meadows by a blow to the head. Amy Gilligan reconstructs protest space from a wheelchair perspective, including her trip to the top of the occupied Tory Headquarters during the November 10 protest and being attacked by a cop at the December 9 protest at the parliament. Through all the British accounts, the fragility of the protestor's bodies is contrasted with the police's masked and armored uniforms.

Not that protestor's bodies are always defenseless. In the Italy section, the "Genealogy of the Book Bloc" documents how students literally armed themselves with knowledge. With shields decorated with titles varying from Plato's *Republic* to Isaac Asimov's *The Naked Sun* to Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, Italian students confronted Berlusconi's education reform with the very literature that he threatened to destroy. "Genealogy" notes how this tactic has already spread to Britain. With the numerous budgetary threats to the libraries of cities, towns and schools, the Book Bloc seems ready to tour America, perhaps with a copy of *Springtime* thrown in the mix, just to be a little meta.

*Springtime* is full of such tactical ideas, including how to confront the police's "kettling" technique, how to time a campus occupation, and how to balance differences between the sciences and the humanities when holding a student strike. In the last week in April alone this year there were student occupations at five universities (Emory University, Rutgers University, University of Wisconsin Madison, Williams and Mary, Tulane University). What will American students think of after *Springtime* is released in the United States?

The editors Solomon and Palmieri are both heavily involved in the student movement in Britain, and their experience is reflected in the quality of the UK: December section. With over twenty entries, readers hear from university students, high school students, parents and university lecturers. Furthermore, this section has the best art of the entire book, with a time line and map of the protests and university occupations of 2010 that uses collage and a digital style to emphasize how Twitter, Facebook and Google maps all became tools in service of the student movement. Unfortunately, the breadth of perspectives in the UK section isn't matched elsewhere in the book, in which the editors prioritized theoretical and historical pieces, rather than the heartfelt reflections that make the UK student movement so memorable.

One of those reflections is that of sixteen year old Stuart O'Reilly: "I used to moan at people who said politicians were all liars and were all as bad as each other. I realize now how naive I was. Protesting against tuition fees has not only allowed me to express my opinion, it has allowed me to grow up." Around the world, students are growing up; it's going to be a different world after the spring. Ⓐ

## Pugsley's Love Poem to Wednesday

Waiting for you to garnish my spaghetti with hemlock and nightshade is the highlight of my evening.  
I wish that all the slings could be emptied of arrows at my expense, so that my kin could shed my blood and excite me in ways that I can only fantasize about.

Sister, beat me like a taiko drum.  
Sister, break me under saddle and spurs.  
Sister, bring me to the edge of death by drowning.  
Sister, boil me alive like I used to do to all your pet spiders.  
Sister, berate me with collar and leash  
Sister, brand me using your cultured tongue, or the glowing iron rods.

I want all of this and more. The thought of it reminds me of your access to dynamite and matches.  
My skin is all scabs, and Wednesday, you are the fingernails I need to get a good scratching from.

But instead, you sit and comb Marie Antoinette's hair.  
You're wearing a smile like my happy guillotine that tells me I won't receive my forty whacks for playing the part of the French when I lopped her head off.

Sister, causing others pain may be wrong,  
but is it still wrong if it is done in the name of love?

—Shay Lessman

# A Breath of Fresh Air

► *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

## VICTORIA ROMERO

The Metropolitan Museum of Art recently opened the exhibition *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century*. This show focuses on the subject of the open window, a theme which German, French, Danish and Russian Romantic painters depicted repeatedly in their work. The exhibition includes about sixty works of art, including paintings and works on paper by Caspar David Friedrich, C. G. Carus, G. F. Kersting, Adolph Menzel, C. W. Eckersberg, Martinus Rørbye, Jean Alaux, and Léon Cogniet, among

others. This contemplative show presents a departure from the packed blockbuster exhibitions that often take place at the Met. This is also the first time that the museum has put together an exhibition based on such a specific theme. Although many of the artists in this show are probably unfamiliar to most Americans, their works are nevertheless stunningly beautiful and serene. Walking through this exhibition is like inhaling a breath of fresh air.

One hallmark of Romanticism was the focus on the individual and private introspection, themes frequently explored in paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The open window became a popular subject during this period because of its abil-

ity to portray a sense of reflection and deep personal contemplation. A single figure before a window can convey a range of personal emotions, as demonstrated by many of the works here, including Friedrich's *Woman at the Window* of 1822. Perhaps the most famous painting included in the exhibition, this small picture draws the viewer into the private realm of the artist's wife and invites us to contemplate the scene without providing any real narrative. Inner thought trumps action in nearly all of the pictures in this exhibition, allowing viewers to quietly reflect on their own interpretations.

The exhibition is divided into four gallery spaces, each with a theme: "Figures at the Window," "Artists'



Georg Friedrich Kersting  
(German, 1785–1847),  
*Woman Embroidering*, 1811



Jakob Alt (Austrian, 1789–1872),  
*View from the Artist's Studio in the  
 Alservorstadt toward Dornbach*, 1836

be understood as rather subversive painters for their choice of subject matter. In choosing interior scenes, their subjects most closely fell under the category of genre painting, thought to be a “lower” form of art than history painting or even portraiture. Pictures that focused on landscape would also have been considered lower art at the time. Moreover, traditionally, genre scenes contained some sort of implied narrative, a component lacking in these views of the open window. These pictures form a new kind of category, one that falls outside of the traditional academic hierarchy of painting. Romantic artists frequently rejected such conventions, preferring to focus on their own personal interests, thoughts and emotions in their work, a revolutionary idea in the early nineteenth century.

The final gallery in the show presents images of open windows in empty rooms. These include works that explore both interior spaces and the world outside of the window. In Johan Christian Dahl’s *View of Pillnitz Castle*, 1823, the artist utilizes the window as a framing device for his landscape scene. The interior surrounding this window lacks descriptive detail, drawing the viewer immediately to the outside world, and to ponder what lies ahead.

By contrast, Adolph Menzel’s work hanging nearby present the opposite focus, exploring a series of interior spaces where the windows are partly or com-

pletely closed. *The Artist’s Sitting Room in Ritterstrasse*, 1851 is one such example, wherein the shade falls just short of the windowpane, allowing a beautiful, glowing light to infiltrate the room. This work belongs to a series of five paintings in which the artist studied the effects of light on interior spaces. Menzel’s handling of light in this work will likely remind viewers of the Impressionists, who are remembered chiefly for their exploration of the effects of light. They, however, did not begin their work until about twenty years after Menzel completed his painting. Despite his status as a realist painter, Menzel’s artistic concerns included the effects of light long before the Impressionists took up this examination.

Overall, the Metropolitan has installed a lovely exhibition exploring the Romantic subject of the open window. Scholars of art history and amateurs alike should take the opportunity to view these rarely exhibited pictures, many of which have never before traveled to the United States. The subtle variants on the theme present a chance to better understand the subject at hand. At the same time, the precise and technically astute artistic rendering of these works allows us to appreciate artists heretofore unrecognized on this side of the pond.

Rooms with a View: *The Open Window in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* will remain on exhibition through July 4, 2011. Ⓐ

Studios,” “Drawings,” and “Open Windows & Empty Rooms.” With the exception of the “Drawings” gallery, these divisions highlight the variations on the theme of the open window and allow for careful examination of the way that different artists treated the same subject, making them all the more interesting with each comparison. Because nearly all of the works included are moderately sized, the open spaces of the galleries provide an intimate viewing experience for visitors, allowing them to appreciate the works more fully. In truth, because of the rather small size and the relative anonymity of their artists, visitors might easily pass these by without notice if not for this special exhibition. These are quiet pictures, technically precise in paint handling and lacking in dramatic subject matter; they are the wallflowers of art history. The splendid effect of this exhibition is that these works are given the chance to be noticed and to shine.

The motif of the open window first appeared in two sepia drawings by Friedrich, both titled *View from the Artist’s Studio* and exhibited in 1806. These beautiful works are rather unfortunately placed in the “Drawings” gallery, the third space visitors enter in the exhibition. Given their chronological importance in kicking off the subject that is the focus of this show, they might have had more of an impact in the first gallery space. Nevertheless, the thematic organization of the exhibition is successful in interpreting and organiz-

ing these images for viewers to digest as they explore the different sub-themes in each gallery.

A significant number of works reveal views of Rome through their windows. Since the Renaissance, artists flocked to the city to study the art of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the more modern masters like Raphael and Michelangelo. These images reveal the continued importance of this destination for artists in the nineteenth century as well. The artists’ variance in approach to depicting the eternal city makes for interesting comparison. For example, Léon Cogniet focuses most of his composition on his own studio in *The Artist in His Room at the Villa Medici, Rome*, 1817. He depicts every detail of the sparse interior and includes a small Italianate landscape in the open window as a notation of his location in Italy. Nearby, a watercolor by Constant Moyaux, *View of Rome from the Artist’s Room at the Villa Medici*, 1863 presents a much more specific Roman landscape, complete with representations of St. Peter’s church and Castel Sant’Angelo. This picturesque scene, painted from the same building as Cogniet’s version, would not have been visible from the Moyaux’s room, however he took liberties with it in order to create a souvenir of his time in Rome.

Despite their allegiance to study in Rome and to the relative serenity of the pictures displayed, the Romantic artists represented in this exhibition should also

completely closed. *The Artist’s Sitting Room in Ritterstrasse*, 1851 is one such example, wherein the shade falls just short of the windowpane, allowing a beautiful, glowing light to infiltrate the room. This work belongs to a series of five paintings in which the artist studied the effects of light on interior spaces. Menzel’s handling of light in this work will likely remind viewers of the Impressionists, who are remembered chiefly for their exploration of the effects of light. They, however, did not begin their work until about twenty years after Menzel completed his painting. Despite his status as a realist painter, Menzel’s artistic concerns included the effects of light long before the Impressionists took up this examination.

Overall, the Metropolitan has installed a lovely exhibition exploring the Romantic subject of the open window. Scholars of art history and amateurs alike should take the opportunity to view these rarely exhibited pictures, many of which have never before traveled to the United States. The subtle variants on the theme present a chance to better understand the subject at hand. At the same time, the precise and technically astute artistic rendering of these works allows us to appreciate artists heretofore unrecognized on this side of the pond.

Rooms with a View: *The Open Window in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* will remain on exhibition through July 4, 2011. Ⓐ

# Black Watch: Back for Another Tour of Duty

► *Black Watch*. Written by Gregory Burke. Directed by John Tiffany.

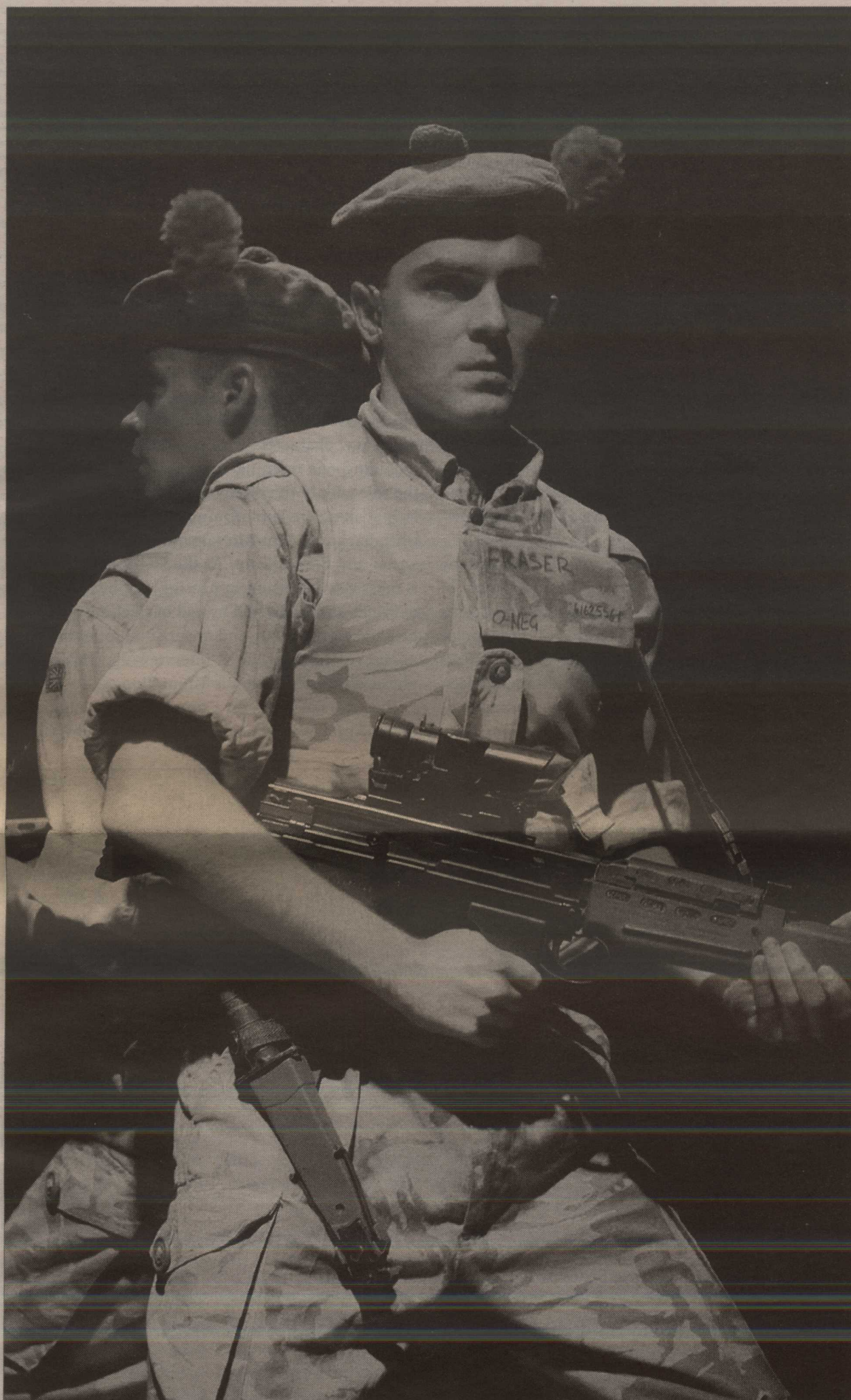
DAN VENNING

The National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch*, created as part of the company's inaugural season in 2006, returned to New York for the third time this spring. The play was previously presented in New York at St. Ann's Warehouse in sold-out runs in October 2007 and November-December 2008 (at which point it was reviewed for *The Advocate* by Frank Episale in his article "Anthems for Doomed Youth"). I also saw its last incarnation in 2008 and was eager for its return. *Black Watch* remains timely and extremely affecting, and this staging benefits from an all-new cast.

*Black Watch* is a meditation on war, specifically the war in Iraq, and the ways in which the war impacts the lives of Scottish soldiers. *Black Watch* is written as a memory play, staged primarily through flashbacks. In the opening sequence, six former soldiers meet a writer in a pub. The young men are dressed casually, wearing jeans, athletic shoes, and polo shirts with popped collars. After some debate—and bribery with drinks—the men agree to be interviewed by the writer. As the interview begins, the sound of gunfire is heard, and the soldiers and writer run off-stage. When the soldiers return, they are dressed in their uniforms, reenacting some of their experiences in Iraq. Yet in this first moment, the pub's pool table remains onstage, and two more soldiers emerge from the table. These two, Fraz (Jamie Quinn) and Kenzie (Scott Fletcher) are absent from the scenes set after the war, yet this image suggests that they always remain present as part of their comrades' lives. Returning to the pub throughout the play serves to show how the war itself remains a part of the soldiers' lives long after they return home: in the final pub sequence, the young men remain costumed in their uniforms.

*Black Watch* takes its name from the infantry regiment it depicts. Formed in the eighteenth century, the Black Watch is an all-Scottish regiment in the British armed forces. The regiment has fought and won honors in conflicts across the world; among those honors is a special uniform. In one of the central sequences in the play, the soldier Cammy (played by Jack Lowden) explains the history of his regiment. As he describes the wars in which it has taken part since 1715, his comrades maneuver him around the stage, helping to dress him in various uniforms from throughout the regiment's history. Before our eyes, he comes to represent the history of the regiment, a history sentimentalized in the play as "the Golden Thread," linking the soldiers to their comrades, family members who had been in the regiment, and their national Scottish heritage. Significantly, in the cast biographies, several actors note that their own ancestors served in the real Black Watch.

As this sequence demonstrates, the play's relationship to war and to the regiment it depicts is fraught, and never black and white. *Black Watch* is nostalgic and nationalistic, yet also a staggering critique of war and imperialism. In one sequence, some BBC reporters come to interview the soldiers in Iraq, and the sergeant orders the men to remove posters of pornography and sports cars from their wagon. The unit's officer countermands this order, saying, "It's important that we have a reminder of what we're here fighting for. Porn and petrol. That's a joke, by the way." Yet of course this line is also simultaneously dead serious, as the men know that they are part of a politically unpopular venture not directly related to British national security. Like the war, the soldiers are depicted both sympathetically and critically. They are crass, sexist, and violent, yet they are also young men put into terrible circumstances who place their lives on the line for their country.



Despite the play's critique of imperialist military ventures, part of what makes *Black Watch* so appealing may be some degree of fetishization of imperialism itself. The accents used throughout the play serve to remind the audience that the characters are not British, but Scottish. They are a provincial clan, outsiders even within the army in which they serve. The actors emphasized their Scottish accents throughout the production (the National Theatre of Scotland just brought another production to St. Ann's Warehouse, *Beautiful Burnout*, in February-March, and in this production the accents were accentuated significantly less). This is in fact indicated in the text: for example, in the sequence in which he dons various costumes and describes the history of the Watch, Cammy says, "We've got lots ay links tay North America... they... love us over there. Cannay get enough ay the history

ay. All the shite they dinna have." Cammy's statement rings true: this scene, dramatizing history before our eyes, was particularly affecting, and much of the audience broke into applause at the end of the scene.

The play has been quite successful in its American tours, generating rave reviews here in New York as well as in Chicago, Austin, Chapel Hill, and Washington, DC. While part of this may be because of the otherness of the Scots, it is certainly due in part by the ways the play reminds us that not only American soldiers are participating in our international conflicts. Although all the characters are Scottish, Americans are a presence in the play. The Black Watch are part of a force of eight hundred Scottish soldiers replacing four thousand American marines who are gearing up for the assault on Fallujah. The Scottish soldiers are backup, serving as a blocking buffer between insur-

gent forces and the Americans. Throughout the play, the soldiers are awed by the firepower of the Americans, who can be heard flying overhead and bombing opposing forces. The soldiers all know that they are Scotsmen fighting America's war.

While *Black Watch* has been successful on its American tours, including winning the 2009 New York Drama Critics' Circle award for Best Foreign Play, it has gained even more laurels at home, winning four Olivier awards in 2009, for Best New Play, Best Director, Best Theatre Choreographer, and Best Sound Design.

Indeed, to my mind, the choreography and music are the most astounding elements of the show. Steven Hoggett, the production's associate director and choreographer, is the co-founder and co-Artistic Director of Frantic Assembly, a British devised physical theatre company. The martial choreography throughout the play is visceral, moving, and often terrifying as the actors run, dive, toss props, and themselves across the stage. In one particularly effective scene, two of the soldiers begin insulting one another, and the Sergeant allows them to fight one another for precisely ten seconds. As they fight, the rest of the soldiers pair off and begin engaging in their own fights across the playing space, often only inches from audience members. All of the actors ended this scene dripping with sweat. Such displays of physical prowess filled the show.

These physical sequences are complemented by very effective music. Each scene has music, most of it projected over the sound system, but in many cases sung by the actors themselves. Several of these songs, such as "Gallant Forty Twa," "Forfar Sodgar," "Twa Recruiting Sergeants," are Scottish traditional pieces, serving to reinforce the show's nostalgic sentimentalizing of the regiment, as do several selections from

recordings of The Black Watch Pipes and Drums. Davey Anderson, the production's associate director for music, did a superb job of composing and selecting the recorded music from diverse sources. The music, combined with Hoggett's choreography, serves to make *Black Watch* almost a physical melodrama, in which physical activity (not necessarily dramatic content) provokes a direct emotional response from the audience.

While I feel the success of this production is largely due to its choreography and music, the acting and directing are also excellent. One crucial difference between this cast and that which I saw in 2008 is that the new cast is significantly younger. *Black Watch* is the theatrical debut for Cameron Barnes (Macca), and two of the other actors, Ross Anderson (Rossco) and Jack Lowden (Cammy), are still students. The youth of these actors makes them especially convincing: it was easy to believe that they were young soldiers. More crucially, their age never manifests itself as a lack of experience. Lowden deserves particular praise for his performance. Cammy is the central character; it is primarily from his perspective that we see the experience of Iraq. Additionally, Cammy is one of the few characters with several long monologues, including one opening the show. Lowden performs the role with both vivacity and gravitas. Also particularly striking are Jamie Quinn as the angry and childish Fraz, and Adam McNamara, who plays both the writer and the Sergeant. As the Sergeant, McNamara is massively imposing, appearing as if he is made out of bricks and motivated by will of steel. As the writer, he looks timid, small, and unsure both of himself and of the volatile men he is interviewing. McNamara's physical transformation is astounding.

The actors perform on a simple set. The large space of St. Ann's Warehouse is transformed into a long,

rectangular arena, with audience members seated along the two long sides of the rectangle. Thus, the actors perform not surrounded by the audience, but still in the middle of it. Audience members seated in the front row (as I was) are often only inches away from actors—including when the actors are performing intensely active martial choreography. The actors enter and exit from doors at the short ends of the stage. One of these doors looks like the entrance to a shipping container—the wagon in which the troops fought and lived in Iraq. Placed above the four corners of the stage are television screens that are used for various purposes throughout the show. During the ten second fights, they display clocks continuously counting down. At other points, they show footage of the road the soldiers are patrolling, and at one point they reveal a live feed of the very stage we are watching, as if the soldiers are under surveillance. The stage itself is, for the most part, bare, although the pub scenes contain a few chairs, stools, and the pool table, which is also used in a later sequence to represent a vehicle. The simple staging is effective because it helps focus attention directly on the actors and the intense physicality of the piece.

One effect of this staging is that the audience always remains visible. This was particularly crucial at the performance I attended. St. Ann's Warehouse offered free tickets, available by online lottery, to students, veterans of Iraq and/or Afghanistan, and families of veterans. The house was packed, and comprised almost entirely of young people. Many men in the audience had close-cropped military haircuts similar to those worn by the actors; a man seated a few rows behind me had a prominently visible marines tattoo. This audience was particularly responsive to the show—laughing at the many jokes (especially the off-color or even offensive ones), and clearly moved by *Black Watch's* nuanced depiction of the war in Iraq.

Despite its many successes, the play is not without problems. Burke's text is sometimes thin, especially during transitions between scenes, some of which seem to end abruptly, without any real motivation or explanation. Were it not for the choreography, music, and physical acting, *Black Watch* would be just another war play. Additionally, the show's total lack of women is particularly troubling—the entire cast is male. This is a choice emphasized throughout the show, as the characters frequently use extremely derogatory language to refer to women, to such a degree that the audience can become desensitized. Although clearly a conscious choice, this exclusion of women from a play about Scottish nationalism is problematic.

Yet even with these problems, *Black Watch* remains profoundly moving, a testament to the power theatre has to evoke empathy for those in far different circumstances from our own. Moreover, the play is—unfortunately—still entirely timely five years after it was first written. Towards the end of the play, the officer notes that the Black Watch "could be off to Afghanistan next...the only place on the planet that might be slightly more dangerous than here." His line is followed by an exploding mortar, and then he says, "We're going to be hearing that noise for years to come."

In a time where most headlines are now devoted to the economy and political battles at home, *Black Watch* is an important reminder that we are still a nation at war; in fact, the Afghan war is now the longest in American history. For many members of the audience on the night I attended, the reality of those wars may still be a part of their lives. Ⓐ

*Black Watch*. Written by Gregory Burke. Directed by John Tiffany. Choreography by Steven Hoggett. Music by Davey Anderson. Sets by Laura Hopkins. Lighting by Colin Grenfell. Sound by Gareth Fry. Costumes by Jessica Brett. Video Design by Leo Warner and Mark Grimmer. Featuring: Jack Lowden, Richard Rankin, Ross Anderson, Christ Starkie, Cameron Barnes, Stuart Martin, Adam McNamara, Jamie Quinn, Scott Fletcher, Ian Prie, Paul Tinto. Produced by National Theatre of Scotland. At St. Ann's Warehouse. April 14–May 8, 2011. Tuesday–Friday at 8pm. Saturdays and Friday, May 7 at 2pm. Saturday May 1 at 7pm. Tickets: \$55–\$90. See [www.stannswarehouse.org](http://www.stannswarehouse.org) for further details.

## A Very Brady Poem

I remember as a kid, I always wanted to run away  
to the Brady house. I even sent a letter to the studio once  
to request their address.

I wanted something more than homesteading  
in a house with a corn field for a back yard.

The studio sent me a form letter explaining that it was best  
that I not run away because my parents would miss me—  
Apparently they got letters from kids like me often.  
This family just seemed to be better than mine  
at everything.

I was determined to learn to sing in harmony—  
I practiced their songs for hours—  
have a dog named Tiger,  
meet celebrities like Joe Namath and Vincent Price,  
and travel across the United States by station wagon.

I can't sing and I am currently dogless  
and waiting for the first snow of the year.  
I want to live in a place like Florida or California  
where there is no snow and palm trees grow  
in abundance. That is the Brady climate.

I could still make it out there to see that house  
and meet Mike and Carol.  
While the kids have moved on to bigger and better things,  
like marriage and weight loss reality programs, I haven't accomplished anything  
by contrast.

I still haven't lost my urge to pack my bags  
and leave the Midwest to discover something different.  
I just doubt that I could learn how to be a Brady  
when my experiences have been so different.  
Growing up, I was just so Jan when I wanted to be a Marcia.

—Shay Lessman

# Important Findings from the Wellness Survey

This year the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) conducted 2010-2011 Student Wellness and Student Insurance Survey. Led by the DSC Officer for Health and Wellness, Leigh McCalen, the members of the Health Issues Committee developed, implemented, and analyzed the survey and its results. The DSC thanks the Committee for this work as well as the hundreds of GC students who responded to the survey for their participation and support of this endeavor. Since closing the survey in March, the students on the Health Issues Committee have drafted a report on these findings.

The report was released at the NYSHIP Forum held at the GC on April 27. This event was a coordinated effort of the DSC, Adjunct Project, Office of Student Affairs, and the University Benefits Office. It also provided an opportunity for students to directly ask representatives from the DSC, Adjunct Project, Office of Student Affairs, and the University Benefits Office questions about NYSHIP.

The event was audio recorded and will be available as a podcast via the DSC website. In addition, the Health Issues Committee compiled a list of student-recommended health care providers. This list will also be available through the DSC website. In an effort to foster broader dialogue about students' health and wellness needs, we are also publishing the report on this survey in *The GC Advocate*.

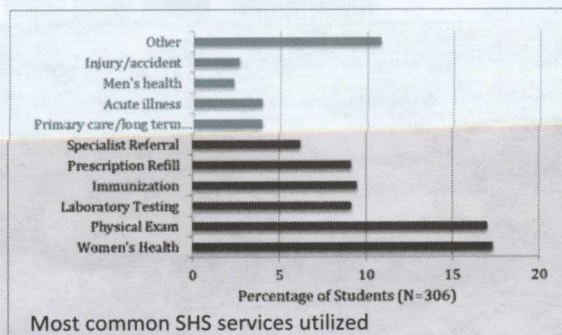
If you have questions or comments about the report or any other DSC health related projects, please contact us at [DSC@CUNYDSC.ORG](mailto:DSC@CUNYDSC.ORG) and put "Health" in the subject line of your email.

## Background

From November 2010 to March 2011, the Health Issues Committee of the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) conducted an online survey of all Graduate Center students regarding utilization of Student Health Services and Student Counseling Services offered at the Graduate Center, as well as student experiences with the NYSHIP Student Employment Health Plan (NYSHIP). The survey was administered online using the DSC's Opinio software. Students were recruited to participate in the survey via emails sent to program and student listservs at the Graduate Center.

This survey follows up on the 2009-2010 Student Health Insurance Survey administered by the DSC. Last year's survey was designed to identify specific problems regarding student experiences with NYSHIP, and propose recommendations for improving student health protections under NYSHIP.

The most common difficulties with NYSHIP reported by students in 2009-2010 include: finding a provider that accepts NYSHIP, finding information on plan benefits, finding someone at the Graduate Center who can answer questions about NYSHIP, and getting



billed for services they believed would be covered under NYSHIP. To access a report on the full results of last year's survey, including a description of the NYSHIP plan, please visit the DSC website at [cunydisc.org](http://www.cunydisc.org) and click on "Resolutions and Reports" (<http://www.cunydisc.org/resolutions>).

What follows is a report detailing the findings of the 2010-2011 Student Wellness and Student Insurance Survey. This report re-evaluates student satisfaction with NYSHIP, as well as student usage and satisfaction with health and counseling services offered through the Wellness Center at the Graduate Center. We hope the results and recommendations compiled in this report will continue to inform efforts to improve the health and wellness of Graduate Center students.

## Survey Respondent Characteristics

Approximately 20 percent of students matriculated at the Graduate Center as of Fall 2010 responded to the survey (714 students). The majority of respondents (72 percent) indicate they spend most of their time at the Graduate Center. Many student respondents are employed as Graduate Assistant Bs (25 percent) or employed as a teaching adjunct at a senior college (17 percent).

When asked to indicate their annual household income, most respondents fell into two categories: 32 percent of student households earn between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year, with another 22 percent of student households earning \$60,000 or above.

## NYSHIP

Of students who responded to the survey, 60 percent (377 students) indicate they are currently enrolled in NYSHIP. The majority of students (82 percent) had read the plan description of benefits, and most students obtained a copy of the plan description on a website (37 percent) or in a home mailing (36 percent).

Overall, students appear to have mixed views regarding their satisfaction with the NYSHIP plan.

- ▶ 36 percent of students (133) indicate they are unsure regarding their satisfaction with NYSHIP
- ▶ 27 percent of respondents indicate they are satisfied with the plan
- ▶ 16 percent of students indicate they are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the plan.

Students were asked to indicate what they have had difficulty with regarding the NYSHIP plan. Almost 150 students

(14 percent) report having trouble understanding coverage under NYSHIP, and 14 percent of respondents indicate they have trouble finding a doctor or other health service provider that accepts NYSHIP coverage. Thirteen percent of respondents report getting billed for health services they believed would be covered under NYSHIP. Other common difficulties reported by students include delays in receiving the NYSHIP insurance card and difficulty using the card.

## Student Health Services

Twenty-two percent of respondents (191 students) indicate they have used Student Health Services (SHS) within the past year. Most respondents view their experience with SHS favorably, with 60 percent indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received.

Students used SHS for a variety of reasons. The most common services utilized by respondents include women's health (17 percent), physical examination (17 percent), immunizations (10 percent), and laboratory testing (9 percent).

Overall, student respondents appear pleased with the quality of service at SHS. Sixty-nine percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the nurse practitioner at SHS was helpful and courteous, and 72 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the nurse practitioner helped them in the ways they expected.

## Student Counseling Services

Of those who responded, almost 12 percent (76 students) have made use of the Graduate Center's Student Counseling Services (SCS) in the past year. Overall, students appear to view the SCS very favorably, with almost 84 percent indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received, and none reporting they were very dissatisfied.

Many respondents used more than one SCS service. Individual counseling sessions were the most popular, accounting for over half of the SCS services provided to respondents. Referrals to an outside mental health practitioner constituted 20 percent of SCS services reported. Smaller numbers of students also made use of the SCS workshops, dissertation/academic counseling services, and group and couples counseling.

The vast majority of students (over 90 percent) who report using SCS agreed or strongly agreed that the hours of operation were convenient, and that they were able to schedule a convenient appointment time. Almost 95 percent of respondents found the SCS counselors helpful and courteous, and over 86 percent said they had been helped in the ways they expected by the counselor who saw them.

## Recommendations

(1) The Health Issues Committee of the DSC should continue to conduct an annual Student Wellness and Student Insurance survey to track changes in student satisfaction regarding Student Health Services, Student Counseling Services and the NYSHIP insurance plan.

(2) The Office of Student Affairs should conduct educational outreach to students enrolling in NYSHIP and to prospective students, so they understand the limitations of the plan and have realistic expectations about this health insurance.

(3) It is recommended that fellowship award letters and funding award letters sent to students, who may then qualify for NYSHIP, include some text about the limitations of NYSHIP coverage.

(4) The DSC, the Adjunct Project, the Office of Student Affairs and the University Benefits Office should work together to map a campaign of advocacy for making improvements to the NYSHIP health plan. Demands should be made for

- ▶ increasing payment standards for in-network physicians so that more doctors will participate in the plan
- ▶ coverage for preventative services such as STI testing and annual check-ups
- ▶ update the GHI dental plan to include coverage for modern day dentistry, specifically composite fillings
- ▶ streamlining and providing more consistency in billing procedures
- ▶ providing insurance cards that arrive in a timely manner and display all of the information health care providers find necessary to bill for treatment

(5) Student Health Services and the Office of Student Affairs should collaborate to create a billing system within our on-site health care facility that would bill NYSHIP for medical services provided to students. This would generate income to support the expansion of our current health services. It would also provide a convenient place for students to access care paid for with their insurance without having to fear unexpected bills. The services provided on-site should be tailored to work within the limits of the NYSHIP Student Employment Health Plan while providing the best care possible.

(6) The Graduate Center administration should collaborate with the Research Foundation, the 501(c)(3) organization that manages the University's research investments, and other entities to place students paid through grant funding or other non-lax-levy monies on state payroll in NYSHIP-eligible titles meeting minimum earning requirements. Thus would have the additional benefit of extending to them protections granted under the New York State Public Officers Law for activities conducted in the course of their employment. Ⓐ

# Kushner/Wiesenfeld News in Briefs

MATT LAU

## Wiesenfeld Wins NBA's Most Improved Zionist Award

Following the footsteps of many hardworking players before him, including Jalen Rose, Tracy McGrady and Hedo Turkoglu, Jeffrey Wiesenfeld's incredible season has netted him one of the most coveted awards in US politics, the NBA's Most Improved Zionist Award.

"It was a pretty close battle amongst a number of new Tea Party politicians, evangelical ministers, and the Minnesota Timberwolves' forward Kevin Love, but the award was always Wiesenfeld's to lose," said ESPN analyst, NBA Hall-of-Famer and Brooklyn native Chris Mullin.

"Then—when he rejected Kushner's honorary degree just before the end of regulation, he really threw down the gauntlet. Even though his team lost the game in overtime, that play was one of the Zionists' highlights of the year."

One indication of the award's almost immediate impact on his life is the fact that Wiesenfeld has more or less been forced to hire a spokesperson. The spokesperson delivered his prepared remarks to reporters after the award was announced. "Trustee Wiesenfeld is honored to be recognized for his commitment to the people and the state of Israel."

"Unfortunately," the newly appointed flack went on, "he cannot accept the award because it was also once given to an Arab player: the Miami Heat's former standout big-man, Rony Seikley, who Commissioner David Stern probably didn't know was born in Lebanon when he let the award go through."

## Trump Demands Tony Kushner's Marriage Certificate

"Look, all he has to do is release the marriage certificate and this whole controversy will go away. It's really simple," said Donald Trump from his front seat at The Public Theater, where he and his wife had become increasingly enthralled by Kushner's new play, *An Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*, last Thursday evening.

"Look, we've all seen the *Angels in America* thing. And yeah, I get it. I know his 'commitment ceremony' was the first same-sex one to be listed in *Times*' Sunday Styles section. But the doubts are still swirl-



Few realize that Wiesenfeld's attack on Kushner was simple retaliation for Kushner's breaking off their brief 2002 engagement because he'd decided Jeff was "just too political."

ing, and you know what? Even though it says the word socialism in the title, I kind of like this play. So I need to know whether or not Mr. Kushner is actually a homosexual living in an illegal marriage before I decide to condemn his art.

"Thus, I stand here before you tonight asking you one thing and one thing only, are you with me? Who else wants to see Tony's marriage certificate from Provincetown?"

When the audience began to jeer him, Trump interpreted it as enthusiastic applause.


## Councilman Charles Barron Still Wants to "Whoop" Wiesenfeld's Ass

Noticing that he hadn't said anything outlandish or accused anyone of disrespecting him for quite some time, East New York Councilman Charles Barron

decided last week to remind the New York metro area that he would still like to kick or, more precisely, "whoop" CUNY Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld's ass.

"I'm tired of this racist, capitalist, Zionist, homophobic, right-wing, clothes-wearing, self-washing, teeth-brushing fool taking all the controversies lately," said Barron into the tape-recorder he keeps by his bed to brainstorm speeches.

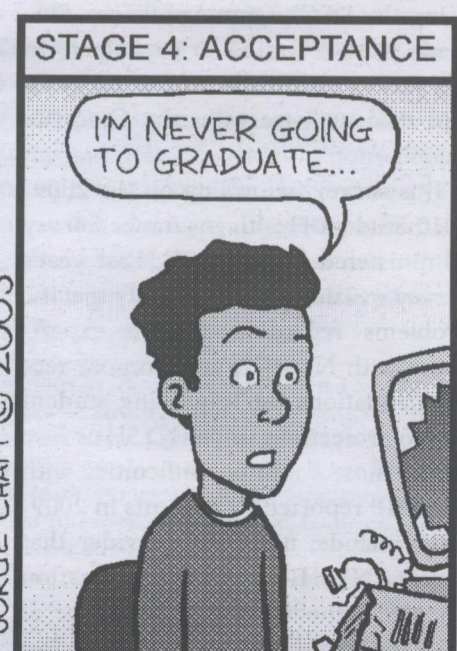
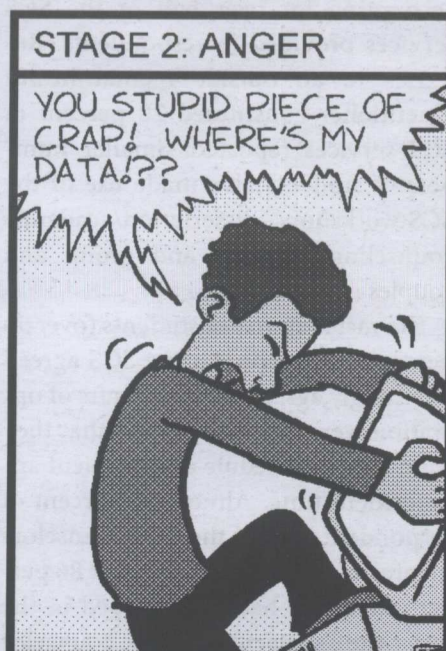
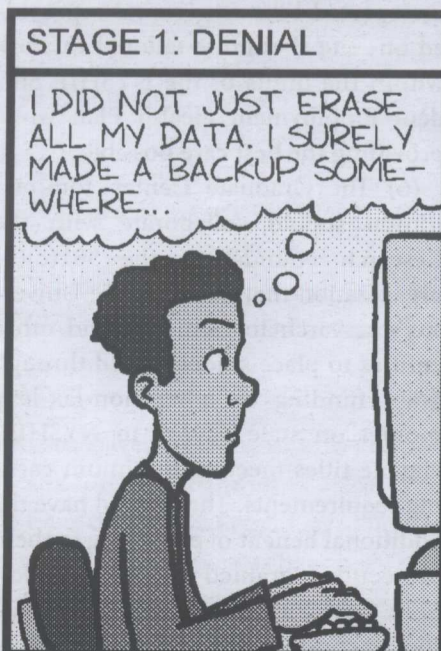
"I don't just wanna whoop his ass. I wanna whoop his ass for charity. I wanna whoop his ass ten times and get the eleventh one free. I wanna whoop his ass until I get so tired I have to go home and rest before I come back and whoop his ass again."

In the morning, after a dream about getting his own ass whooped by a figure resembling both Wiesenfeld and his mother, Barron realized he had forgotten about Mother's Day. 

ph.d. comics BY JORGE CHAM

## THE FOUR STAGES OF DATA LOSS

DEALING WITH ACCIDENTAL DELETION OF MONTHS OF HARD-EARNED DATA



JORGE CHAM © 2003

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