



NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICIAL 2008 BALLOT

PLEASE NOTE: Unfortunately all the electronic voting machines the State purchased from Skynet LLC are not yet operational; consequently all voters must use paper ballots.

VOTE HERE



INSTRUCTIONS: Indicate your choice for office by punching out the perforated chad so that there is a clean hole. (Please note that punching out any bystanders who happen to be named Chad, regardless of whether you leave a clean hole, will NOT result in your vote being properly cast. IMPORTANT: Please try not to cry while pondering the available choices, as dampening the ballot may cause the ballot-reading machine to jam. Only one per customer, please. Void where prohibited. NO SUBSTITUTIONS.



(REPUBLICAN)
MORE OF THE SAME



(DEMOCRAT)
BUSINESS AS USUAL



(GREEN)
DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH



(LIBERTARIAN)
NOT A CHANCE



(SOCIALIST)
YEAH RIGHT



(REAL CHANGE)
TRY AGAIN



ALSO INSIDE

What's Happening to America?:
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FROM THE editor's desk

The Road Ahead

Despite the bitter acrimony, the racist mobs, the comic distractions, and the absurd lack of substance that has defined the 2008 presidential campaign, one of the most fascinating and unexpected developments of this election cycle is the recent and surprisingly palpable feeling among so many voters that something meaningful and potentially momentous is on the horizon. Whether this something new is not simply a slick repackaging of something old is a fair and, let's face it, absolutely necessary question—the cover of this month's *GC Advocate* makes a case for this kind of practically pessimistic approach.

However, it has become increasingly difficult—even for skeptical third party advocates like myself—not to get caught up in the idea that our nation stands at a potentially historic crossroads. Despite the last eight years of Democratic and Republican incompetence, despite the botched and stolen elections, the cowardly Congress, the immovable Senate, and the Bush administration's record-breaking streak of criminal malfeasance, it still seems possible, and almost inevitable, that we may finally be on the verge of something positive—that the news coming out of Washington may for once be good. In fact it is precisely because of these sad precedents that the idea of something better seems almost inevitable. Perhaps we have finally reached a

quintessential nadir of low governance—a position from which everything looks better, more hopeful and optimistic.

From this position, Obama's message of change seems to have resonated almost messianically with the average American voter, and indeed Barack Obama's incredible rise to political stardom has been an inspiring story; and his remarkably well fought and rhetorically elegant campaign—consider his Philadelphia speech on race, which, as Tim Krause notes (see page 20) was as rhetorically elegant as Lincoln and King—leaves one with the sense that he may actually be the real deal and more than just another Democratic politician. But at least for now, until he proves otherwise, Obama is a Democrat and a skilled politician, and despite the rhetoric of change, his policy positions, those of which he has been willing to make a case for, have been consistently middle of the road.

His health care policy, for instance, while potentially a first step in the direction of a national health care system is like nearly every health care plan proposed by a major party candidate in the last twelve years, woefully inadequate. It does nothing to tackle the fraud and waste of private insurance companies, while offering little help to businesses, whose health care costs, make it increasingly difficult to compete with their foreign counterparts who operate out of countries with nationalized health care. The reasons for this are so obvious that it almost goes without saying: the health insurance industry is one of the most powerful lobbies in the nation and both candidates have received ample contributions. Likewise Obama's position on military spending is arguably mainstream conservative and is almost indistinguishable from McCain's. Like McCain, Obama supports an increasingly large military and military budget. Loren Thompson, a defense analyst with the Lexington Institute, told McClatchy Newspapers that "Temperamentally, Senators Obama and McCain are very different on defense. But when you read the details of their defense positions, they are remarkably similar," adding "Whether we get Obama or McCain, we will get a bigger military." None of this is to suggest that there is no difference between McCain and Obama, but only to suggest that their similarities are greater than they may seem, and that like all major party candidates, they are both bound by the corporations and lobbies that have paved the way for their candidacies. As Amiri Baraka passionately

points out in this issue of the *GC Advocate* (see page 14) the differences are important and criticizing Obama is a counterproductive exercise. However, despite the obvious policy differences and the more obvious ideological and even intellectual differences between the two, we must be wary of placing too much hope in a candidate who, like his Democratic and Republican brethren, is so deeply ensconced in the corporate political system. Like other Democratic politicians before him, Obama, should he win on the 4th, will likely find himself so tied to the real Democratic Party platform that the possibility of meaningful change will become quickly lost and/or watered down among the give and take of the political process. Like *The Wire's* Mayor Carcetti, whose ideological enthusiasms are devoured by the calculations and compromises of the Baltimore political machine, Obama's real political potential may just quietly fade once he gets into office. In this sense it will be critically important that, at least for the first hundred days, the Left throw its weight behind Obama and remain vigilant and demanding, but the real impetus for change is not going to come from the Democrats or the Left.

The real potential of an Obama presidency and the real potential for positive change is, ironically, going to depend less on who Obama is and more on the state of the nation come January 20th. It is no secret, after all, that this economic crisis has been a boon for the Obama campaign and it is clear that the longer it goes on, and the more desperate the public becomes, the less they are going to continue to hiss and boo at the concept of redistributing the wealth. The more people who are laid off and find themselves without health care, the fewer people there will be concerned about the socialist threat of labor unions and national health care; and the more banks that go bust, the fewer executives there will be willing or able to lobby against greater regulation. One way or another Obama, should he win on Tuesday, is going to inherit a long list of troublesome and increasingly dire economic, social, and environmental problems. In this sense he may very well find himself positioned, thanks in part to the increased power of the executive carved out by Bush and Rove, in one of the most momentous periods in presidential history. Only then will he have the mandate and the public support to break the chains of both parties and actually potentially live up to the hype he's been generating for the last four years. ☺

Correction



Nikolas Kozloff (honest)

Last month's book review in the *Advocate*, "The New Left Looks East," was accompanied by a photograph of a man erroneously identified as Nikolas Kozloff. In fact, the photograph was of Steve Stein, a leading authority of Peruvian history. The *Advocate* regrets the error.

DON'T SUBMIT CONTRIBUTE

Turn the musings of
your mind into manna
for the masses. Write
for the Advocate.

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The Other November Election

MICHAEL BUSCH

As Venezuela prepares to mark the tenth anniversary of its Bolivarian Revolution, Hugo Chávez has little cause for celebration. His stewardship of the state economy has largely resulted in failure: income inequality is on the rise while poverty reduction has not kept pace with the country's unprecedented oil returns. Basic food staples—such as milk, eggs, and meat—are scarce, raising fears that an impending food crisis looms on the horizon. Violence is rife. Venezuela's murder rate, which tallied over 12,000 homicides in 2007, has grown so ruinous that the country no longer releases official data. Internal disturbances from burgeoning secessionist movements have threatened state stability. Moreover, recent government politics hardly inspire confidence. In the last year alone, Venezuela threatened war with neighboring Colombia, repeatedly rattled its saber at the United States, and most recently, tossed Human Rights Watch observers from the country after the organization issued a critical report on regime transgressions.

With the country suffering under the weight of political turbulence and a deteriorating economy, Venezuela's November election could produce a significant shift in the balance of national power. Indeed, some analysts have argued that the winds of change are gusting through Caracas with increased momentum. To be sure, Chávez's Bo-

livarian Revolution looks vulnerable to defeat. The economy is in serious distress; public support for the Chávez regime is wilting; state nationalizations have repelled potential investment; and government policies have largely refused to conform to the necessities of reality.

Yet in all likelihood, Chávez will escape the impending vote with minor losses. The Bolivarian regime stands to benefit from a confluence of at least three factors that will maintain Chávez's power in the near term. First, and of greatest concern, is the country's seeming transition to authoritarianism. Chávez has declared a state of exception that has allowed him to extend executive power and bar political opponents from participating in this month's election. Second, any organized opposition that remains finds itself in shambles. Though it seemed as if an opposition movement might take shape following Chávez's December referendum defeat, any hints of continued momentum are undetectable. Finally, and most importantly, Chávez will benefit from the strongest buffer against electoral defeat: his populist politics. Though the recent drop in oil prices will likely force Chávez to scale back his state-spending on the poor in 2009, the government will not consider any reductions until after the election. Indeed, Chávez has increased spending as the elections draw near. As in the past, this will translate into victory at the polls.

Venezuela's Troubled Economy

The election comes at a particularly tumultuous period in the country's recent history. While a number of factors have been isolated to explain Venezuela's current problems, the locus of trouble is the economy. Until the global finance crisis this fall, the surging price of oil on international markets had dramatically expanded Venezuela's economy which result in inflation spiking to dangerous levels. Venezuela currently suffers from the highest inflation rate in Latin America, and forecasters see no end in sight. Experts expect it to climb past its current rate of 35% by year's close, which would rank Venezuela's towering inflation second only to Zimbabwe in the global economy. Compounding these concerns is the weak value of Venezuela's newly-introduced currency. The *bolívar fuerte* was launched with the objective of curtailing Venezuela's inflationary economy, but has had the opposite effect. The "strong bolívar" trades on the black market at less than half its nominal value, pushing up the costs of imports which in turn further intensifies mounting inflation. In October, collapsing oil prices on the international market devalued the new currency to its all-time low, capping off a 44 percent plunge since the middle of August.

Adding to the country's difficulties, the tremendous economic growth enjoyed over the past five years has begun to stall, dropping from 10.3 percent at

the end of 2007 to between six and seven percent in the first quarter of 2008. One problem has been a slowdown in industrial production. Another has been the steep decline in foreign investment. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, neighboring Colombia—a country wracked by security concerns—attracts nearly fourteen times more investment from abroad than Venezuela. To the southwest, Peru's annual inflows from foreign investment dwarf Venezuela's by a magnitude of nearly ten. Even tiny El Salvador and the Dominican Republic enjoy more foreign investment than Venezuela.

Cast in historical perspective, the Bolivarian republic closely resembles previous revolutionary regimes in the developing world. Earlier experiments with state socialism in the Global South have all articulated a standard menu of policies. Each is generally designed to accomplish five central objectives: combat the economic influence of foreign capitalists; nationalize key industries that generate significant international exchange; recentralize state capacities; collectivize agriculture; and redistribute wealth. In addition, revolutionary regimes have often created social welfare programs to enhance the lives of the poor. The Bolivarian Revolution shares these ambitions.

Chávez has pursued a dramatic restructuring of Venezuela's sociopolitical institutions. Before coming to

cuny news IN BRIEF



Breaking News: Chancellor Goldstein Receives Hefty Pay Increase

In answer to recent state-led cuts to the CUNY budget, the Board of Trustees tightened its belt still further by bumping Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's annual salary by \$55,000 (a 14 percent increase). This brings the chancellor's yearly pay to just under \$500,000 a year. When his housing stipend (!!!) is thrown into the mix, the chancellor's total income amounts to an additional \$100,000 per annum.

Those concerned that the Trustees

might have forgotten to reward the chancellor's gallery of underlings, fret not. According to the Professional Staff Congress, a whole slew of vice-chancellors and other assorted henchmen also received pay hikes. Most raises were of a five-figure nature, ensuring that none of the top executives would be left out of the \$200,000 annual salary club. But don't worry: most won't have to suffer increased taxes under the Barack Obama plan.

CUNY Law Students Defend Democracy

With the John McCain campaign going down in flames, CUNY Law students are organizing to ensure that democracy doesn't get taken down with it. On November 4th, a group of seventy-five students will disperse to various polling stations throughout the city to protect the voting rights of those targeted for disenfranchisement.

The students intend to station themselves in predominantly poor and minority neighborhood precincts, where they will "enhance access to voting and to prevent the use of unlawful practices, such as demanding proof of citizenship, turning people away without photo identification when it is not required, or restricting access to language interpreters," according to the Asian American Legal Defense and Educa-

tion Fund, which sponsors the movement. Participating students have received training in voting rights law and poll monitoring.

CCNY Student Activists Finally Get Their Day in Court

Just when you thought the bad old days of the Rudolph Giuliani years were dead and gone, their ghosts have returned to haunt former student activists at City College—and just in time for Halloween!

On October 27th, a federal jury began hearing a case that dates back a decade involving student activists that took on former CCNY president Yolanda Moses. Three students filed a lawsuit against Moses for installing surveillance equipment inside the college's Morales-Shakur Center, home to campus and community activist groups. At the time, local organizations were mounting a campaign against the Giuliani administration's attack on equal access to CUNY education.

In response to the lawsuit, Moses nullified student elections that would have been captured by a slate of activist students, prompting yet another lawsuit. A federal judge has already determined that Moses violated the First Amendment rights of the students through her actions. The jury has been charged with determining whether or not the viola-

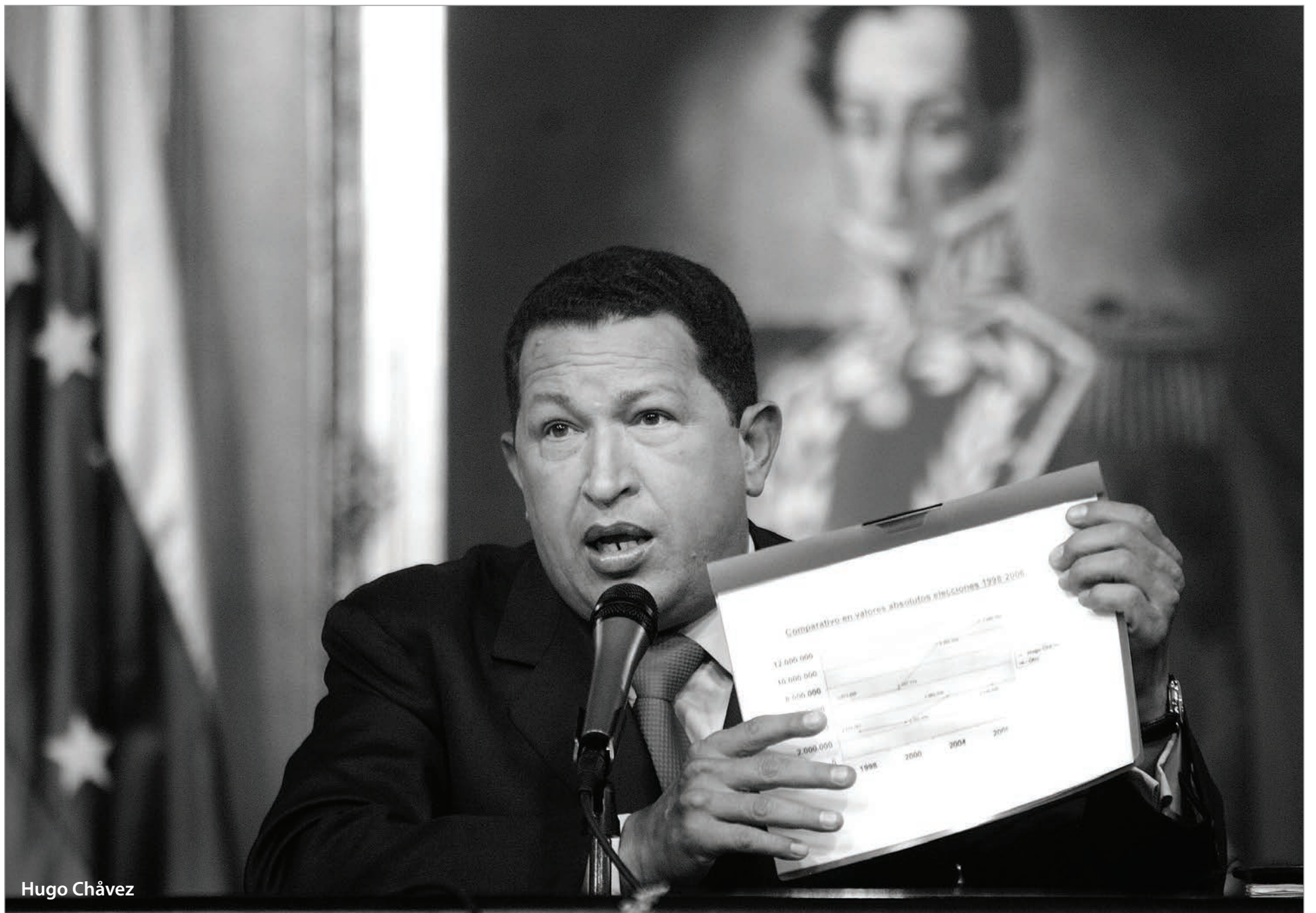
tion of constitutional rights was "objectively reasonable" within the context of the period.

HIP HIP Hooray!!!

Adjuncts sick, literally, of not being covered by health insurance can finally breathe a sigh of relief. As of this month, adjuncts and graduate assistants (with A,B, or C designations) enrolled as full-time doctoral students are now eligible for low-cost health insurance coverage. According to the Office of the Provost, eligibility requirements demand that adjuncts "earn at least \$4,112 a year in one of those titles. If they are employed for just one semester, they must earn at least \$2,061 to be eligible."

Moreover, "adjuncts (or non-teaching adjuncts) are eligible in the semester in which they are teaching or otherwise working, as long as they earn at least the minimum amount for plan coverage. Students who are enrolled in the health insurance plan in the spring semester will be covered over the summer as long as there is an expectation that they will remain eligible in the fall."

Students concerned about the fine print of eligibility are encouraged to contact Anne Ellis in the Provost's office for more information by email at aellis@gc.cuny.edu, or by phone at (212) 817-7284. ☺



Hugo Chávez

power, Chávez built his political platform on attacking the established order as the source of the nation's problems. He criticized the ruling regime for their willingness to mortgage Venezuela's future on the economic policy prescriptions of so-called Washington Consensus neoliberalism, and promised radical reforms if elected. Once in office, Chávez initially delivered on his pledge to jettison the decrepit state institutions of the Punto Fijo era. In their place, he established alternative political structures that promised to deliver much-needed social services to the extensive ranks of Venezuelan poor. On top of these concessions, Chávez outlined a comprehensive reform agenda for state overhaul to be implemented throughout the duration of his presidency.

Similar to nation-states in the developing world emerging from revolutionary tumult, Venezuela labors under structural constraints that limit the Bolivarian government's attempts at social welfare improvement. Yet because the country is endowed with the second largest hydrocarbon deposits in the world, including massive petroleum reserves, Chávez has enjoyed room for maneuver that many leaders pursuing radical reform have not. This has been especially true until this fall when oil prices skyrocketed following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Unsurprisingly, then, a key component of Chávez's redistribution scheme is nationalization of Venezuela's natural energy sector. The government has moved aggressively to reclaim control of its oil fields, and the profits they produce. In April 2006, Chávez ordered the expropriation of eighteen oil operations and the cancellation of over

thirty operating service agreements. In the aftermath of these state takeovers, Venezuela renegotiated terms of agreement with all the firms but three, which increased taxes on profits to 50 percent, and placed 60 percent of operations under direct governmental control.

Unlike many developing countries possessing a wealth of energy resources, Venezuela enjoyed the technical and managerial capacity needed for effective nationalization. By the time Chávez ascended to power in 1999, Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA), had developed into one of the world's most efficient, technologically advanced, and profitable energy firms. PdVSA possessed the expertise and physical capabilities to extract over four million barrels of oil per day from Venezuela's expansive reserves of heavy crude. The company's team of engineers and geologists were so highly valued that they became an invisible hand guiding state political and economic decision-making.

Chávez moved to gut PdVSA of its senior management early in his presidency, however. Following the failed coup against him in the spring of 2002, state oil employees staged a work strike that ground the country's oil sector to a halt. Chávez responded by firing 18,000 striking PdVSA employees, a move that effectively cut the company's workforce in half. Employees left with more than their pink slips. According to one former PdVSA president quoted by journalist Christian Parenti, "Those workers took with them tens of thousands of years of experience, types of embedded experiential knowledge that cannot simply be purchased." Since then, official numbers show that the

company's production has been cut by over 700,000 barrels per day. Outside expert observers argue that these numbers grossly underestimate the slowdown by at least a half a million barrels per day more.

Venezuela has never recovered from the disruption to its oil production. While the spike in energy costs on international markets temporarily infused the country's struggling domestic economy with new life, Chávez's decapitation of PdVSA's technical and bureaucratic expertise exacerbated the uncertainty of private investment in Venezuela. Between an unstable regulatory framework for private investment, the government's growing portfolio of expropriated industries, and deteriorating physical security conditions on the ground, the cost of doing business in Venezuela has been proved too high for many potential financiers. As a result, the toxic combination of private sector fears, reduced industrial production, and an inflationary environment has intensified the country's economic turmoil.

Ideals and Reality

Yet at the moment economic indicators increasingly suggest that real living standards in Venezuela must fall, and Chávez has responded with aggressive policies designed to raise the living standards of his constituents. Most recently, the president celebrated International Worker's Day by announcing a thirty percent wage increase for all Venezuelans, noting "there is no socialism without the working class." At the same time, Chávez made plain his intention to lighten the burden of labor by reducing the national work day from eight hours to five. The government has

also subsidized the public's consumption of food and basic goods through government-run supermarkets that purportedly serve eleven million citizens. Moreover, the state has launched job creation schemes outside the oil industry to relieve economic stresses generated by unemployed sectors of the population.

The chief dilemma of this charitable state-spending is the fact that investment is directed at the most unproductive and marginal sectors of the population. On the one hand, many of Chávez's state-sponsored efforts to improve the lives of Venezuela's poor, like food subsidies and health care, are simply consumed without any yield. On the other hand, those resources dedicated to raising the productive capacity of marginalized segments of the population have largely failed to do so. Despite government claims to the contrary, for example, illiteracy throughout Venezuela has not been reduced significantly since the advent of the anti-illiteracy program *Misión Robinson*. According to *The Economist*, the literacy initiative has taught nearly 100,000 Venezuelans how to read, a far cry from the 1.5 million claimed by the government. Another, paradoxical, problem faced by Chávez's oil-financed Bolivarian social service programs is the perpetuating cycle of "catch-up" they face in meeting the needs of marginalized populations. While mission workers welcome and depend on increased petroleum revenue, the influx of oil wealth into the Venezuelan economy produces greater rates of inflation, which in turn exacerbates disadvantages faced by the impoverished majority.

The president's militancy on behalf of his impoverished constituents ironi-

cally set a trap of policy contradictions into which Chávez has unwittingly wandered. His Bolivarian Revolution is currently caught between the opposing forces of rising expectations among the citizenry, and the necessary compromises needed for economic stability. In an interesting turnabout this past spring, Chávez acknowledged as much by reversing course on his anti-neoliberalism. Arguing that he would not sell-out his poor constituents, Chávez nevertheless issued a number of presidential decrees mandating new economic policies that mirror prescriptions outlined by Milton Friedman in the name of national stability. The president ordered a temporary reduction in state spending, increased the cost of borrowing money, ordered all banks to double their reserve holdings on all new deposits, and removed significant sums of money from circulation. While the new policies paid immediate dividends by slowing inflation, their use-by-date was of short duration. With national elections looming, Chávez soon resumed his lavish spending on the downtrodden.

November Forecast

Increased state financing of programs aimed at Venezuela’s poor is especially important in the face of a perceived reduction in popular support for the Chávez regime. While in the past Chávez has enjoyed the buffer of widespread popular support against the harsh reality of Venezuela’s deteriorating economy, public confidence began evaporating in 2008. Chávez’s declining popularity took shape most startlingly this past December when voters dealt him his first electoral defeat in a referendum that would have significantly expanded presidential powers. Chávez’s loss, however, was not in itself a major stumbling block for the Bolivarian Revolution. *Chavista* absenteeism, however, was startling. The government lost the referendum by a hair’s breadth, yet 44 percent of Chávez supporters chose to stay home during the election. An-

other three million voters, who had supported Chávez in his reelection bid earlier in 2007, voted against his platform in December. Since then, a survey published by Datos pollsters shows the popularity of Chávez’s Bolivarian government declining 34 percent, a sharp departure from already sagging popularity ratings at the end of 2007.

Chávez has, in a sense, been betrayed by his own. A recent series of high profile defections from the Bolivarian regime have undermined government stability. First, General Raúl Baduel, former Venezuelan Defense Minister and close aide to Chávez, publicly broke with the president. Baduel attacked Chávez for failing to meet the growing needs of Venezuela, and claimed that Chávez was leading the country down the road to authoritarianism. Then came accusations from Chávez’s ex-wife Marisabel Rodríguez that the president harbored dreams of dictatorship, and needed to be stopped from consolidating further power in the executive. Rodríguez’s public show of opposition was followed by the refusal of the Podemos Party, long a key supporter of Chávez’s Bolivarian coalition, to continuing supporting the president.

Still, an opposition victory in November is far from certain. In the first place, and certainly most worrisome to many observers, is Chávez’s willingness to unleash his unappetizing autocratic impulses to stem defeat across the nation. To be sure, the stakes are high. Up for grabs are nine regional gubernatorial seats, including oil-rich Zulia and a significant bloc of neighboring states. Were opposition parties to seize power in these departments, Chávez’s plan for a self-styled “Bolivarian revolution” would grind to a halt. This marks the election as the most significant moment in Chávez’s presidency since the failed coup which briefly jettisoned him from power in 2002. Chávez himself has not been shy to forecast the dire consequences of an opposition victory. “Imagine if the opposition groups managed to win...the state of Miranda, the

state of Carabobo, Zulia, Tachira, Anzoategui...the next step would be war, because they would come for me,” he warned in June.

Possibly sensing his increased vulnerability, Chávez decreed a small, but sweeping, expansion of executive power at the start of August. Along the way, he also ordered the disqualification of hundreds of local opposition candidates poised to win seats in this month’s election. Chávez argued that those barred from running deserved prison sentences for their rampant corruption, not state-sanctioned legitimacy. Nevertheless, none of those expelled from electoral participation have been found guilty of any crimes. At the end of October, Chávez continued his offensive against the ranks of opposition candidates, threatening to jail the governor of Zulia, Manuel Rosales. As *The Advocate* went to press, Rosales’ future was unclear. Yet Chávez emphatically announced his determination to “put Manuel Rosales behind bars” before the elections. Predictably, such actions provide fodder for those alleging Chávez’s thirst for dictatorship.

These claims notwithstanding, it is unclear whether such measures are even necessary to maintain government power. The opposition is a mess. Looking to capitalize on Chávez’s weakened position following December’s referendum vote, opponents of the Bolivarian government took the offensive. Eight of the country’s most influential opposition parties signed a “unity pact,” building on increased popular dissatisfaction with the direction of state politics. Since then, however, political capital accrued from the referendum victory has been squandered by infighting and disorganization.

The most startling evidence belying a potent, “unified” opposition took the form of recent demonstrations protesting the president’s August decrees. In stark contrast to the marches against Chávez’s December referendum—rallies which drew tens of thousands to the streets—recent demonstrations

have attracted paltry numbers of participants.

Beyond strong-armed tactics and an increasingly ineffective opposition, however, the most important safeguard buffering Chávez from political opponents is his potent populism. Latin America boasts a rich tradition of government spending and clientelistic practices to strategically manipulate electoral outcomes. Venezuela is no different. Chávez pursued a dramatic restructuring of Venezuela’s sociopolitical institutions after coming into power in 1999, delivering on a pledge to dismantle the decrepit stilts propping up the old order. In their place, Chávez established alternative political structures that he promised would deliver much-needed social services to the extensive ranks of Venezuelan poor. Bolstered by billions of dollars from unprecedented oil sales on the international market, state sponsored programs have enjoyed hefty bankrolling and an explosion of growth in the size and scope of their operations. The political utility of these grassroots operations is clear: for millions throughout the country, they provide a consistent, positive interface with the government—a valuable asset in securing voter turnout on November 23rd.

When the smoke clears following the Venezuelan elections this fall, Chávez will have suffered the loss of only a handful of regional allies. In all likelihood, of the twenty-one governorships currently controlled by Chávez and his allies, only two will fall to the opposition. Results for the hundreds of regional posts to be determined by local elections are more difficult to determine, but will almost certainly proportionally mirror gubernatorial outcomes. If so, these minor cuts and bruises should not significantly hamper Chávez’s march toward “socialism in the twenty-first century.” The fluctuating price of oil, Venezuela’s disintegrating economy, and Chávez’s own hubris, however, just well might. ☹

adjuncting

Adjunct Project Wants You to Have More Money!

RENEE MCGARRY AND JESSE GOLDSTEIN

Students working on campus at their university are exempt from Social Security and Medicare Tax in the state of New York—as per IRC 3121(b)(10) and Section 218 Modification 242. We have confirmed this with the IRS and the New York State Social Security Administrator, Kevin Mack.

This exemption only holds for work done while you are enrolled in classes as a full-time student.

Check your paystubs: if you have been having these taxes taken out of your check, there is a way to get this money refunded to you for prior years so long as you can prove that you were taxed!

(Internal Revenue Code: IRC 3121(b)(10) Publication 15: Employer’s Tax Guide, page 35.)

In order to get your money back, follow these steps.

First, contact human resources at the campus where you work. Tell them you would like them to stop withholding Medicare and Social Security taxes and that you would like to inquire about reimburse-

ment for the taxes that have already been withheld. If they give you any problems, you can explain that this exemption is in the internal revenue code: IRC 3121(b)(10), or in IRS Publication 15 page 35. If they are not going to be able to refund everything that you are due to get back, you can ask them for a statement explaining what they are able to refund, if anything.

Second, if you haven’t gotten all the money from your employer, you should file IRS Form 843 (attached). You must file a separate Form 843 for each tax year that you are seeking a refund for. The IRS asks that you attach a statement from your employer (explained just above) but if you cannot get a statement, then instead you can just attach your own statement that says you tried but were unsuccessful. The top of your statement should have “your social security number-1040-the year in question” ex: 123-43-4343 – 1040 – 2008.

Third, for each Form 843 that you file, attach a W-2 form for the appropriate year, or your most recent pay stub – as evidence of the withheld taxes. If you do

not have the W-2 Form for the year in question – you can get this from the IRS – they should have all of this information on file for the last three years of tax returns. Call 1-800-829-1040 or visit one of the IRS centers listed on the back of this sheet.

Fourth, fill out the personal information on the form, lines 1 and 2, and then sign the bottom – the rest is already filled out for you.

Fifth, in Line 2 you must write in the total refund that you would like. This should be the sum total of social security and medicare withholdings listed on the W2 or paystub.

Sixth, GET YOUR MONEY!! Mail the completed form with attached documentation to: Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service Center, Andover, MA 05501-0002.

Brought to you by the Adjunct Project. www.adjunctproject.org or email: theadjunctproject@gmail.com.

Let’s make a better CUNY! The Adjunct Project wants your involvement! ☹

The Long View from the Ivory Tower

ALISON POWELL

During my first semester at the GC, I've been struck by the complicated relationship many of us are negotiating between our responsibilities as academics and as citizens of a troubled city, country, and world. Many of my fellow humanities doctoral students have a latent social worker or justice advocate inside them, and I've enjoyed debates where we consider how our political commitments should or could be integrated with our research and writing. I took the longish way around to the PhD, taking several years off to work in the nonprofit sector, and I've recently found myself considering what originally compelled me to work in non-profits, when I've always felt most at home in academia. Passionate as I am about my politics, they feel, ultimately, less deeply a part of me than my obsessions with poetry and literary criticism (subjects hard to apply, say, in day-to-day work at a women's health clinic).

Immediately before coming to the Graduate Center, I was a fundraiser for a nonprofit focused on ending the death penalty—at times a Sisyphean task. My involvement in the movement arose, strangely enough, through research I'd undertaken in a graduate class on theories of corporeality. The course nurtured in me a fascination with theorists like Judith Butler and Gilles Deleuze; this, along with reading about executions in early modern England, had me riveted. Theory can do that—the puzzle of the theory enabled me to look politically abhorrent subject matter squarely in the face,

and even enjoy doing so. Yet the same year, I visited the classes of a close friend who is the Program Director of the Prison University Project at San Quentin State Prison, and overheard some of her students discussing the impending execution of Stanley "Tookie" Williams. An early leader of the Crips, he was later credited with negotiating a truce in one of the largest gang wars in the nation, and nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his books to help disenfranchised youth. Though he maintained his innocence in

the killings for which he received the death penalty, he was executed at San Quentin on Dec. 13, 2005.

I returned to my program troubled with the implications of considering the death penalty in the context of such esoteric theory. I had really enjoyed asking, and formulating tentative answers to, questions such as "How were public executions related to medical advances in the late 1500s?" Meanwhile, condemned inmates in our own country—economically disadvantaged, subject to the racism and classism of their juries, burdened with incompetent representation—were being executed via state-sanctioned lethal injection. A few books (including Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) and one documentary (*The Execution of Wanda Jean Allen*) later, and I left my program, packed up my car and sped away to a job in California. It would be dishonest and self-aggrandizing to pretend it was solely altruism that led me to such a decision. I craved a break from the teaching/non-earning lifestyle, from the loose-at-ends non-schedule of grad school, and the Midwest (it's easy to trade the bleak winters and conservative politics of Indiana or Missouri for the ocean, redwood forests and anything-goes of San Francisco). In general, taking a break between graduate programs is something I recommend.

Over the next two years I met heroic individuals—appellate lawyers, religious leaders, the families of murder victims who oppose the death penalty, staff who every day brought optimism to their work. But writing copy for direct mail appeals to members, or designing a new t-shirt, I found myself wistful about my life in grad school. Like everything else, graduate school churns out self-deprecating, embarrassing situations (like my first literary seminar when I pronounced Borges with a hard "g"). Still, our primary obligation is to read what we would (hopefully) already read anyway, and then be intimidated but inspired as scholars in the field talk to us about the work. In the 9-to-5 grind at the office, planning some fundraising event, I missed having, say, my weird obsession with 16th century religious sermons encouraged. I missed the jolt of conversing about something absurdly specific with others who are as excited. Then there was the schedule: as a fundraiser, I had to be at work at 9 until 5 or later, and work some weekends; now I do a whole lot of my work in pajamas and I do it whenever I want.

Social justice work, though, does provide a very real sense that your work has an immediate impact. Trying to fight the death penalty in the United States is tough, but we saw measurable progress. At Planned Parenthood, there was satisfaction leaving every day having armed some sixteen year old girl with bilingual safe-sex pamphlets and contraceptive information. But I think the idea of a fundamental difference between social work and academia is, to some extent, a false dichotomy. Coming from a conservative state, I was at college before I learned to be skeptical of politicians and demagogues, to marvel at the power of individual resistance, and to understand the complexity of institutionalized racism and sexism, inadequate distribution of wealth, and the abysmal conditions in our prisons.

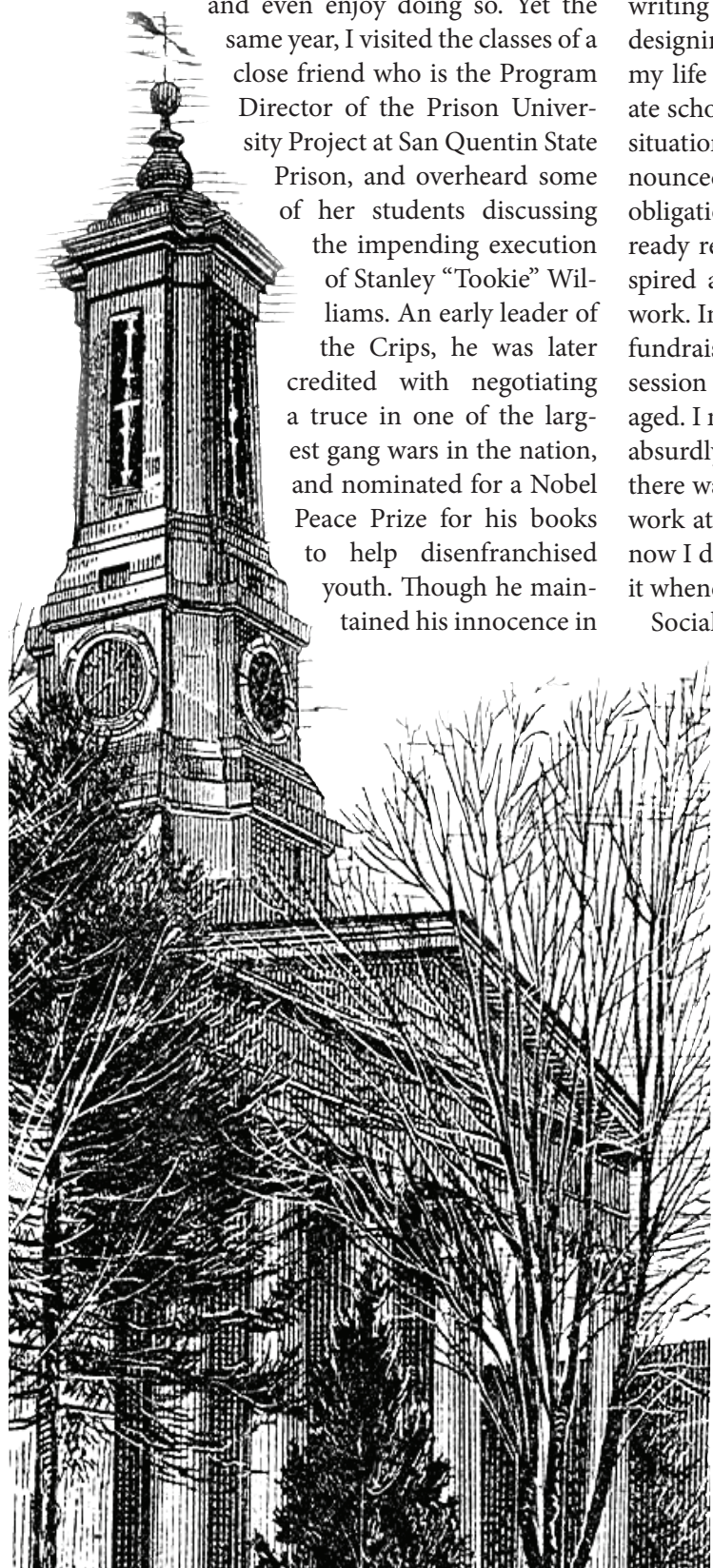
For the vast majority of us here at the GC, we don't get the direct satisfaction of seeing how our own activities help to solve the various social problems that concern us (I should note that I'm thinking very much as a person in English lit; it may be easier to visualize a connection to social change coming from the disciplines of history, so-

ciology or the hard sciences). There is no dearth of students here who brilliantly and responsibly integrate their politics into their lives as academics (the upcoming election happily digresses a number of seminars; buttons abound), and we should keep in mind how our work contributes to the "greater good." Having visited San Quentin, I truly believe that having read Foucault and Bentham allowed me to comprehend what I witnessed in a more meaningful way; that experience has helped me nurture the long view (not to be confused with the "Oh my, it will be fifty years before I pay back my student loans" long view) and to see that our work, which can at times feel absurdly narrow, has implications far beyond our own disciplines. As teachers, for example, asking our students to analyze everything from *Legally Blonde* to the *Canterbury Tales* encourages them to wrestle with their environment in a more empowered, complicated way.

While ambivalence about the potential for change through grad school may be natural, the work of universities is to improve our critical faculties and sense of history. What universities contribute isn't only the result of overtly sociopolitical theoretical stances—queer theory, feminist studies, African-American studies, Chicano studies, etc. But even the very act of posing highly specialized questions has ethical merit with powerful implications. As the world becomes increasingly general and high-speed, we participate in a global consumer culture, reaching for what's in front of us without discipline or reflection; well, if we don't exactly resist that—if we, too, participate in it—we at least complicate it by avoiding the split-second reward. I mean, nothing English lit scholars do is fast.

We can't position ourselves as consistently integrated and relevant to the nonacademic world, not practically, not yet. We want to: there's a healthy desire to demolish the ivory tower. But it seems important to remember that, as college teachers, researchers and writers, we are somewhat removed from the 9-to-5 world of commerce, government, service industries or (as my radical, social-justice careerist friend called it) the "nonprofit industrial complex." It's easy for us to think about what is intimidating and taxing about being a graduate student, and we fetishize a bit the difficulty of the PhD route, in a way that sometimes rings false. Sure, at times reading Hume or prepping for a seminar at the Shakespeare conference makes me want to hole up in my increasingly shrinking living space, watch Almodovar movies and drink inadvisable quantities of red wine. But maybe I bemoan the work to feel a teensy bit less guilty about what I'm not doing—collecting signatures, handing out sandwiches, organizing protests. I'd bet all 35 square feet of my living space that GC students fret more about the problems facing our nation today than your average twenty-something; yet we spend our time on decoding the Romantic ethical imagination or reading 16th century antitheatricalist texts that have seemingly little relevance to the problems of poverty right outside our doors on 5th Ave.

Don't get me wrong: the work we're all doing is deeply challenging, sometimes absurdly so. But still, for many of us, we're here because we have the amazing luxury of pursuing our favorite thing in the whole world. The long view, for me, means reckoning with the fact that, sure, the paper I'm developing on medicine and sacrifice in Donne won't end the three strikes law, collect those signatures, or get health care to people in need, but my awareness of this disparity reminds me to enjoy what I've got, and also motivates me. I may not exclusively do work that privileges a political agenda—I am far from advocating that—but I will continue to consider what's come historically from this ivory tower, and celebrate how that work was later used as fodder for social revolution. Ⓐ



What's So Democratic about American Democracy?

ADVOCATE STAFF

It is true that American democracy has come a very long way in the last two hundred and thirty-two years. Before the secret ballot, it was not uncommon to find oneself threatened with bodily harm at the polls, and of course, voter fraud, ballot rigging, and outright destruction of votes, have all been frequent occurrences throughout US history. In the New York elections of 1868, for instance, marauding gangs of youth, under the direction of Boss Tweed, beat and intimidated opponents of Tammany Hall, stuffed ballot boxes, and voted two, three, sometimes four times each in an attempt to completely control and dictate the outcome of the election. This kind of outright violence and explicit fraud is, thankfully, more uncommon today, and yet the legitimacy of our democracy still faces a series of increasingly complicated challenges.

Until recently, the trend in American history has been a general, if at times unsteady, increase in suffrage and voter enfranchisement. From the Fifteenth and the Nineteenth amendments, which gave the vote to African-Americans and women respectively, to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which put an end to explicitly racist Jim Crow poll taxes and literacy requirements, the thrust of American policy has been to offer greater and greater opportunities for popular participation in local and national elections. This trend, however, has always faced a considerable amount of opposition from crafty politicians and political parties, and, after the debacles of the 2000 and 2004 general elections, it seems clearer and clearer that we are currently suffering through one of the most aggressive assaults on our democracy in decades. From a dismal lack of voter participation, to the continued intimidation and active disenfranchisement of poor and African-American voters, to the electronic manipulation of poll results, we seem to be faced with yet another series of fundamental challenges to the solvency of our democracy. As the next election approaches, and as charges of voter fraud are already being hurled from all sides of the political spectrum, there seems no better time to take a close and critical look at these threats.

Where are the Voters?

One of the most fundamental problems that threatens the legitimate functioning of our current democracy is, quite bluntly, the sheer lack of participation among most eligible voters. Despite the great advances in voting rights of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one of the most disturbing facts about our democracy is, and has been, the limited number of citizens who choose to actually participate at the polls. According to the International

Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)—an intergovernmental organization that helps to build global democracy—“voter age population” turnout in the United States in 2000 was only 46.6 percent. Compare that to the Russian federation, in which voter turnout for 2000 was 68.8 percent or Azerbaijan, which came in at an astounding 71.2 percent in 2003.

According to National IDEA, “Nine of the top 20 countries [for voter turnout] are European (seven Western and two Eastern), six are African, three Asian and two Oceanian.” Not surprisingly, North and South America are conspicuously absent from this list. In fact, since 1945 the United States ranks only 139 out of 200 countries in voter age population turnout, averaging only 48.3 percent for the postwar period. Although critics of this system contest that a study of actual “voter eligible” voting trends, which would exclude the millions of prisoners and parolees who are ineligible to vote in forty-eight states across the country, as well as the number of non eligible non citizens living in the United States, would offer a fairer assessment of the actual voting rates than “voter age” turnout, the numbers are still pretty dismal. If we measure voter turnout by the “voter eligible” population, the figures go up to close to 53 percent in 2000, but that is still barely a little more than half. In other words, of the millions of people eligible to vote only slightly more than half are willing to even bother to go to the polls. According to IDEA, the United States, often invoked as the pinnacle and defender of global democracy, is in the bottom third of one of the most basic measurements of a healthy democracy. Angola (88.3 percent), Uzbekistan (88.2 percent), Taiwan (70.1 percent), Lebanon (60.2 percent), Venezuela (77.2 percent), Iran (67.6 percent), and even the Palestinian Authority (75.4 percent) (whose legally and popularly elected Hamas government the Bush administration helped Israel to oust in 2006) all have greater voter turnout than the United States. How is this possible?

Two of the most significant reasons for this dismally low turnout include a general sense of apathy and a sometimes open and active distrust of campaign politics more broadly. In a two party, winner take all electoral system like our own, huge percentages of the population, who see themselves as neither Democrat nor Republican—those individuals whom the media likes to call “independents”—are left without any seemingly legitimate representation

of their own political values. In addition to this tremendous lack of political options, the absence of any significant democratic involvement previous to the general election, such as the party selection of primary party candidates, including the almost total absence of general participation in congressional primary decisions, leaves most voters with the sense that their vote is a meaningless choice between two often hand-picked and largely identical candidates. Worse yet, their opinions, concerns, or needs seem superfluous to the machinations of the political parties and corporate sponsorships that help to generate party tickets and manipulate party agendas with various and intense forms of lobbying. Because of this perceived and often actual sense of distance from the most important aspects of the political process—that is, actually choosing who gets on the ballot to begin with—a majority of voters opt out of the system all together, with only a small majority voting in the general elections.

In addition to the fact that most voters are actively kept on the margins of the political process, there is also the more obvious and unsavory fact that political campaigns, especially in the presidential elections, have become largely substance-free political theatre and comic entertainment. Consider for instance the inordinate amount of attention given to the stupidity, sex appeal, clothing choices, and Midwestern accent of McCain's running mate Sarah Palin. Although it is important for vot-

ers to get a strong sense of the character and intellect of all of the candidates involved in any election, the over-emphasis placed upon Palin's lack of qualifications (don't get me wrong, she is clearly unqualified) is more often than not a distraction from the real issues. Likewise, the

mudslinging of the McCain campaign and the ridiculous amount of attention given to Obama's name, his supposed ties to Islam and Sixties radical Bill Ayers, are all explicit forms of political obfuscation. Indeed, these obfuscatory tactics seem intentionally designed to distract the voter and eliminate the possibility of actual political discussion, which, for most candidates—who want to simultaneously please as many donors on both sides of any given issue as possible—is anathema. The fact that American voters are turned off by these tactics, even as they happily indulge in them (consider the huge boost to *Saturday Night Live's* ratings since Palin was chosen as vice-presidential nominee), is not surprising. In many ways, we get the democracy we prac-

tice, and the more politicians continue to practice active forms of distraction, the fewer voters there will be who are willing to tackle the issues on their own and find themselves capable of taking a stand one way or the other.

Tactical Disenfranchisement

Despite the great dearth of actual participation, it is still tempting to believe the myth that, although not many of us vote, we still have one of the most honest and open democratic systems in the world, where every citizen, regardless of race, gender, class, or income, is free, should they choose, to easily and securely exercise their democratic rights on a regular basis? Unfortunately this vision of American democracy is just not true. On top of all of the inherent structural and social problems that plague our democracy, we still have not fully figured out how to insure an equal opportunity for all Americans to freely exercise their right to vote, especially if that American happens to be a member of an ethnic minority, poor, or both.

Of the many forms of tactical disenfranchisement currently being waged against poor and black Americans, the most direct and devastating has been the growing number of convicts and parolees who have lost their vote. Sadly, like many democratic nations, the United States, with few exceptions, does not allow people in prison to vote. Because we are a federal system, this decision is made on a state-by-state basis; however, currently only two states in the United States allow prisoners to vote while in prison: Vermont, which has a prison population of about 2,300, and Maine, which houses only a little more than 2,100 inmates. This means that of the more than two million inmates in the United States as of 2008, at least 1,996,000 are denied their right to vote. That's close to 4 percent of the total number of people who voted in the 2,000 election—a huge swing vote that would have likely given Al Gore the election had they had the opportunity to vote. According to the Bureau of Justice the total US prison population has increased from approximately 250,000 in 1975 to more than 2,000,000 today. Indeed, when you compare over time, the rates of “eligible voter” turnout to the rate of “voter age turnout” the gap between the two increases dramatically from 1972 all the way to the present. Some of this gap surely is the result of increased immigration, but it is clear that much of it is directly related to the number of voting age inmates and parolees who are nonetheless ineligible to vote. In this sense looking at IDEA's voter age figures truly does provide a better sense of the actual health of a democracy in terms of voter participation. Indeed, looking even more closely there is a correlative, but much smaller

gap between the years 1952 and 1968. Although there are few ways to test the hypothesis, it is possible that these two gaps correlate to the two biggest disenfranchisements of blacks in the 20th century, the first ending only after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, with the second beginning shortly thereafter, with the devastating and exponential increase in prison populations, which disproportionately effect African-Americans. Although many ex-convicts are allowed to vote, sometimes immediately after leaving prison; sometimes, after they have finished their parole; and sometimes after a specified amount of time, many of them never realize this and few people are going out of their way to make it clear. This means that of the millions of ex-convicts the US produces many of them are perpetually kept from voting for the rest of their lives.

Even worse perhaps than these explicit forms of disenfranchisement is the much more sinister and much more cynical Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which, in its attempts to eliminate supposed voter fraud, comes as close as anything to helping replicate the biased and unfair requirements of Jim Crow laws. As Andrew Hacker of Queens College ably pointed out in the *New York Review of Books* (Sept 25, 2008), voter identification laws, the purging of voter rolls, and the disproportionate number of African-Americans who have lost their vote for life, will all contribute to a perfect storm of voter disenfranchisement, just in time for the first African-American democratic presidential candidate. Indeed, voter identification laws, such as those required by HAVA legislation, tend to disproportionately effect poor and African-American voters—many of those, Hacker argues, who would normally vote Democratic, and who, in this election would overwhelmingly vote for Obama.

According to Hacker, HAVA, in its attempts to “clean up” state voter rolls, has opened the door to a new form of implicit disenfranchisement through the process of “purging” the voter rolls of poor and African-American voters. In key battleground states like Florida and Ohio, state governments have sought to eliminate illegal voters from their voting rolls in ways that have resulted in a widely disproportionate number of legally registered poor and African-American voters being removed from the rolls. In Ohio, for instance, election officials scrubbed voter rolls by sending out letters to all registered voters and then removed the names of those voters whose mail was returned. According to Hacker, this resulted in the removal of 35,427 names from the Ohio voter rolls. “A review” of this process, says Hacker “found that the addresses were in ‘mostly urban and minority areas.’” In addition, Hacker argues, African-Americans and poor citizens tend to move more often, and without a forwarding address, meaning they are far more likely to be among those 35,000 removed from the rolls. Even more sinister, in Florida, election officials, simply compared the names and social security numbers of registered voters and removed all of those registrations that showed any discrepancies between the

two. Although this might sound fair on the surface, Hacker explains that “the Social Security Administration is unable to match submitted names with numbers in 28 percent of the cases sent to it.” This means that in addition to any illegal or redundant registrations that might have been appropriately eliminated, Florida may have “accidentally” purged 28 percent of their voting rolls. Not surprisingly, as in Ohio, where poor and African-American voters were disproportionately effected by these purges, Hacker reports that “while black voters made up 13 percent of the scanned pool, they comprised 26 percent of those who were purged; while whites were 66 percent of the pool, they were only 17 percent of the rejected group.”

One of the more recent and malicious manifestations of this ongoing attempt to suppress voter turnout of minorities, especially African-Americans, can be seen in the current controversies surrounding supposed acts of voter fraud. The tempest in the proverbial teacup over the fraudulent activities of some ACORN employees, for instance, has been exploited and manufactured as a way for Republican operatives to run a last ditch effort to intimidate and scare away as many Obama voters as possible. Of the very small number of actual voter fraud cases processed in the United States, the majority of them were simple mistakes, such as accidentally filling out a registration form twice, or felons voting who did not understand they were not allowed to do so. According to the *New York Times* in total there have been 95 cases of voter fraud brought before courts in the United States between 2002 and 2005. Of those 95 cases, 25 were acquitted or dismissed, while at least 40 were committed by party officials, candidates or election workers. The actual number of individual voters convicted of fraud, who actively tried to cheat the system by voting twice is only about 30. However, of these 30, the *New York Times* reported that 18 of them were simple examples of ineligible voters voting. In other words, the majority of voter fraud cases prosecuted in the U.S. From 2002 to 2005 were cases where one individual voted one time and was prosecuted simply because they were ineligible to vote. Even counting these ineligible but hardly fraudulent votes, that’s about ten a year: hardly the kind of stuff that could change the outcome of an election even in the smallest rural borough in the nation. The *New York Times* quoted Richard Hasen from Loyola Law School, an expert in election law as saying “If they found a single case of a conspiracy to affect the outcome of a Congressional election or a statewide election, that would be significant. But what we see is isolated, small-scale activities that often have not shown any kind of criminal intent.” Even more disturbing is the climate of fear that is created around these accusations of voter fraud. In this same article the *New York Times* reported that a 43 year old mother of four, Kimberly Prude, was imprisoned for more than a year after voting while on probation. This kind of disproportionate punishment for the performance of one’s civic duty is the

worst kind of voter intimidation, and is reminiscent of the shameful and still-practiced tradition of intimidation and disenfranchisement of African-American voters that has been ongoing since the Fifteenth Amendment was passed.

Indeed, the voter fraud scandal currently being hyped up by the Republican Party is actually far more insidious and harmful to our democracy than the supposed threat of double registrations and votes from the grave. The Republican strategy, since it realizes it cannot fairly win many key swing states in 2008 has been to aggressively protest voter registrations with the implicit intent of discouraging and frightening off Democratic voters who may fear being arrested or challenged at the voting booth.

Electronic Voting: A Future Threat to Democracy

One of the other more troublesome developments to come out of the Help America Vote Act is the move toward electronic voting. HAVA legislation was originally intended to address the dimpled chads and other paper ballot problems that plagued the 2000 elections, but instead of helping to create better, clearer, and more accessible ballots, the legislation has instead convinced many states that electronic voting will solve all of their problems. However, as anyone who has ever used a PC knows, computers come with their own set of new and previously unimaginable problems. One of the great virtues of the paper ballot is that it provides an actual as opposed to a virtual record of any one citizen’s vote, and in the case of suspected fraud or recount, can be easily accessed, and in most cases, easily read and interpreted. Electronic voting machines, on the other hand, often do not include a paper ballot, and what’s worse, provide absolutely no assurance to the voter that the vote they cast will be properly registered. Although it may have taken a room of lawyers to recount the Florida ballots, no amount of lawyers can recount something that exists only as a final tally.

Rebecca Mercuri, who works for the computer forensics firm Notable Software, has repeatedly criticized the use of electronic voting as it currently exists. According to Mercuri, “fully electronic systems do not provide any way that the voter can truly verify that the ballot cast corresponds to that being recorded, transmitted, or tabulated. Any programmer can write code that displays one thing on a screen, records something else, and prints yet another result. There is no known way to ensure that this is not happening inside of a voting system.”

Indeed, as early voting begins, reports from across the country have been verifying Mercuri’s concerns. In West Virginia, for instance, there have been numerous complaints about electronic voting machines that have apparently been “switching” or “flipping” votes from Obama to McCain, while in Tennessee there have been at least two reports of Votes for McCain flipping to Obama, and even votes for Obama flipping to Green Party candidate Cynthia McKinney. The tripartisan nature of these problems suggests

that while actual practices of fraud may go unnoticed—after all, as Mercuri suggests, if you were going to cheat the system electronically, you could easily do it without the voter’s, or poll workers’ knowledge—software glitches and calibration problems may be rampant enough to disqualify thousands or tens of thousands of votes by the end of the general election.

What to Do?

Obviously there are no magic bullet solutions for how to fundamentally improve our democracy. Real democracy takes time, effort—enormous amounts of effort—and a level of engaged citizenry that begins in kindergarten and pre-school. There are, however, a number of practical changes that would at least increase voter turnout, reduce fraud and intimidation, and increase enfranchisement.

The first and most obvious, but perhaps most controversial solution is to begin the process of repealing state laws that prohibit convicts and parolees from participating in their democracy. The two million citizens behind bars, many of them for non-violent crimes such as drug possession, are perhaps more disproportionately effected by legislation than any other group and have a right to have their concerns and needs represented. Equally controversial but perhaps less radical would be to pass legislation making the first Tuesday of every November a federal holiday. Although this would not effect all voters, since many would still have to work, it would act as a kind of mandate stressing the importance of the process, essentially saying to the public, this is a special and important day. Likewise, although highly controversial, passing state laws that make voting mandatory and non-voting subject to a small, but largely unenforced fine, would help to create and reinforce the sentiment that voting is not only a right but a duty. This legislation would also send the message for democracy to function well it must provide universal representation.

More immediately, we should pass an amended HAVA that actually helps Americans vote by recommending the elimination of voter Identification policies and the arbitrary removal of names from voter rolls. Considering the incredibly small numbers of voters who actually attempt fraud, the increasingly strict identification requirements for voting are unreasonable and unnecessary. HAVA should also recommend a “voter verified Paper Ballot electronic voting system as devised by Rebecca Mercuri, which allows for the voter to verify a paper copy of their electronic vote before that paper ballot is securely submitted and available in the case of any computer malfunctions or recounts.

More important than all of this, however, is a greater emphasis on the importance of democratic participation in public schools. All children should be taught the importance and the responsibility of participating in their own governance, whether at the local or national level, and more funds should be provided to create and maintain curriculums that promote democratic participation and values. ☺

STEVEN PLUDWIN

There are no longer any innocent words.

— Pierre Bourdieu,

Language and Symbolic Power

Asked towards the latter part of his life how he came to define his interest in a series of diverse problématiques, Michel Foucault responded by stating that he was driven by a very basic and fundamental question—the desire to comprehend what is happening around us, to inquire, “What is our present?” In an age of contradictions, when “invasions are touted as interventions” and “occupation as liberation,” that question poses a difficult challenge. Presently, the United States is at war in Iraq. Yet beyond that simple statement of fact, not much else seems clear. With an absence of clarity and an abundance of ambiguity surrounding the conflict, our collective memory is intoxicated. As the battles continue and guilt is assessed with the talk of civil war, exit strategies and the now famous dictum, “no end in sight,” it is necessary to return to Foucault’s question and ask—how do we make sense of what is happening around us?

Over the past couple of years, the dialogue surrounding Iraq has shifted on all sides of the political spectrum. A discourse of responsibility—insisting that Iraqis be held accountable for their own country—now provides the framework within which our discussions about Iraq take place. Resounding from the echo chambers of political pundits from right, left

and center have been calls for increased Iraqi responsibility regarding everything from security, to the curtailment of violence and the financing of reconstruction.

Many have followed Carl Levin's suggestion that "it is indeed long overdue that we cut the cords of dependence and push the Iraqis to take more responsibility and ownership," and have stressed the need "to change our current course in order to shift more responsibility from our troops and taxpayers to the Iraqi government." The overriding sentiment has been to "force them to take responsibility for their own future, politically, economically and militarily." Recently, Democrats in the House have introduced legislation that would require Iraq to become liable for funding its own reconstruction. Florida Democratic Representative Allen Boyd's recent article in the Tallahassee Democrat—"It's Time for the People of Iraq to Share in Reconstruction Costs"—demonstrated his "renewed efforts to require the Iraqi government to take more responsibility" by touting the merits of a federally mandated shared investment in Iraq's future, reaffirming his belief that "it is time for the Iraqi government to step forward to meet more of its security and reconstruction expenses."

But how do we make sense of this discursive framing of Iraq around issues of responsibility and accountability? What exactly does it mean to be held responsible or to assume a greater share of responsi-


bility? What types of identity do such interpolations construct? In sum, what are the consequences of this discourse for both the people of Iraq and for the United States? To speak about Iraq's current state of affairs and future possibilities through the medium of Iraqi responsibility does further violence to Iraqis by casting them as resentful and pathological, while trivializing the traumatic sense of loss endured as a result of war, invasion and internal conflict. Additionally, the responsibility discourse allows the United States to simultaneously lay blame and escape blame. It induces a kind of psychological displacement and collective forgetting regarding the war in Iraq, making it tougher for us to understand what our present is and limiting our space of comprehension by masking and obscuring reality.

Responsibility, Violence and Iraqi Identity

The concept of responsibility is Janus-faced. While on the one hand, we instinctively need to assign blame, to attribute guilt, and determine levels of culpability, it is not clear that the attribution of responsibility to an individual or group of individuals will be commensurate with reality. It is not always the case that the subject labeled "responsible" is truly the responsible party. Hence, responsibility is marked by a certain ambiguity because rather than simply calling our attention to those who should be held responsible, the ascription of responsibility may actually serve


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to produce the subjects it marks. As a result, anytime responsibility, or the lack thereof, is attributed to an agent, it presents a reason to reflect on who is being labeled and why.

Calls for the Iraqis to assume a greater share of the responsibility for their country continue incessantly. But who exactly are the “Iraqis?” Instead of simply reporting or reflecting objective reality, such statements produce a unified Iraqi subject—one that blurs the lines of ethnic and religious cleavages. They serve to further distort what is taking place in Iraq by speaking in terms of a fictive universal Iraqi identity. This practice of naming is a political act of the first order; an exercise of power that recalls Nietzsche’s argument in the *Genealogy of Morals* that “The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should conceive of the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers.” The power to name an event or a group of individuals is the power to construct identities and meaning. Thus, to inscribe the discourse of responsibility on Iraqi bodies is to establish a bifurcated framework wherein those who take responsibility for themselves, their future, and their livelihood are deemed normal. Conversely, as Alyson Cole argues, those who fail to take responsibility for themselves are placed within the category of abnormal, resentful and pathological. It is within this later category that the discourse of responsibility places Iraqis.

For example, calls for increased Iraqi responsibility are often coupled with a focus on their inability or unwillingness to do so. For instance, Senator Carl Levin emphatically stated that “Iraqi leaders have not met their benchmarks to share power and resources, to modify de-Bathification laws, to schedule elections and to amend their constitution.” Additionally, Bryan Bender of the *Boston Globe* writes that “the inability of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense to assume full responsibility for providing life support to its more than 100,000 troops marks a setback in the slow process of turning over greater responsibility to the Iraqi government.” Underpinning these statements is the implication that failures in Iraq continue because of the failings of the Iraqis themselves. There is an implicit notion that it is time for Iraqis to move on and take control of their situation. As one local commentator in the *Kennebec Journal Morning Sentinel* put it, “I think we should give the Iraqis one year from June 1st to get their act together and then we are out of there. If they can’t do it in the six years since we unwisely invaded their country, then they obviously can’t do it.” In other words, the invasion was five years ago—get over it!

By portraying Iraqis as unable or unwilling to move beyond their current situation, the discourse of responsibility draws directly upon Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment*. For Nietzsche, the subject of *ressentiment* is one that fails to act with an eye toward the future, but instead cleaves to its suffering and clings to its past. Psychologically invested in its suffering, the subject of *ressentiment* becomes dependent, lashes out and searches for an agent outside of itself to blame. Iraq’s failure to take responsibility for itself is cast within this framework. The discourse commands the Iraqis to let go, reinvent themselves, and highlights their failure to do so as a deficiency. By refusing to assume command of their country, Iraqis are depicted as invested in their suffering and unable to move beyond their past, both dependent on, while simultaneously lashing out at, the United States for its current predicament through acts of insurgent violence and civil war. Portrayed as unable and unwilling to overcome their melancholic state and face their present, Iraq is deemed irreparable because of the Iraqis themselves.

In this regard, the attribution of responsibility to Iraqis is a practice fraught with violence. William Connolly has pointed out in the case of the alcoholic that he or she “has to contend not only with the debilitating effects of the disease but with the moral judgment of those who construed it as simply a willful abdication of self responsibility.” Similarly Iraqis, in addition to coping with the trauma of invasion,

displacement and loss, must also assess their personal failings—their refusal to take responsibility for themselves. This ascription of responsibility perpetrates a second layer of violence on top of the physical violence that accompanies the horrors of war. It inflicts a psychic violence by placing the problems in Iraq at the feet of the Iraqis, all the while displacing any sense of culpability on the side of the invading and occupying power.

Forgetting Iraq...

That the discourse of responsibility also works to displace culpability presents another way in which to make sense of its power to shape our view of the war. Simply put, it provides a mechanism for the United States to escape blame for the situation in Iraq by repositioning the locus of responsibility onto Iraqis. For instance, in a 2006 episode of Meet the Press, as the discourse of responsibility was gaining traction, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, Dr. Richard Haass, explicitly argued for the need to construct a frame through which people see the current debacle in Iraq. In a roundtable discussion he stated that, “If Iraq doesn’t work, I think it is incredibly important for the future of the Middle East and American foreign policy around the world that the principle lesson not be that the United States is unreliable or lacked staying power.” He concluded that, “It is essentially important for the future of this country that Iraq be seen, if you will, as Iraq’s failure, not as America’s failure.” This reimagining of Iraq facilitates a psychological displacement as to where responsibility actually resides.

Most importantly, Haass’ statement sets its sights beyond the present by calling for the need to alter the way in which the Iraq War will be remembered. In this regard the shift to a discourse that produces Iraqis as the responsible agents as opposed to the United States can be read as an attempt to shape collective memory in the present; an act of crucial importance for the nation. Ernst Renan, in his essay, “What is the Nation?” referred to the nation as “a soul, a spiritual principle,” sustained largely by the “possession in common of a rich heritage of memories.” For Renan it is a sense of collective memory that provides the nation with a foundation that bridges the past to the present and links the present moment with a vision of the future. Through a narrative of the past a group of individuals comes to know itself as constitutive of a collective body. It is the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves that turns individuals into citizens or subjects; providing an adhesive for a disparate group of “I’s” to know itself as a “We.” Haass’ statement reflects the act of constructing a narrative, a story through which Americans will remember their nation’s role in Iraq.

However, while every nation needs a particular knowledge of the past, what kind of knowledge is, of course, of utmost importance. Nietzsche believed that “cheerfulness, a good conscience, belief in the future, the joyful deed—all depend, in the individual as well as the nation on there being a line that divides the visible and clear from the vague and the shadowy.” His notion that “we must know the right time to forget as well as the right time to remember,” highlights the fact that a nation’s existence is contingent upon not only a collective, but a selective, national memory. The nation commits itself to “historical error.” The imperative is not only, *never forget*, but in addition, *forget to remember*.

But while the art of forgetting is critical to the national imagination, what exactly is so imperative to forget? What is it that requires such collective amnesia on the part of the nation? In response, Renan maintained that historical inquiry could actually undo the national foundation by bringing to light “deeds of violence.” Selective memory and collective forgetting then become essential means of disavowing past incidences of brutality effectively reflecting Margaret Atwood’s contention that “we tend to remember the awful things done to us and to forget the awful things that we did to others.” This type of discriminating relationship with the past is perhaps best exemplified

by the juxtaposition of 9/11 to the Iraq War. While our memory of 9/11 as an event of unprecedented importance and collective purpose remains indelibly burned into the national psyche, our understanding of the Iraq War, from its inception to the present remains muddled.

Every moment of remembrance for the nation is simultaneously an instance of forgetting precisely because memory fashions the past in a way that prioritizes a specific way of seeing history. The construction of national memory is a political project, where, to echo Aleida Assmann, “history is not only what comes after politics; it also becomes the stuff of politics.” As a result, the current discourse that surrounds the conflict in Iraq forces us to ask not only what is remembered, but how it is remembered. How will we remember Iraq tomorrow? A year from now? Twenty years from now? Moreover, what will we forget?

While answers to such questions will also depend in part on future political moments, the discourse of responsibility provides a social frame that helps mediate the experience and memory of the Iraq War. It allows the United States to begin the process of disassociation from the tragedy of Iraq by placing distance between itself and its actions. The continuous discussion regarding the need for Iraq to take responsibility for itself helps foster a collective forgetting of the cruelty associated with invasion. It renders it impossible to recognize our national deeds of violence, allowing for what William Connolly has called, “the forgetfulness of the present in the present.”

What’s Really Lost?

We return now to the question that marked our beginning. That is, how do we know, how do we make sense of, what our present is? Proving “Iraqi innocence” or “American guilt,” is not what is at stake here. Instead, my goal has been to illuminate how our reality is mediated and shaped through discourses of power and how these discourses construct identities, engendering ways of seeing, remembering and forgetting. With all the talk of responsibility there is, of course, everything that goes unspoken. This forces us to ask what gets lost in a discourse that attempts to reposition responsibility and inscribe other agents with its obligations.

When officials speak about the absence of Iraqi leadership or the need for Iraqis to assume greater responsibility, the United States effectively casts the Iraqis as delinquent and erases their status as victims. The mounting civilian casualties, the refugee crisis and the problems of internal displacement remain hidden from clear view. However, despite the great lengths to which the United States goes in its attempt to reposition the locus of responsibility from itself onto Iraqis, gaps between rhetoric and reality remain. The discourse and the reality, to invoke the language of Fanon, follow the dictates of “mutual exclusion.” Such a disjunction strikes at the heart of Judith Butler’s question of “who counts as human.” Whose lives count as lives? And finally, what makes for a grievable life? To be able to recognize the significance and trauma of what Iraq and all Iraqis have collectively undergone in the past five years might provide an entry point into an important dialogue about Iraq’s present and future possibilities.

Pierre Bourdieu once wrote that “from a strictly linguistic point of view, anyone can say anything just as the private can order the captain to clear the latrines; but from a sociological point of view, it is clear that not anyone can assert anything or else does so at his peril.” I propose that it is imperative to assume the role of the private in Bourdieu’s formulation in order to assert all that the dominant discourse omits and attempts to silence. By struggling against the forgetting of the current moment, regardless of the potential dangers involved we begin to piece together a more comprehensive picture of what is actually taking place, producing a better understanding of what our present is. This commitment will no doubt guarantee the development of counter-narratives, despite attempts to ensure otherwise. Ⓐ

What's Happening to America?

Is America in the midst of a moral and political crisis—one that goes deeper than George W. Bush? || The *Advocate* asks America's brightest minds what's going on—and what we can do about it

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CHALMERS JOHNSON

“Can Any Administration Reverse the United States’ Downward Spiral?”

In his speech to the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Barack Obama called the forthcoming presidential election a “defining moment” in this country’s history. It is conceivable that he is right, and there are precedents in American history in which an election inaugurated a period of reform and political realignment. However, such a development is extremely rare and surrounded by contingencies that are normally beyond the control of the advocates of reform. So let me speculate whether the 2008 election might set in motion a political renaissance in the United States—restoring a modicum of democracy to the country’s political system and ending the march toward imperialism, perpetual warfare, and bankruptcy that began with the Cold War and approaches its end game at the present time.

The political blunders, serious mistakes, and governmental failures of the last eight years so discredited the administration of George W. Bush that his name was barely mentioned at the 2008 Republican convention. Even John McCain chose to run as a candidate of “change” despite the fact that it was his own party’s misgoverning that elicited those demands for

change. Bringing the opposition party to power, however, is not likely to restore the American republic to good working order. It is almost inconceivable that any president could stand up to the overwhelming pressures of the military-industrial complex, the extra-constitutional powers of the sixteen secret intelligence agencies, and the entrenched interests they represent. The subversive influence of the imperial presidency, the vast expansion of official secrecy, and the irrational commitments of American imperialism (761 active military bases in 151 foreign countries as of 2008) will not easily be rolled back by the normal workings of the political system.

In order for that to occur, the election of 2008 would have to be a “realigning election,” of which there have been only two during the past century—in 1932, electing Franklin Roosevelt, and in 1968 bringing Richard Nixon to power. Until 1932, the Republicans had controlled the presidency for 56 of the previous 72 years, beginning with Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860. After 1932, the Democrats occupied the White House for 28 of the next 36 years. The 1968 election saw the withdrawal of Lyndon Johnson, the defeat of Hubert Humphrey (not to mention the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King), and created a new alignment that favored the Republicans based on the so-called “southern strategy.” Its essence was to run Republican racists for office in the old Confederate states. Before 1968, the Democrats were clearly the majority party, winning seven of the previous nine presidential elections. Between 1968 and 2004, the Republicans won seven of the next ten.

Of these two realigning elections, the one that elected Roosevelt is more important for our purposes because it ushered in one of the few truly democratic periods in American political history. In his latest

book, Sheldon Wolin, a Princeton political theorist and analyst of American democracy, holds that “Democracy is about the conditions that make it possible for ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs.”

However, the founders of the country and virtually all subsequent political leaders have been hostile to democracy in this sense. They favored checks and balances, republicanism, and rule by elites rather than rule by the common man or woman. Wolin writes:

The American political system was not born a democracy, but born with a bias against democracy. It was constructed by those who were either skeptical about democracy or hostile to it. Democratic advance proved to be slow, uphill, forever incomplete. The republic existed for three-quarters of a century before formal slavery was ended; another hundred years before black Americans were assured of their voting rights. Only in the twentieth century were women guaranteed the vote and trade unions the right to bargain collectively. In none of these instances has victory been complete: women still lack full equality, racism persists, and the destruction of the remnants of trade unions remains a goal of corporate strategies. Far from being innate, democracy in America has gone against the grain, against the very forms by which the political and economic power of the country has been and continues to be ordered.

It is this history that makes the election of 1932 so exceptional. “The sovereign people,” Wolin contends:

were fully entitled to use governmental power and resources to redress the inequalities created by the economy of capitalism. That conviction supported and was solidified by the New Deal. A wide range of regulatory agencies was created, the Social Security program and a minimum wage law were established, unions were legitimated along with the rights to bargain collectively, and various attempts were made to reduce mass unemployment by means of government programs for public works and conservation. With the outbreak of World War II, the New Deal was superseded by the forced mobilization and governmental control of the entire economy and the conscription of much of the adult male population. For all practical purposes the war marked the end of the first large-scale effort at establishing the tentative beginnings of social democracy in this country.

Socioeconomic conditions in 2008 somewhat resemble those in 1932, making a realigning election conceivable. Unemployment in 1932 was a record 33 percent. In September 2008, the rate was a much lower 6.1 percent, but there were many other severe economic pressures. These included massive mortgage foreclosures, bank failures, rapid inflation in the prices of food and fuel, the failure of the health care system to deliver service to all citizens, a looming catastrophe of global warming due to the overconsumption of fossil fuels, continuing costly military interventions with more on the horizon due to foreign policy failures (in Georgia, Ukraine, Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, and elsewhere), and record-setting budgetary and trade deficits. The question is whether the electorate can be mobilized as it was in 1932 and whether this would lead to a realigning election. The answer to neither question is an unambiguous yes.

To even contemplate that happening, the Democratic Party has to win the election, and it faces two formidable obstacles in doing so: race and regionalism. Although large numbers of white Democrats have said to pollsters that the race of a candidate is not a factor in their decision to vote, there is ample evidence that they are not telling the truth. Andrew Hacker, a well-known specialist on this subject at Queens College, calls this phenomenon the “Bradley Effect,” referring to Tom Bradley, a former black mayor of Los Angeles, who lost his 1982 bid to become governor of California even though every poll in the state showed him leading his white opponent by substantial margins. Similar results appeared in

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BILL AYERS

1989 when David Dinkins ran for mayor of New York City and Douglas Wilder sought election as governor of Virginia. Dinkins was ahead by eighteen percentage points but won by only two, and Wilder was leading by nine points but actually won by only a half a percent. Numerous other examples lead Hacker to offer this advice to Obama campaign offices: ALWAYS SUBTRACT SEVEN PERCENT from any favorable poll results. That's the Bradley effect.

Meanwhile, the Karl Rove-trained Republican Party has been hard at work disenfranchising black voters. Although we are finally beyond property qualifications, written tests, and the poll tax, there are many new gimmicks. These include laws requiring voters to present official identity cards that include a photo, which for all practical purposes means either a driver's license or a passport. Many states drop men and women from the rolls who have been convicted of a felony but who have fully completed their sentences, or they require an elaborate procedure to be reinstated. There are many other ways to discourage black voters from attempting to vote, not the least of which is that the United States imprisons a greater proportion of its population than any other country on earth, a burden that falls disproportionately on blacks. These obstacles can be overcome but they require heroic organizational efforts.

Regionalism is the other problem standing in the way of attempts to mobilize the electorate on a national basis. In their book *Divided America*, the political scientists Earl and Merle Black argue that the U.S. electorate is hopelessly split. This division, which is becoming more entrenched with each passing year, is fundamentally ideological but is also rooted in ethnicity and manifests itself in an intense and never-ending partisanship. "In modern American politics," they write, "a Republican Party dominated by white Protestants faces a Democratic Party in which minorities plus non-Christian whites far outnumber white Protestants." Another significant and growing difference is gender imbalance. In the 1950s, the Democratic Party, which was then by far the larger party, was evenly balanced between women and men. Fifty years later, a smaller but still very potent Democratic Party contained far more women than men (60 percent to 40 percent). "In contrast," says Black, "the Republican Party has shifted from an institution with more women than men in the 1950s (55 percent to 45 percent) to one in which men and women were as evenly balanced in 2004 as Democrats were in the 1950s."

The old American antagonism between the two sides in the civil war (Southern Democrats vs. Northern Republicans) had by the 21st century given way to "a new American regionalism, a pattern of conflict in which Democrats and Republicans each possess two regional strongholds and in which the Midwest, as the swing region, holds the balance of power in presidential elections."

The five regions, each becoming more partisan and less characteristic of the nation as a whole, are the Northeast, South, Midwest, Mountains/Plains, and Pacific Coast. The Northeast, although declining slightly in population, is becoming more unambiguously liberal Democratic each year. It is composed of New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont), the

Middle Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania), and the District of Columbia. It is the primary Democratic stronghold. The South is today a Republican stronghold. It is made up of the eleven former Confederate states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia).

The second Republican stronghold, displaying an intense and growing partisanship, is the Mountains/Plains region. It is composed of the thirteen states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. The second Democratic stronghold is the Pacific Coast, which includes the nation's most populous state, California, joined by Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington. The Midwest, where national elections are won or lost by the party that is able to hold on to and mobilize its strongholds, is composed of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The two most important swing states in the nation are Florida (27 electoral votes) and Ohio (20 electoral votes), which the Democrats narrowly lost in both 2000 and 2004.

These five regions are today entrenched in the nation's psyche. There is no way to get around them in a national election, which barring a clear and unmistakable performance failure by one of the parties—as happened to the Republicans during the Great Depression—will normally produce very narrow victories by one party or the other.

In the 2008 election, there are two main issues that will determine whether or not it will be a realigning one. Republican Party failures in managing the economy, in involving the country in catastrophic wars of choice, and in ignoring such paramount issues as global warming all dictate a Democratic Party victory. Militating against that outcome is racist hostility toward the Democratic Party's candidate. It seems probable that the crisis caused by the performance failures of the incumbent party will guarantee a realigning election favoring the Democrats. But it is impossible to know how swayed by race the nation may be. The fate of the nation hangs in the balance.

Chalmers Johnson is the author of three linked books on the crises of American imperialism and militarism. They are *Blowback* (2000), *The Sorrows of Empire* (2004), and *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (2006).

BILL AYERS

“The Politics of Teaching in an Unjust World”

During the heat of the 2008 battle with Senator Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Party nomination for president, Senator Barack Obama was asked who he imagined Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. would support if he were alive today. Without hesitation Obama responded that he didn't think Reverend King would support or endorse either one; King, more characteristically, would be in the streets building a movement

for peace and justice, holding everyone's feet to the fire.

That strikes me as right. Lyndon Johnson, the most effective politician of his generation, was never involved in the Black Freedom Movement, although he did pass the most far-reaching legislation in history in response to a robust and in many ways revolutionary movement in the streets. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was neither a labor leader nor an activist, and yet he presided over critical progressive social legislation in a time of radical labor mobilization in shops and mines and factories across the land. And Abraham Lincoln was not a member of an abolitionist political party, but reality—including in effect a general strike by enslaved human beings—forced emancipation to the forefront of American politics. Each of these three acted at a moment of crisis and expanding possibilities, each responded to radical grassroots movements for social justice on the ground.

Of course the White House “matters,” but where intellectuals, artists, and activists tend to get muddled is in analyzing how and why it matters, what its critical limits are, how this or that election, this or that candidate, a vote for this one or “that one” or neither one fits into a larger strategy for fundamental progressive change. Too often when the wildly noisy carnival of a national election sweeps into town it's as if a magnetic hole opens up, sucking all energy and light into its gaping maw. Some abandon other important work under the banner, “All for the White House,” others offer “critical support.” But without a serious, collectively generated critical analysis, national elections reinforce a terribly retrograde and entirely unworthy idea: if we get the right leaders, we can sit back while they bring us the change the world needs. If the less bad alternative lands in the White House there's no need for dancing in the streets; we might feel relieved, but the real work still lies ahead. In this regard it's worth remembering the insight expressed by Eugene Debs at the turn of the last century when he told a group of workers in Chicago, “If I could lead you into the Promised Land I would not do it, because someone else would come along and lead you out.”

I subscribe to Myles Horton's idea that great moments of social upheaval—Mountain Times he called them—are inevitable in an unjust world, but that Valley Times are critical in order to prepare ourselves for the coming storms. This is the hard and essential work of movement-building. We, of course, cannot *will* a movement into being, but neither can we sit idly by waiting for a movement to spring full-grown, as from the head of Zeus, and land in our laps. Preparation, preparation, preparation.

We must agitate for democracy and push hard for human rights, learning to build a new society through our collective self-transformations and our limited everyday struggles. We must commit to the common good even as we take a full and realistic measure of reality. This means making a concrete analysis of real conditions, finding ways to make connections between and across specific movements—war and warming, peace and labor rights, queer freedom and human rights—and positing alternatives. We must seek ways to live sustainably, to stop the addiction to consumption and development and military power, to relentlessly press the egalitarian ideal of fair distribution of rights and wealth, and this means specifically



All children and youth, regardless of economic circumstance, must have full access to richly-resourced classrooms led by caring, qualified, and generously compensated teachers, and assessment must be in the service of student learning and teacher effectiveness. K-16 education is an urgent priority and a fundamental human right

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opposing war and surveillance and caging in favor of more education, more health care, and social security for all. In these efforts the competing impulses and ideals that animate our history are on full display: rights and liberty and the pursuit of human freedom on one side, domination and conquest and repression on the other; education, health care, and some degree of economic security throughout life in close contention with war, surveillance, and containment.

We live in a time of empire resurrected and unapologetic, militarism proudly expanding and triumphant, war without justice and without end, growing disparities between the haves and the have-nots as economic dislocation wracks the world, white and male supremacy retrenched, basic rights and protections shredded, fear and superstition and the mobilization of scapegoating social formations based on bigotry and the threats of violence, and on and on. The powerful cannot rule in the old ways, ordinary people are unwilling to pursue solutions in the old ways, and a missing piece of the puzzle—a radical new vision and program—cries out to be discovered through action. We live as well at the eclipse of the American empire—Randy Newman sings that “The end of the empire is messy at best/and this one is ending/like all the rest.” The question of whether we will become a nation among nations and a people among peoples, or rather insist belligerently on our right to be the *uber*-nation and go out, then, in the proverbial blaze-of-glory is palpable, immediate and real. The trauma of contradictions that is America. All of this pushes us toward becoming authentic actors and active subjects in our own history.

And none of this, of course, is easy or automatic; all of it demands, in Gramsci’s famous dictum, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” We might harvest some hope now in the growth of opposition to war and occupation worldwide. Or we might be inspired by the growing reparations and prison abolition movements, or the rising immigrant rights movement that is re-framing the question of work and rights as well as the stirrings of working people everywhere on earth, or by queer people courageously pressing for full human recognition and rights. But mainly hope resides in a simple self-evident truth: the future is unknown, and it’s also entirely unknowable.

History is always in the making, and we are—each and every one of us—works-in-progress. It’s up to us, for nothing is predetermined, and we are acting largely in the dark with our limited consciousness and our contingent capacities. This makes our moment both entirely hopeful if exquisitely treacherous and all the more urgent. And it brings me to the wild and wonderful, controversial and always-contested world of education.

In Brecht’s play *Galileo* the great astronomer sets forth into a world dominated by a mighty church and an authoritarian power: “The cities are narrow and so are the brains,” he declares recklessly. “Superstition and plague. But now the word is: since it is so, it does not remain so. For everything moves my friend.” Intoxicated with his own radical discoveries—he has seen more, become shockingly more aware—Galileo feels the earth shifting and finds himself propelled surprisingly toward revolution. “It was always said that the stars were fastened to a crystal vault so they could not fall,” he says. “Now we have taken heart and

let them float in the air, without support ... they are embarked on a great voyage—like us who are also without support and embarked on a great voyage.”

Here Galileo is raising the stakes and taking on the establishment in the realm of its own authority—it strikes back fiercely. Forced to renounce his life’s work under the pressure of the Inquisition he denounces what he knows to be true, and is welcomed back into the church and the ranks of the faithful, but exiled from humanity—by his own word. At this point a former student confronts Galileo in the street, saying, “Many on all sides followed you with their ears and their eyes believing that you stood, not only for a particular view of the movement of the stars, but even more for the liberty of teaching—in all fields. Not then for any particular thoughts, but for the right to think at all. Which is in dispute.”

The right to think at all, which is in dispute—the right to pursue an inquiry into uncharted spaces, the right to challenge the church and its orthodoxy with argument and evidence in the public square. The right to think—this is the heart of education which, at its best, rests on the twin pillars of enlightenment and liberation, knowledge and human freedom. We want to know more, to see more, to experience more in order to do more—to be more competent and powerful and capable in our projects and our pursuits, to be more astute and aware, more fully engaged in the world we inherit and that we are simultaneously destined to change.

Education in a democracy must be considered distinct from education under a dictatorship or a monarchy, and the distinction matters. After all, school leaders in fascist Germany or communist Albania or medieval Saudi Arabia are all agreed that students should behave well, stay away from drugs and crime, do their homework, study hard, and master the subject matters. But in a democracy there is something more: the attempt to develop in students and teachers alike the ability to think for themselves, to decide what is black and what is white, what’s false and what’s true. Teaching in a democracy is geared toward participation and engagement, and it’s based on a common faith: every human being is of infinite and incalculable value, each a unique intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, and creative force capable of asking. Who in the world am I? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed?

Education in a democracy is characteristically eye-popping and mind-blowing—it’s about opening doors, opening minds, inviting students to become more capable and powerful actors and choice-makers as they forge their own pathways into a wider world. But much of what we call schooling forecloses or shuts down or walls off meaningful choice-making. While many of us long for teaching as something transcendent and powerful, we find ourselves too-often locked in situations that reduce teaching to a kind of glorified clerking, passing along a curriculum of received wisdom and predigested bits of information. A fundamental choice and challenge for teachers, then, is this: to acquiesce to the machinery of control, or to take a stand with our students in a search for meaning and a journey of transformation. To be a prison guard or an educator. To teach obedience and conformity, or to teach its polar opposite: initiative and imagination, the capacity to name the world, to

identify the obstacles to your full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known demands. Education as the practice of freedom.

School has always been and will always be contested space—what should be taught? In what way? Toward what end? By and for whom?—and at bottom the struggle is over the essential questions. What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to construct a meaningful, purposeful, and valuable life in the world, here and now? What demands does freedom make?

The education we are accustomed to is often little more than a caricature—it is not authentically or primarily about full human development. Why, for example, is education thought of as only kindergarten through 12th grade, or kindergarten through university? Why does education occur only early in life? Why is there a point in our lives when we feel we no longer need education? Why is there a hierarchy of teacher over student? Why are there grades and grade levels? Why is there attendance? Why is being on time so valuable? Why is education separate from production?

Schools in a democracy resist the over-specialization of human activity—the separation of the intellectual from the manual, the head from the hand, the heart and the head, the creative and the functional—as a distortion, and build upon the unity of human beings, a unity based both upon recognition of differences as well as consciousness of interdependence. People are different—distinct capacities, unique needs—and we are, at the same time, entirely connected. The knowledge we lack includes an acknowledgment of the reality of our wild diversity—something that just *is*—and at the same time an acceptance of our deep connectedness. The knowledge we desperately need is a knowledge based upon full human recognition, upon unity and solidarity. The goal of democratic schools, then, is the mobilization of intelligence and creativity and initiative and work of all people in all directions.

Educators, students, citizens, and activists must press in this period for a new kind of education based on the principle that the fullest development of all will be the condition for the full development of each. This new education advocates an end to sorting people into winners and losers through expensive standardized tests which act as pseudo-scientific forms of surveillance; an end to starving schools of needed resources and then blaming teachers for dismal outcomes; and an end to the rapidly accumulating “educational debt,” the resources due to communities historically segregated, under-funded and under-served. All children and youth, regardless of economic circumstance, must have full access to richly-resourced classrooms led by caring, qualified and generously compensated teachers, and assessment must be in the service of student learning and teacher effectiveness. K-16 education is an urgent priority and a fundamental human right.

We might try to create open spaces in our schools and our various communities where we expect fresh and starting winds to blow, unaccustomed winds that are sure to electrify and confound and fascinate us. Winds that tell us we are alive. We begin, then, by throwing open the windows. In this corner of this place—in this open space we are constructing together



er—people will begin to experience themselves as powerful authors of their own narratives, luminous actors in their own dramas, the essential creators of their own lives. They will find ways to articulate their own desires and demands and questions. In this space everyone will live *in search of* rather than *in accordance with* or *in accommodation to*. This is the key to a democratic future.

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AMIRI BARAKA

“Forward is Where We Have to Go”

What the young people with the signs in St. Petersburg said to Barack Obama—“You’re undermining the (Black) Revolution”—is merely one more example of how confused and misdirected too many who style themselves “revolutionary” have become. For one thing, it is certain that these folk do not even understand what revolution is. I would guess they are more of the tiny throng captivated by anarchism and infantile leftism who think revolution means standing on the sidelines hurling insults at the people who they think are their enemies.

If you want to stand around with signs of some significant show of political clarity, they should at least be aimed at the crypto fascist John McCain. To not even be able to identify who the main enemy is at any given stage of struggle is patently non-revolutionary. To think that Obama is the principle target of our struggle is, at best, infantile and anarchist. At worst, it could be pro-McCain.

If we go back to basics, revolution is the *seizure of power*. The aim of revolutionaries, at most stages of struggle, is the seizure of power. To picket Obama is to move to seize power for McCain.

What is also not understood is the tortuous path of revolutionary struggle. Obama, along with quite a few other “post ‘60s” developments is still the product and direct result of the turbulent Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements of the ‘60s. Without Dr. King, Montgomery, Malcolm X, Robert Williams, Rosa Parks, CORE, the Freedom Riders, the Black Panthers, SNCC and CAP there could be no Barack Obama. Without those bloody struggles against black national oppression, racism, discrimination and segregation, there could be no Obama candidacy, or certainly not of this magnitude.

Jesse Jackson’s two runs for president were admirable, and yes, they were part of the sledgehammer of black politics from the 50’s through the 80’s. And just as that force created the visible use of Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice as negro “buttons” within the right-wing establishment of US bourgeois politics, none of that was possible without the black movement itself,

as contradictory as that might seem. The internationally perceived racial conflict in the United States was the most glaring contradiction to US claims to being the almighty white angel of world politics.

The colored secretaries of state provided some of the cool out necessary not only to sublimate that image but to foist on this world of colored people a confusing tactic, so that when either secretary of state hopped out of a plane somewhere in this mostly colored world, friends and righteous enemies would be startled by who was carrying the message.

So now that it’s come all the way to the “top” of US government, there is a need for another, Yeh! black, face to cool out the ugliness the last twenty some years have mashed upon the world. We might not agree with the intention of this playacting, but at the same time we must recognize the forces that make it necessary. Recognize those forces, because we are a large part of them. And with that recognition must come the understanding of what the next step in this protracted struggle to ultimately eliminate imperialism and monopoly capitalism is: which are the base of continuing national oppression, racism, gender oppression, and anti-democratic hegemony anywhere in the world.

The very negative side of the “post-racist” line that Obama runs is that the die is cast for nitwits to say that racism is done and gone and that if you still in the ghetto or still don’t have a job, it’s on you. Obama’s best intention is that there is the making of a post racist coalition that can provide the muscle for his campaign and victory in the election. But reality—the cops, the jails, the unemployment figures—puts all that down every day.

Still, it is a very pimpable figment. A *New York Times* recent cover story—“Is Obama the End of Black Politics?”—is a stinking example of its pimpability. One obvious answer to that is “Only if Obama is the End of White Politics.” One could hope that an Obama victory would signal an incremental leap in the direction of more democratic allowances for highly skilled operatives within the system, which is what Obama certainly is. But “post-racist”? Gimme me a break.

Black politics will only disappear when the black majority disappears, and even the wish fulfillment of *New York Times* “liberals” can never achieve this, nor the creepy self hatred of those incognegroes the *Times* wants to anoint as “post-black.” Still the question of Obama’s candidacy is a quite different consideration. As I have said in print and in the flesh at many forums, the foundation of Obama’s successful candidacy is his 90 percent support from the Afro-American people, a fact that I’m sure he understands. Obama also understands that it is the rest of the American people he must reach out to, no matter how his attempts to do this are questioned, even by black people. After all, 90 percent of 12 percent is not enough to win the presidency.

The so called militants, black and white, simply fail to understand that the logic and strength of Obama’s candidacy is the 21st century manifestation of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements. Jesse Jackson’s two impressive candidacies were also part of that movement. Not to accept both these phenomena as positive aspects and results of our collective struggle is to lack “true self consciousness.”

The real question now is what the next step should

be, what the key link in that chain of progressive struggle is that if grasped will hoist the whole of us incrementally to the next level of unity and struggle? We cannot go backward or even contemplate it. A revolutionary must first find out what it is the people want, what they need. Unfortunately, for some, the definition of revolution is to construct some elitist cultural nationalist, religious or infantile leftist position, the “further out” the better, so they may claim, since few others will get down with that, that they must be the most revolutionary of all. Too often this is just a means of hiding out from the real work of educating and organizing and settling for being the hippest chump in the closet.

What we must be aiming for at the present level of US politics is a people’s or popular democracy, rather than the dictatorship of wealth that exists today. That struggle must include replacing the monopoly capitalist-imperialist domination of US politics at every level with a united front, which should be led by the working class in alliance with farmers, the progressive petty bourgeoisie, oppressed nationalities and progressive national bourgeoisie: in other words, the loose Obama coalition, as it exists now.

For the Afro-American people a national united front, democratic assembly, would be a huge step in the right direction, as what was attempted by the Convention Movement of the 19th century, the National Negro Congress in the 1940’s and the Gary Convention in 1972. It is this kind of organized force that would be powerful enough to maintain the correct orientation of any national coalition of multinational forces to win this election and help steer the ship of state.

The fiercest opponents to such a victorious coalition are the racist right and the juvenile delinquent left some of whom are quite rightist and even some quite racist; e.g., how can Nader put Obama down for “sounding white”? What does “white” sound like, after all? And how come Nader don’t sound like that?

Ultimately this political period will be characterized by what kind of political force blacks and progressive Americans can put together to secure Obama’s election and push him ever to the Left. Hubert Harrison, the black socialist, wrote in the *New York Call* in 1911: “politically, the Negro is the touchstone of the modern democratic idea. The presence of the Negro puts our democracy to the proof and reveals the falsity of it... True democracy and equality implies a revolution ...startling even to think of.” So the question of “Black Politics” must be inextricably bound to progressive politics in this country and just as we fought as black people and with progressive allies of many nationalities even to vote, or for that matter, to drink out of public drinking fountains or ride anywhere in a bus, so it is this same “Black Politics” that will help us tackle our current national problems. Black politics in its most progressive meaning is the struggle for a people’s democracy here in the United States. This is what the Obama campaign asserts boldly. We must see that it continues to do so right into the Oval Office and beyond. ☺

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Unfortunately, for some, the definition of revolution is to construct some elitist cultural nationalist, religious or infantile leftist position, the “further out” the better, so they may claim, since few others will get down with that, that they must be the most revolutionary of all

Democracy's Demons

Inside the Mind of the American Voter

JUSTIN ROGERS-COOPER

- *The Myth of the Rational Voter* by Bryan Caplan (2008)
- *Just How Stupid Are We?* by Rick Shenkman (2008)
- *Red State Blue State Rich State Poor State* by Andrew Gelman (2008)

Recent stories of America's relatively abrupt fall from "exceptionalism" typically trace the corruption and incompetence of the executive branch. Much of this commentary focuses on the abuse of executive power during the administration of George W. Bush. The majority of it has come from journalists, pundits, or insiders near the White House (think Richard Clarke, Bob Woodward, or Frank Rich). In their narratives, the nation's problems came from a relatively small group of political appointees that grossly abused the power locked into unelected positions of government: Donald Rumsfeld, John Ashcroft, Alberto Gonzales, and so on. By this point, we're probably too familiar with the awesome corruption, decadence, and ethical decay exposed within the military/industrial complex—the CIA, the NSA, the EPA, the Interior and Justice departments, the Pentagon, and so on.

This general mindset has been described as a warped institution of policies inaugurated during the Ronald Reagan years. Reagan's quip about "government being the problem" seemed to address the perceived failures of the Great Society programs and gave political cover for neo-liberal deregulation and free market ideology. While channeling Reagan's rhetoric of small government, Bush used the one-party Congress to cut taxes to large corporations, legalize torture, and cow a compliant judiciary branch to re-write the Constitution. In July, a federal court ruled that Ali al-Marri's status as an "enemy combatant" was legal; the same ruling allows for the indefinite detention of any American citizen. With no checks and balances until 2006, the zero regulation of government, banks, and Wall Street sunk the nation into recession, criminality, insolvency, and panic. Enter Barack Obama and the Age of Redemption. Right?

Not so fast. In the past year, several contemporary historians, economists, and sociologists have begun searching for other explanations about the Bush years. How did Bush and his cronies get into power, anyway? Who put them there—and why? They examine the role played by American citizens in maintaining the health of their own democratic institutions. These books follow the general thrust of Thomas Frank's widely read critique of red state America following Bush's re-election in 2004, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Instead of limiting their focus to the seeming contradiction between red state cultural and economic interests, they ask much broader questions about the role of culture, information, religion, passion, emotion, and education for voters in the United States. These questions rightfully strike at the very heart of participatory politics and government by the people and they don't begin or end with Bush. The biggest problem, these authors contend, is not lackluster voter turnout for midterm elections. Nor is it about the apathy or ignorance of those that sit out elections entirely. What keeps these writers awake at night are the people that *do* vote.

If you want to understand the problem with de-

mocracy, they argue, you've got to start with how voters make decisions. In *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, George Mason University economics professor Bryan Caplan echoes Thomas Franks' central question: why do people vote against their economic interests? For Caplan, however, this question pertains to those voters who vote for protectionist trade policies. They don't do this because they are ignorant. They're "irrational." They process information emotionally. They "tune out" information that upsets their beliefs. If democracy fails, it's because it does what voters want. In short, voters want to feel good about voting. Their choices are irrational, and therefore democracy cannot behave rationally. This is his main argument against those folks who think democracy could be better if people were more educated. On this point, he seems to score.

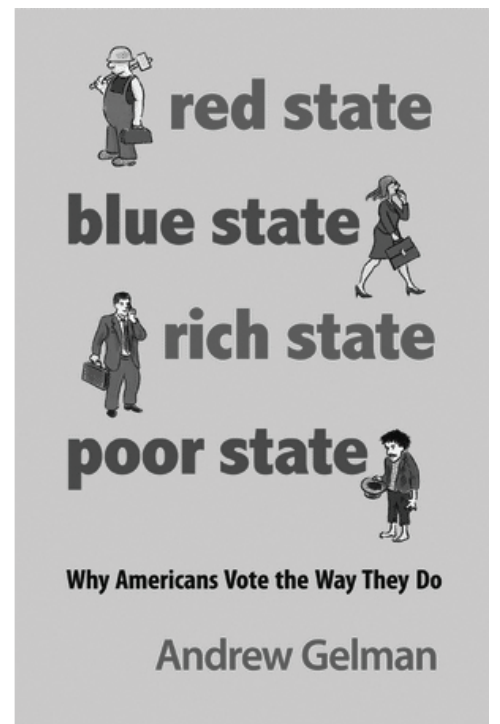
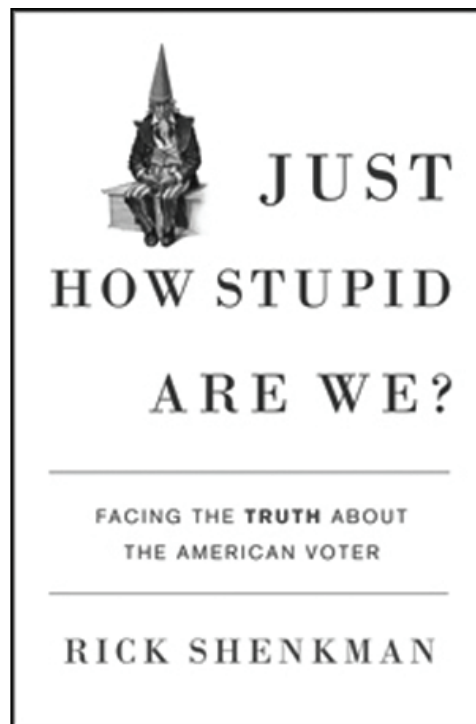
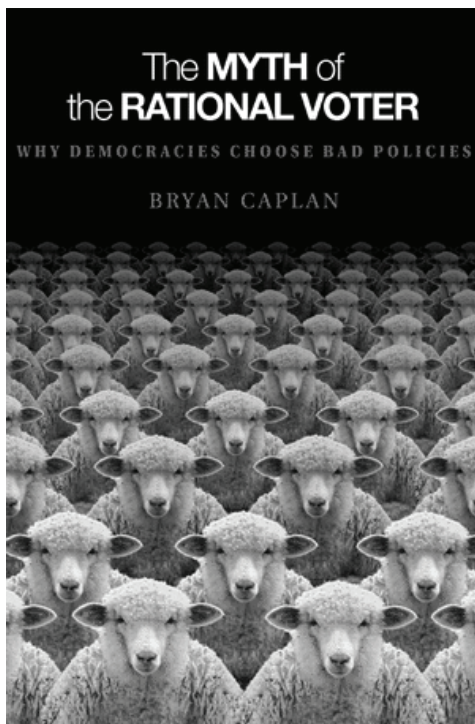
You might contest that voters aren't "disturbingly ignorant" or that the past few years are a "fragile, temporary condition," but Caplan's got numbers, facts, and studies to back him up. Some of these figures are from classic studies, and also appear in similar literature. In *Just How Stupid Are We?* for instance, another George Mason academic, historian Rick Shenkman, catalogues several of the same studies: Only 20 percent of U.S. citizens have passports; half of Americans don't know how many senators each state has; half can't name their congressman; only 40 percent can name all three branches of government; only 34 percent know that congress declares war; and 49 percent believe the president can suspend the constitution.

During the McCarthy hearings in 1952, only 19 percent of the population knew what the Foreign Service did. In 1986, only 30 percent of the population knew *Roe v. Wade* had to do with abortion. It goes on.

The effect of all this information could mean a few

(the public believes more people working is good), and pessimistic bias (the public believes the economy is worse than it is). Antimarket bias is a core part of his critique and philosophy, though. At the end of his book, Caplan returns to it as he proposes that free-market economics be taught in schools. "People do not understand the 'invisible hand' of the market, its ability to harmonize private greed and the public interest," he writes. He believes the public doubts the ability for "profit-seeking business" to generate positive social effects. "They focus on the motives of business," he writes, "and neglect the discipline imposed by competition." Instead, voters should understand the benefits of comparative advantage, the danger of price controls, and the "long-run" benefits of labor-saving innovation. Indeed, Caplan prefers voters understand that jobs go overseas because "there are more remunerative ways to use domestic labor." He doesn't specify them, unfortunately.

It's almost too easy to point toward the current economic crisis as a response to Caplan's own "pro-market bias." First, his old reference to the "invisible hand" refers to competition and greed among individuals. It does not refer to the combined, abstracted greed that powers a hundred-billion dollar company like, say, AIG or Lehman Brothers. Imagine that one of the figures the invisible hand tries to regulate is a single-income, black-female household in Cleveland. The other figure is a gigantic insurance company with thousands of employees all coordinating their activities to exercise the most exacting, overly clever, and seemingly sophisticated set of policies ever imagined to produce wealth. The invisible hand can probably nudge the grandmother fairly easily with a sub-prime contract: follow your greed and get this house re-financed. But the same invisible hand would probably



things. First, it appears that a majority of citizens have been ignorant of political events *and* the political process for a long time. Second, this knowledge implies that the education system is seriously flawed. Or, finally, it may be that people do, in fact, *choose* to vote based on emotions rather than reason. Since Caplan is an economist, he cares most of all about voters' ignorance of economics. If they could purge their basic biases about economic behavior, the political process would work better. This would happen because politicians could finally start implementing policies they know work for the long term, instead of trying to satisfy voter feelings about, say, jobs going overseas.

Voter sensitivity to protecting jobs is what Caplan calls antimarket bias. He also faults antiforeign bias (the public is scared of foreigners), make-work bias

get its fingers broken trying to stop AIG. What Caplan doesn't account for is that gigantic corporations, like monopolies or trusts, are not equal to an individual. They have more power, more authority, more choices, more information, and thus their unchecked greed can do more damage. It's not proportional. So when he criticizes voters who elect representatives that can express their antimarket bias, he neglects considering the way it might "balance" the greed he finds so productive.

Caplan might remember, too, the decline of union power during the neo-liberal era. If laid off workers can no longer organize, isn't it logical to assume they might elect protectionists to office during times of economic crisis? In other words, they're choosing to be "irrational" economists because they're actually ra-

tional workers and consumers. Just because the milk and toys can be made cheaper in China, that doesn't mean the labor-saving "innovation" of cheap Chinese labor is preferable. The milk and toys could have been made safer in the United States. Furthermore, without a social safety net voters anxious about jobs will never quit worrying about their next paycheck. So it's no use telling them to worry about the benefits of free trade *years down the road*. If economists want more free-trade, they might ironically find it works better in a socialist state with more unemployment benefits, education, and health-care. Higher taxes for these benefits might translate into less anxiety about free-trade.

Less anxiety over these benefits might also lessen another of Caplan's worries. He believes that voters are irrationally afraid of foreigners because they take jobs here and abroad. He desires they instead consider that "total output increases" when different places in the world concentrate on what they do best. "Imagine how much time it would take to grow your own food?" he asks. He rapturously cites the "The Law of Comparative Advantage," which "shows that mutually beneficial trade is possible in every way." As an example, Caplan offers a scenario where Americans should make cars and Mexicans should make wheat. Specialization increases production if each country focuses on producing what it does well. So when American wheat jobs go to Mexico, that's a good thing.

But voters, Caplan says, often see lost jobs, lost wages, and wasted public services (think of those who argue against allowing illegal immigrants access to hospitals). I would again refer Caplan to reconsider the negative value attached to higher taxes in a socialist state. It would be harder for voters to resent the possibility of homelessness, unemployment, and getting sick if they understood their job loss didn't translate into losing their lives. It's hard to reconcile free-trade and pro-market policies with lower taxes and cuts in "liberal" social programs: ironically, it seems necessary to have more socialism if one wants to have more free-trade. This seems true unless one desires a standing reserve of poor, desperate, under-employed, sick, poorly housed, and angry people waiting around for the next job boom. These folks might, however, be the ones angry enough to fight wars.

If we know anything about American history, it's that the anger of humiliated people can turn ugly fast. There is a vague sense of this for Caplan. He ties anti-foreign bias to sentiments about foreigners who "look like us" and those that don't (note the "us"). He then cites 1980s surveys that show the United States preferred Canada and England to Japan during a period of anti-Japan hysteria, even when trade deficits with Canada and England were higher at the time.

In *Just How Stupid Are We?* Shenkman notes that voter stupidity and angry racism move together. Furthermore, politicians exploit it. "Bush's assertion after the 9/11 attack that our enemies hated us because we are free was mindless," Shenkman asserts, "but people believed it. His claim that oil had nothing to do with our invasion of Iraq was downright comical—but a majority of people believed it." The public also believed in the link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11. And the public that believed this attached their anger to human bodies, not abstract policies. Shenkman recalls that the first turning in public opinion against Bush happened because of the Dubai port "scandal," when an American port would have been leased to an Arab government. People didn't trust Arabs. People aren't outraged by hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian casualties, either. In his recent endorsement of Obama, Colin Powell cited the infamous video of the woman at the McCain rally wondering if Obama was Arab. It was a dangerous signal from Caplan's "us" more than four years after Abu Ghraib.

Both Shenkman and Caplan also agree that voters rely less on information and reason and more on passion and myth. "Like the adherents of traditional religion," Caplan writes, "many people find comfort in their political worldview, and greet questions with pious hostility." Shenkman traces the history of mass political participation with an eye toward these de-

velopments. When the "masses" got the vote in the 19th century, politicians had to dumb-down their tactics. They began using "fake imagery, slogans, songs, torchlight parades, and bombastic rhetoric." Men were elected and came to power "on the back of a simplistic phrase designed to generate an emotional charge from the masses." This is the connection between the real evangelicals who supported Bush and the "secular" evangelism of those who believe in Obama. Politics and religion trade on the fears of those that wish to be saved. Both Karl Rove and David Axelrod understand the need to create an emotional bond with people using a new public myth as a vehicle to power.

For Shenkman, the "limited capacity" of the general public has become so toxic because it has become a taboo subject. This limited capacity—this ignorance—might mean something different in light of Caplan's thesis about how voters choose to be irrational. It suggests that the stupidity of racism might sometimes be indistinguishable from real stupidity. Shenkman believes the issue could be confronted by questioning the intelligence of the population. He suggests a sustained, popular critique of the entire sacred mythology surrounding the Constitution's notion of "the people." This critique is acceptable in private conversation, but not in public debate or in the media. It's certainly not going to appear as a question in a debate, or in a post-debate wrap-up. The question about the people is always going to be: what do they think? But the question can never be: how intelligent are those that think it—and maybe even how racist? The fallacy of "our civic religion" is to treat all voters' opinions as equal. The reason the Constitution removes so much power from the people, Shenkman argues, is because the framers didn't trust the people to make good decisions—they relied too much on their crazy emotions.

For Shenkman, the biggest myth broken in modern times was liberalism. The shocking right-wing rise of an evangelical Moral Majority and neo-liberal economic platform has angered liberals in the past three decades, and acutely so during the Bush term. What these movements displaced, however, was a progressive belief in a rights-based US society. Thus, the shock was about the conservative "reaction" to the Civil Rights Movement, "which laid bare the racist beliefs of thunderous majorities of white Southerners" (glancing at recent news reports, Ohio and Pennsylvania would have to count here as Southern, too). Furthermore, "one obvious factor in liberal decline was their embrace of the Civil Rights Movement and the women's movement." In other words, a string of neo-conservative and neo-liberal governments replaced a couple decades of Civil Rights administrations that acknowledged—and tried to address—the grave historical "inequality" of slavery and its legacies. Instead, the neo-liberal, neo-con era decided to instead focus on how to maintain wealth at the individual level. Instead of introducing policies that might correct the genocidal facts of American race relations, government instead imagined a world of free individuals and perfect markets. In a sense, this ideology was an attempt to erase history.

The language of neoconservatism and neo-liberalism is fascinating because of what it does not assume. Caplan's book on economics doesn't have the word "race" in the index, which isn't to say he's at fault. By contrast, however, what Shenkman exposes here is that the pro-America and pro-patriot feelings of the Republican Party derive some of their power from different degrees of white racism and feelings of white superiority. Obama's candidacy has forced journalists and citizens to rediscover this passionate emotion, founded on a myth of white America, that some felt was safely buried in the past. Lurking behind stories of Sean Bell, Rodney King, and Amadou Diallo, it has re-emerged hot and angry at McCain-Palin rallies. Nixon's "silent majority" have found their voice again.

When pundits talk about the confusion of the Republican Party and the fracturing of its Reagan coalition among defense-hawks, the rich, and evangelicals,

they should begin honestly assessing another crack among the white base: do they hate Arabs or blacks? Their conflation of Obama as a Muslim *and an Arab* and a terrorist seems to clearly indicate this confusion. This might end up being another of Bush's unwelcome legacies for the Republican Party. Too much of the base seems to understand the war on terror as a conflict that resembles a clash of civilizations between Christians and Muslims. By doing this, Bush has tenuously shifted the zeal of white American racists away from their long support of the institutionalized persecution of African-Americans, onto the backs of Muslim Americans. When he over-sold the myth of the terrorist as an Islamic extremist, he neglected to stoke the old code-words involving race. These are the words the McCain campaign invokes when it uses phrases like "the real America" in Virginia, an echo of former GOP candidate George Allen's rant in which he uses the word "macaca." The problem now for the Republican party is that Bush might have confused moderately racist Republicans enough that, after eight years, they don't know who to hate.

In his study *Red State Blue State Rich State Poor State*, Columbia statistics professor Andrew Gelman surveys how the intense electoral divisions in the 2000 and 2004 elections corroborates the way race and religion worked together among lower-income voters when they voted Republican. It's not what you would expect: his findings dispel some of the easier assumptions of those elections, and how poor whites vote. First, he found that in blue states the rich disproportionately support Democrats, although nationally the rich overwhelmingly support Republicans. Although the rich are slightly more socially liberal than the poor, they basically vote for their own economic interests (even in blue states). Conversely, most poor people in red states vote Democrat. Indeed, a strong majority of the poor voting along class lines in the red states are black. In the red states that vote Republican, income is a very strong predictor of voter choice. That is, the more wealthy a red state voter, the more likely they'll vote Republican. Gelman argues that wealth matters more in red states; they essentially vote along class lines.

Perhaps surprisingly, religion and social issues are *more* important for rich voters than poor voters: "It is richer Americans in richer parts of the country, more than the poor and rural, who are voting based on 'Gods, guns, and gays.'" After the last few weeks, can't we add African-Americans back to this list? Gelman uses the statistical language of trends between the polar opposites of rich and poor, but it's worth considering whether the social issues voters use to vote Republican reveal a gray zone of the Republican middle class. This middle class is living in the suburbs of America's racist heartland: the South and the Midwest (Pennsylvania to Kansas). It's not a stretch to imagine that significant white Republican swing-voters in the suburbs are basing their decisions, in part, upon race.

After all, even when accounting for their recent diversification, the suburbs remain especially segregated in the south and more so in the Midwest. Many Americans live in *de facto* apartheid neighborhoods—the legacy of white flight, which was the legacy of Jim Crow segregation, which was the legacy of slavery. If race is the reality of how class is lived, as Stuart Hall has argued similarly elsewhere, then suggesting red states vote along class lines is also to suggest red states also vote along racial lines, at least in part. There has always been that fourth, unnamed party of white supremacists among the Reagan coalition, and among the American population.

If voters are stupid and ignorant, perhaps the question to ask is not: how do we educate them, or, how do politicians exploit their stupidity? Perhaps the questions to ask are not about democracy in general, but about the United States. How much longer can the quiet, racist passions of the suburbs determine elections? How long will they vote based on the myth of a white America? And how do you change the emotions of racism? How will they stop believing a myth when the myth is their nation? ☹

In the Custody of Love

CLAY MATLAN

► *Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton.* At The New Museum (through January 11).

One must be careful with how one approaches the work of Elizabeth Peyton. It is too easy to dismiss her, to fault her for her own seemingly bottomless devotion to the seductions of youth and beauty as Sarah Valdez did in her review of Peyton's 2001 show at Gavin Brown. In that review Valdez wrote that Peyton was "achingly vacant" and that her paintings hung "around like so many posters of celebrities on a pining teenager's bedroom wall." Her wispy, dreamy figures do recall the analogy that Valdez made: their fashion school-like illustrative qualities lend them an inherent weightlessness that seems the stuff of wistful infatuation. And yes, it's true that Peyton loves her subjects. She admitted as much in a recent *New Yorker* profile by Calvin Tomkins, when she remarked: "I really love the people I paint. I believe in them, I'm happy they're in the world." Her enthusiasm for those she paints is apparent, and at the risk of being sentimental, this enthusiasm is not a negative. If anything it is refreshing in an art world that has not only taken to viewing any sort of unironic enthusiasm as dubious, but seems to believe that aggressive disinterest is somehow an aesthetic stance that equates belligerence with intelligence. Peyton's love, though, is also distracting. It detracts from her paintings, taking them out of the realm of painting and transforming them into devotional objects. Her gaze often feels clouded by her worshipful relation to those she paints.

However, it is also too easy to buy into Peyton, as so many do. The accessibility of her emotions is a boon for viewers who want to have artistic intent cleanly laid out before them. It is a disservice to Peyton that these same people are only interested in her candy veneer and not in the depth that lies within her work. They only see, as Jerry Saltz wrote, "dazzling portraits of radiant youth." Saltz is right, her paintings do have a dazzling quality to them, a dazzle that is bound in her sense of color, which is not only bold but has a depth of understanding about who her subjects are. Her fascination with youth is what should make Peyton problematic, not her love for the people she paints. If anything, Peyton's easy relationship with the concept of love should be commended. It lends her an emotional availability and vulnerability that positions her as someone the viewer can feel sympathetic towards. She is distinctly different from her contemporary John Currin, who, up until his strangely intimate November 2006 show at Gagosian, displays an often bitter and detached vision of women that comes dangerously close to outright misogyny. Currin paints with a hunger for his subjects that is off-putting, as if he seeks to re-imagine women so that they might fit his own desires, while Peyton's hunger is perhaps best characterized as one that seeks to reach out and touch; to feel connected with those she paints. It is this longing which envelops her work and opens it to attack.

I cannot help but be reminded of Hart Crane's poem "Hieroglyphic" when I think of Peyton: "Did one look

at what one saw / Or did one see what one looked at?" Peyton can be accused of answering both questions. If we consider the first part of the poem—the question of looking versus seeing—the answer is apparent. No, Peyton did not look at what she saw. Instead she saw something in her subjects that negated her need to look at them. She saw the magic of youth and her own unbiased affection, but she did not look at them as human beings, because to do that would have necessitated painting them as that. Peyton transforms her muses, making them softer, more feminine, and in the process negates them as living things. At the risk of being glib, they become something else. Peyton succeeds in othering her subjects from themselves, of choosing to see in them a beauty that is available to no one but her. *Nick (La Luncheonette 2002)*, is a profile view of a young man with delicate features. His skin

self of the responsibility of either looking or seeing. Thus she sees but does not look at her subjects while at the same time she looks at her subjects but does not see them. Her devotion obscures the faculties of her sight. And as a result of this the paintings become about the life of her own imagination, the way those she loves might be presented. To put it another way she paints the emotional sensation of her own love. Her paintings of Kurt Cobain and Liam Gallagher, the lead singer of Oasis, present them as peaceful, willowy things, two notions of them that do not come to mind when one looks at the men or listens to their music. But in Peyton's world there is a calmness that surrounds everything. Her paintings extinguish the fires that burn inside.

However, this calming, and ultimately this longing, because what Peyton is really painting is her



Elizabeth Peyton, *Piotr on Couch*, 1996 (detail)

is painted a mix of purple and white. He has a thick mass of black hair that blends with his body. Behind him is what looks to be a street painted in the same muted yet vibrant palette. It is a beautiful piece and a testament to Peyton's skill with color that it does not feel outlandish and alien, but it resides more in the world of fantasy than in reality. The painting, like so much of her work is the manifestation of her dream for this world.

Peyton paints with an intuitive feeling, choosing not to capture her subjects the way they are, but how she sees them to be. To lift a line from the *Importance of Being Earnest*, Peyton doesn't paint with accuracy, she paints with wonderful expression. And it is her wonderful expression that makes her work so compelling and also so aggravating. That she has no ability to stand at remove from those she paints positions her as being guilty of fawning over her subjects. Consequently Peyton answers the second question in Crane's poem and the answer is also no, she did not see what she looked at. It may seem that this divergence between looking and seeing is paradoxical, but that is both to misunderstand the poem and discount the scope of Peyton's vision. By committing to her own aesthetic agenda Peyton absolves her-

own longing, are where the work becomes problematic and difficult. In succumbing to her own desire the work loses rigor and reverts to the status of the dreamy sketchbook. There is no question that there is something bold and interesting in a woman painter choosing to portray men in a lithesome, feminized way. In fact, were John Berger to revise *Ways of Seeing* he would do well to mention Peyton in his chapter on the use of women in European oil painting, as Peyton manages to offer and imbue an odd even awkward femininity to those she paints. But as interesting as it is, this action, whether conscious or not, ultimately feels like a lack of rigor, as if she couldn't be bothered to attempt an unstylized rendering. Regardless of the fact that the people she paints are famous, an argument against her that has always been hollow and a little lacking in rigor itself, her paintings falter because of her own longing. So intent is Peyton on translating her love to that powerful rectangle that she gets lost in the magic of the experience of art making. She paints with so much fondness for her subjects that she paints them out of existence. Peyton has said that she is overwhelmed with the passing of time and this is evident in her paintings. She seeks to

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A Screaming Comes Across The Sky

MARK SCHIEBE

► *Doctor Atomic* at the Met

The idea to do an opera about the atomic bomb was the brainchild of Pamela Rosenberg, who in 2002 was the politically-minded director of the San Francisco Opera. The genesis of the bomb's music, however, came much earlier, in a childhood experience of John Adams: "I do remember as a kid—I don't know how old I was, maybe seven or eight years old—living in the most secure, Stephen Spielbergesque, idyllic village in New Hampshire... getting into bed one night, and my mother gave me a

kiss and turned out the light. I heard a jet plane way, way high up in the sky, and I went into a panic, because I wondered if that was the Russians coming to bomb us." Adams's experience, the vague but numbing fear of nuclear annihilation, was the experience of the entire baby-boomer generation, who grew up during a cold war and an era of widespread paranoia, symbolized most poignantly by 'the bomb' itself, whose invisible waves of radiation threatened skin and sanity alike. As Norman Mailer has put it in his 1957 essay "The White Negro," the bomb ushered in a new phase in the history of human consciousness; a kind of psychic fracturing occurred where normal Americans would go about their everyday lives of getting and spending, all the while aware, on another level, of the possibility of the instant, impersonal, absolute extinction of the race. Such bone-chilling thoughts provide the psychic materials for Adams's bracing score in *Doctor Atomic*, which



opened at the Metropolitan Opera House on October 12, and runs through November 13.

The opera is Adams's third, and continues the composer's commitment to giving operatic treatment to controversial social and political issues that have deep significance in the collective American psyche. 1987's *Nixon in China* (the title pretty much sums up the plot) was the beginning of a collaboration between Adams and the adventurous director Peter Sellers. 1991's *The Death of Klinghoffer*, which stages the hijacking of the passenger liner *Achille Lauro* by the Palestinian Liberation front, brought heavy criticism including charges of "romanticizing terrorists," which drove Adams away from the medium for over a decade. *Doctor Atomic*, the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the making of the first atomic weapon, is perhaps a less politically charged topic, though certainly no less psychologically unnerving. While it was first staged by Sellers in San Francisco in 2005, the Met's version features an entirely new stage design by Penny Woolcock, a British television director whose film version of *Klinghoffer* helped mitigate some of the earlier criticism of the opera. Woolcock's vision of the stage is stripped down, as she eliminated Sellers's chaotic, electron-like dancers. In fact, there is relatively little movement on stage, the visual dynamism coming more from electronic gimmicks like the digital projections of mathematical equations and Japanese bombing targets grafted onto the oversize windows of the Oppenheims' bedroom. The overworked, strung-out physicists even nap at one point.

The story spans the tension-filled two weeks in the summer of 1945 before the first testing of the weapon, scheduled for July 16 in Los Alamos, New Mexico, the site Oppenheimer would name "Trinity" in

a deeply personal nod to John Donne's Holy Sonnet "Batter my heart, three-person'd God." Here Donne's famous poem serves as the text of Oppenheimer's aria, which ends the opening Act. The line "bend / your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new" is addressed not to God, but to the bomb, which hovers menacingly over the stage, suspended by wires. Not surprisingly, the focal point of the entire opera is the soul of the enigmatic director of the Manhattan Project, who was a brilliant physicist with the heart of a poet, and whose struggle is here projected in Faust-like magnitude.

Act I opens near the testing sight in New Mexico with Oppenheimer (played by Gerald Finley) and fellow physicists Edward Teller (Richard Paul Fink) and Robert Wilson (Thomas Glenn) arguing the merits of deploying the weapon in Japan at a time when the war in Europe was winding down. Sellers's libretto, perhaps the most experimental element in the opera, is a collage of pre-existing texts, a heady mixture of the prosaic and the sublime: declassified military documents, transcripts of meetings, interviews with participants in the project, standard histories, and poetry. The effect rendered is an odd mixture of gritty realism and surreality. When the idealistic Teller laments that Americans will lose their souls if they release the deadly weapon, the mercurial Oppenheimer responds by quoting Baudelaire: "The soul is a thing so impalpable, so often useless, and sometimes so embarrassing that at this loss I felt only a little more emotion than if, during a walk, I had lost my visiting card." The three principals go back and forth in heated debate until the matter is decided.

Scene two takes place in the bedroom of Oppenheimer's house in Los Alamos, late in the night, where

Oppenheimer tries to calm his wife Kitty (played by Sasha Cooke), who tries and fails to sustain her husband's attention. The two briefly connect through poetry: Kitty sings Muriel Rukeyser's "Three sides of a coin" and Oppenheimer again responds with Baudelaire. In these tense times, the emotional heights of poetry are the plane on which husband and wife can briefly meet. After an argument, Oppenheimer leaves and Kitty is left alone to contemplate the uncertain future. In the first act's final scene, the eve of the testing date, the weather turns ugly at Trinity, and the barrel-chested military supervisor of the project, General Leslie Groves (Eric Owens), stampedes around the stage, frustrated by a meteorologist's predictions of continued storming. Oppenheimer warns of the possible dangers of testing in storm conditions, and then, in an attempt at comic relief that he can't quite carry off, teases the General about his weight. Groves leaves, and in what is certainly the emotional climax of the opera, we find Oppenheimer alone with his creation, singing Donne's sonnet. The Act ends with what is perhaps the opera's most effective tableaux: the bomb is lowered into view and hangs suspended in air, a pool of yellow light on its upper left corner, and as we gaze at the illuminated sphere we perceive the linkages between the spherical weapon, the physicist's brain, and the earth itself. A moment of reflection ensues: is this the end of the road for technological man? The curtain falls.

Act Two opens with a rumbling electronic white noise created by blending numerous radio frequencies, a static froth and aural analogue of the nuclear radiation shortly to be released into the desert air. Adams's score deftly interweaves "found" radio sounds and various types of musique concrete with traditional orchestral sounds. His palate in *Doctor Atomic* is particularly rich, emphasizing how far he has come from his minimalist work in the 1970 and early 1980's, and even from *Nixon in China*, which featured live stage voices imitating the sound of tape loops. Minimalist repetition still plays an important role, but Adams draws from a far larger array of symphonic styles, incorporating molten Wagnerian brass, lush French impressionistic harmonies, and (what Peter Sellers dubs) "Stravinsky emergency music," which Adams employs as a leitmotif.

Two hundred miles from the test site, the Oppenheimer's Indian maid Pasqualita (played by Meredith Arwady) croons a lullaby to their child: "In the north the cloud-flower blossoms/ And now the lightning flashes, / And now the thunder clashes, / And now the rain comes down!" The baby sleeps but the storm rages deep into the night and Adams's music rides along in its electricity. The radio rumblings gain in prominence and compete throughout with the "Stravinsky emergency music," the French horns and trumpets, the oboes buzzing pedal tones below, strings swirling wind spirals above. The General Leslie Groves has disregarded all warnings about the storm, and the test shot is scheduled for 5:30 am.

From this point on, time itself seems to warp. Narrative fizzles and we the audience wait with the scientists and the generals, the Indians and the children. There is nothing, really, left to do. In a brilliant move, Adams emphasizes the deathly slow pace of the final day with a choice bit of minimalism, introducing an array of clocks which tick away underneath the orchestra, looping in an out of sync—not one countdown but many... an infinity of countdowns. The physicists, in a touch of black humor, make predictions about the size of the explosion: how far will the heat travel? Will the radiation reach their families? Will the earth's atmosphere catch fire and the planet burn? Suddenly the night sky is filled with a vision of Vishnu, as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The chorus chants in slow crescendo: "At the site of this / Your shape stupendous / full of mouths and eyes / terrible with fangs / when I see you Vishnu / with your mouths agape and flame-eyes staring / all my peace is gone / and my heart is troubled." The physicists and military personnel lie in rows of ditches as the warning shots are fired... It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now. ☉

Puppets! Puppets! Puppets!

FRANK EPISLE

- Tom Lee's *Ko'olau*. Puppets and direction by Tom Lee. At La Mama Experimental Theatre (closed).
- Drama of Works's 7th annual *Carnival of Samhain*. At HERE Arts Center through Nov. 8.

While puppet theatre probably makes up less than ten percent of the theatre I see, it makes up a much higher percentage of the memorable theatre I see. Year after year, production after production, the “object theatre” community astonishes me with their extraordinary ingenuity, craftsmanship, and infectious joy in their medium. Despite bouts of enthusiastic cheerleading from myself and other small-time reviewers, though, the audience for this work remains small. Even as puppets make their way into more and more mainstream events, from Broadway shows to the Metropolitan Opera house, shows performed primarily by puppets have remained marginal even within the already marginal downtown theatre scene. It sometimes feels as if the field of puppet practitioners is growing at a rate much faster than puppet audiences.

There are a number of reasons for this, some of which I have written about elsewhere. Just as comic books have struggled for a perceived “legitimacy” in literary and visual arts circles, puppets are often seen as a subset of children’s theatre, and children’s theatre is often seen as an aesthetically uninteresting training ground for audiences. This work is more likely to be studied for its pedagogical potential than for its politics, its narrative strategies, or its aesthetic value. Exacerbating this bias is the fact that so many puppet shows play extremely short runs, even by the standards of off-off-Broadway. Because most reviews are written for potential audiences of shows that are still running, reviews of such short-lived productions are hard to come by.

This month, then, I will write about one show that has already closed (Tom Lee’s *Ko'olau*) and, more briefly, one that has not yet opened but will be closed shortly after this issue of the *Advocate* goes to press (Drama of Works’s 7th annual *Carnival of Samhain*).

The story of Kalua’iko’olau, a nineteenth-century Hawaiian man who died of leprosy (Hansen’s disease), is a very sad tale indeed. In Tom Lee’s *Ko'olau*, it is a very sad tale told with a great deal of joy and ingenuity. It is also a powerful refutation of the notion that revealing the mechanisms of theatre compromises theatre’s capacity for emotional impact.

In 1892, Ko’olau moved—with his wife Pi’ilani and their son Kaleimanu—to Kalalau, a remote area of Kaua’i in order to avoid being moved to a leper colony by the Provisional Government (the Republic of Hawai’i had not yet been formed, but Queen Lili’uokalani had already been overthrown by plantation owners, with the aid of the United States). When a local sheriff attempted to capture him, Ko’olau killed both the sheriff and the two Provisional Government soldiers who accompanied him. After first Kaleimanu and then Ko’olau died of Hansen’s, Pi’ilani quietly buried them both and the returned to her family home.

From here, the story might have faded into obscurity like so many other anonymous tragedies of the time. What rescued Ko’olau and his family from being just a footnote in the history of the Provisional Government was that Pi’ilani worked with journalist John Sheldon to record her story in Hawaiian. Because so few surviving texts document this period from a Hawaiian perspective, the resulting volume has become a key historical document, and has captured the imaginations of writers, painters, theater artists, and filmmakers. Most famously, Jack London’s *Koolau the Leper* and W.S. Merwin’s *The Folding Cliffs* tell two very different versions of the narrative.

Tom Lee’s puppet theatrical *Ko'olau* is a beautifully crafted, highly emotional iteration of the story that

draws on a variety of puppetry and musical traditions; Lee focuses less on violence and disease than on the bond that holds this family together as they fight to live and die together, on their own terms. The puppetry techniques employed are divided into two spaces. The foregrounded characters, Ko’olau and his family, are represented by a variation on Japanese *kuruma ningyo* (cart puppets), a kissing cousin to *bunraku* puppets. Puppeteers sit on wheeled carts, the puppets’ feet resting on the feet of the puppeteers; when the performers move the cart around on stage by moving their feet, the feet of the puppets seem to be walking. While *kuruma* puppets are often elaborately painted and costumed, Lee has simplified the aesthetic of his characters with a rough-hewn style he says is intended to evoke the woodcuts and other crafts of Hawaii.

While the *kuruma*-based Ko’olau family occupies the foreground, the background is dominated by a large screen, onto which layers of shadow, light, and video are projected. As with the cart puppets, Lee has designed the shadows and projections to reflect the hand-carved elegance of Hawaiian prints. Unlike the cart puppets, the shadows and projections are not built on any particular tradition but are an amalgamation of techniques familiar to anyone who frequents contemporary New York City puppet performances. Even in the company of their accomplished peers, however, Tom Lee and his team are exceptionally inventive in their deployment of these techniques. Anyone who thinks of overhead projectors as good for nothing more than excruciating presentations from middle school science teachers has clearly not seen *Ko'olau*.

Indeed, much of the thrill of this performance, as with many puppet pieces, is that the mechanics of production are very much in view. The bodies and faces of the on-stage puppeteers, and the ways in which they manipulate their puppets are a part of why the *kuruma ningyo* are so fascinating to watch. Similarly, projections and shadows are primarily operated, in full view of the audience, by Lee himself and by his lighting designer, Miranda Hardy. The pair hunch over their projectors with transparencies, hand puppets, a glass of water, and a variety of other objects that result in an astonishing array of layered effects. On the screen, clouds float by, letters are written, villains raise their guns, and a young Maui casts his fishing line into the sea to raise a series of new islands. Against this larger-than-life backdrop, the small, very human story of Ko’olau and his family unfolds.

With little-to-no dialogue, *Ko'olau*’s aural elements come primarily from live musicians who line either side of small auditorium. As with the puppets, the instruments draw from a mélange of world-music traditions, mostly Asian, with a particular emphasis on Japanese sounds and the occasional nod to the music of Hawaii. Lee, like many of his contemporaries, borrows so gleefully and unapologetically from his contemporaries that he inevitably opens himself up to accusation of cultural appropriation. The subject of Hawaii, however, inoculates him from such charges


to some extent; there is no ethnic majority in Hawaii, and while *Ko'olau*’s 19th-century islands were not quite the islands we know today, they were already a place where cultural influences from Japan, Portugal, and many other nations held sway.

There has long been a thread of theatre theory that claims theatricality must be as invisible as possible if the audience is to become emotionally involved with the narrative on stage. This idea has been perpetuated, in part, by misreadings of Brecht’s writings, and by simplistic statements like “Wagner turned the house lights off; Brecht turned them back on.” It is not my intention to enter into such debates here, but it is sufficient to say that the same audiences who smiled



Tom Lee's *Ko'olau*

delightedly at Lee’s ingenuous craftsmanship could be heard sniffing back tears at the death of Kaleimanu.

One of my favorite puppet theatre companies, Drama of Works, have made a name for themselves both as creators of their own work and as curators and supporters of the work of others. The company’s Artistic Director, Gretchen Van Lente, produces the sometimes-monthly “Punch” puppet jams and, once a year, right around Halloween, puts together an even she calls the *Carnival of Samhain*. This year’s *Carnival* runs for only three days (November 6th through November 8th), and misses the more spine-tingling potential of both October 31st and November 4th, but promises to be an exciting event nevertheless. An eclectic mix of puppet and burlesque acts that run the gamut from the genuinely creepy to the semi-sexy gothic farce, the *Carnival of Samhain* may well be the best way to dispose of \$15 in early November. 

Ko'olau (closed). Puppets and direction by Tom Lee. Music by Yukio Tsuji and Bill Ruyle. Lighting by Miranda Hardy. Costumes by Kanako Hiyama. Additional projection design by Caren Loebel-Fried. Assistant director Nao Otaka. Company: Matthew Acheson, Marina Celander, Frankie Cordero, Miranda Hardy, Yoko Myoi, Nao Otaka, Tom Lee. Understudies: Takemi Kitamura, Kiku Sakai. This production opened on September 18th, 2008 at La Mama Experimental Theatre (74A East 4th Street, NYC) and closed on October 5th. Additional information is available at www.tomleeprojects.com and www.lamama.org

The 7th Annual Carnival of Samhain. Curated and presented by Drama of Works. Featuring Puppet State Players (“Mothra Memorial Junior High”), Drama of Works (Poe’s “The Black Cat”), Z. Lindsey Briggs, Evolve Company (“Becoming”), Marta Mozelle MacRostle, Chiara Ambrosio, Pinchbottom Burlesque (“The Mummies Curves”), Nasty Canasta, Jonny Porkpie, Amy Chen, Will Randall, Puppet Junction, and Bone Daddy. Thursday, November 6th through Saturday, November 8th, 2008 at 7pm. HERE Arts Center (145 6th Ave, NYC). Tickets: \$15. Running time: Approximately 90 minutes. Additional information available at www.dramaofworks.com and www.here.org

The 2008 Election and the Media

TIM KRAUSE

Discussions about politics and the media are nothing new, but the 2008 Presidential Election is remarkable for having featured, in its sheer scope and intensity, the awesome power of the new media. From the campaigns to their supporters, from partisans to unaffiliated voters, something like a systematic integration of politics with daily life has been attempted, and in some part achieved, as the election plays itself out along the full spectrum of twenty-first-century technology. Like Governor Howard Dean's fifty-state strategy, everything is now in play, from traditional news sources like newspapers and television to cellphones, social networking sites, blogs, even video games. It is perhaps the first fully postmodern election, with its interlocking media narratives resembling the giddier moments of critical theory—Debord's society of the spectacle, say, or Baudrillard's endlessly repeating simulacra—in their depictions of human society awash in a plethora of competing signs and images. Where the election has outdone even these fantasies—indeed, where it's been most paradigm-breaking and historical—has been in the amount of bottom-up, user-generated content that's been part of the chaos, from lengthy action and advocacy diaries on political blogs to entire genres of satiric videos on YouTube: an explosion of politically-themed writings and folk art that rivals any among America's golden ages of political art, the Revolution, the Civil War, and the two World Wars. The following will be a brief reaction, both favorable and non-, both amazed and aghast, at some of the strange and wonderful things—from the candidates themselves to some pretty crazy videos on the Internet—I've seen during the 2008 election.

The very speed of events in this election is itself a marvel. We've had the twenty-four-hour news cycle for at least fifteen years, but rarely before have political events crowded so thick and fast into the months, weeks, and days. Indeed, the news has been so frenetic that the vividness and immediacy of each moment, each image, each gaffe and attack, has vaporized each meme of the moment before in the white-hot forge of the perpetual campaign. The last time I wrote for the *Advocate*, the news of John McCain's multiple homes had just broken—this happened on August 21, a little over two months ago, but this is as far off from the present moment in campaign time as the mythic events of prehistory are from the modern day. Just in the last week, a flood of bad news has hit the foundering McCain campaign, from increasing reports of knives-out infighting among his handlers and staff to the bizarre story of Ashley Todd, who secured her own tawdry bit of Campaign 2008 lore, and a sad, Gibbonian footnote in the history books as well, with her made-up story of being beaten by a six-foot-four black male (that boogeyman in Karl Rove's and other American racists' closets), who allegedly carved a backwards letter "B" on her face as a grisly token of Barack Obama's name. (She confessed on October 24 to having lied, the bloody B an act of self-mutilation that was more scratch than wound, yet red enough to brand Todd with infamy in the deathless digital archive of the Internet.) Even the most standout moments of the campaign—Obama's speech at Denver's Mile High Stadium, a jubilant end to a meticulously choreographed convention;

or Sarah Palin's acceptance speech at the Republican convention in Saint Paul, the Alaskan governor riding high on a wave of nativist anger and America-first bigotry; or the continual revelation of the Presidential debates, which played out as studies in affect and attitude, Obama's limpid focus and delivery contrasting sharply with McCain's catalog of verbal and physical tics ("My friends," his eyerolling and grimacing)—have been lost in the onrush of new narratives, new media for consumption.

As both a candidate and as a media figure, Obama has benefited hugely from the new media dynamics at play in American politics. These dynamics are crystallized in many of the things the Obama campaign has done so repeatedly and dazzlingly well during the election. The utilization of political websites and other Internet resources for political networking, advocacy, and fundraising; the creation of a vast campaign organization relying hugely on volunteerism and new technologies; an intuitive grasp, even, of the look of new media, as with the campaign's sleek, hypermodern website, which borrows heavily on the Apple Computer aesthetic (rounded icons in smoothly blended colors, a confection of links and nested widgets): all demonstrate a saturation of all media, everywhere, with Obama's electrifying brand. Obama's own telegenic charisma, his trademark skinniness

who expressed herself in vapid platitudes that were right at home among broad swaths of angry, confused voters. Palin, I think, is best seen as a hack, not in the sense of a "hack politician"—although she fulfills this role with gusto, You betcha! and she's hackneyed to boot—but in the sense of a computer or tech hack: an unexpected trick of engineering or play that scrambles a program's or tool's wonted, designed-for specifications, opening up new, potentially useful and interesting, applications. Bizarre (if not treasonous) from the perspective of governance, McCain's choice of Palin makes perfect sense as a fiendishly inspired reverse engineering of Obama's media success, a desperate attempt—in the operational vacuum formed by McCain's lack of either a consistent message or a well-organized, smoothly running campaign—to halt Obama's groundswell of support at the end of the summer. That, like many hacks, Palin's disadvantages have, in the scarce two or so months she's graced the national stage, far outweighed her dubious advantages, has for many only increased her media appeal: in the campaign's last week, vowing to "go rogue" and ignore the advice of McCain staffers, Palin reads to me like one of the doomed Nazi wives in Hitler's Berlin bunker—Magda Goebbels, say, who poisoned her children rather than have them survive the death of the twisted dream that was the Third Reich—who



A scene from "Wassup 2008," produced by 60 Frames.

and jug ears and wide smile, are candy to television and YouTube: think of all of the spots, all of the campaign ads and photographs that feature Obama's face, as so many force multipliers that drive home both the message and the man, his policy and persona, in one seemingly seamless continuum. This is not to be hagiographic, and it's saying nothing about the actual content and history of Obama's policy statements and voting record: I'm merely saying that Obama is an exceptionally able politician, well at home as both a user (as the head of his tech-savvy campaign) and as a subject (as a superstar) of the new media.

Obama's media nemesis isn't, of course, John McCain, his titular opponent in the 2008 Election, but Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican Vice-Presidential nominee and, like Obama, already a figure of American historical folklore. Palin dropped like a bomb into the Republican convention, thrilling the assembled delegates and the Republicans' hard-right Christian Evangelical base with her quasi-mythic persona, at once intimately familiar and enticingly exotic: a fiery warrior queen from the frozen North and a tenacious hockey mom and mother of five (the youngest, Trig, an infant with Down Syndrome, which delighted anti-choice "infanticide" partisans)

still vowed to fight on against the victorious Russians and Americans, and who hoped, in those last, fiery moments of apocalyptic zeal, for the ragged, starving brigades of schoolchildren and nonagenarians to save them from the rampaging hordes of Yanks and Slavs. In the course of singularly ruining her first political incarnation (following Churchill's dictum that in politics, unlike in war, one may die many times), Palin has done something far better and finer: she has entered the hallowed mists of American parodic mythology, among the company of other now-lovable freaks, burnouts, and demagogues such as Aaron Burr, Terry Eagleton, George Wallace, and George Allen. Valhalla was meant to burn at the end anyway, and this goes for even gimcrack and pasteboard Valhallas like Governor Palin's.

But enough with analysis: here's a short, in-no-particular-order "top five" list of strange and amazing bits of media from the campaign. Links are provided where appropriate:

1. "Wassup 2008" from 60 Frames, which recasts the members of a famous (and famously irritating) Budweiser commercial from 2000 as fellow sufferers in George Bush's America. The chorus of screaming near the end is sublimely cathartic, a

- much-needed purgation of the last eight years of war, economic collapse, environmental disaster, and existential dread: it might be too soon to start knowingly quoting, apropos of McCain's campaign, old chestnuts like "Birnam Wood to Duninane," but when barely-remembered actors from an eight-year old *ad*, for God's sake, team up to deliver a hilariously poetic exorcism of your President's and party's legacies, and deliver in the process a two-minute film that's worth entire shelves of *Syriana* and *Lions for Lambs* and *In the Valley of Allah*, I'd say you're fucked. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq8Uc5BFogE>)
- McCain's "Lime Green Monster" speech of June 3, a cinematographically ill-conceived response to Obama's winning of the Democratic primaries, in which McCain was put against a sickly green backdrop that in the words of blogger Atrios made McCain look "like the cottage cheese in a lime jello salad." The green backdrop was mercilessly appropriated by an army of YouTube directors, who added backgrounds like the Hindenberg explosion or an atomic blast to McCain's listless, uninspired speech. (Original speech at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7RuX4pQPLY>; search for "McCain green screen" on YouTube for the hundreds of parody videos.)
 - Tina Fey's Sarah Palin. Sure, you've seen it a million times already. Fey's dead-on take is great, as well as a nice example of the confluence of old and new media: the big-money mass culture hack of Palin's Obama hack, saved by YouTube for viewers who can't bother with the crapfest that's the televised program.

- The Rachel Maddow Show*, whose host, Rachel Maddow, is the smartest, funniest, coolest, and newest of the Bush-era television anchors-cum-partisan entertainers. While her show perhaps needs to fine tune a bit—Maddow's a bit more radio than TV, and the show lacks the funnier bits of, say, Keith Olbermann's *Countdown*, which often plays as a meta TV show about TV—Maddow is easily the most informative and engaging network talking head in years.
- "A More Perfect Union," Obama's speech on race in Philadelphia on March 18, occasioned by the firestorm of fake controversy generated by videos of Obama's pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, saying some quite vitriolic things about the American Dream. Obama's speech was a classic pivot, taking a huge liability and turning it into an occasion for a meditation on race and history, in rhetoric as finely crafted and deliberative as Lincoln's or Martin Luther King's or Bobby Kennedy's. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrp-v2tHaDo>)
- "Vlad and Friend Boris Presents 'Song for Sarah' for Mrs. Palin," a knock-off of both Borat and *Flight of the Conchords* that still manages to turn Palin's nonsensical image of Vladimir Putin rearing his head in Alaskan airspace into a tenderly smutty joke, delivered in mock earnestness by two faux-Russian troubadours who gaze longingly across the frozen Bering Strait for a glimpse of their beautiful neighbor Sarah. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XR9V_aOCga0)
- Racist McCain-Palin supporters on YouTube: I'm loath to give these more attention than they've gotten, but for sheer WTF? anthropological interest,

- est, and as a testament to the hatefulness and irrationality of some few on the far right, these must be seen, like the following clips from Strongsville, Ohio, recorded on October 8. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIgv992NZs0>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJghQMq49dw&feature=related>)
- "Barack OBollywood," an inspired visual mashup of images of Obama with cheesy-funky low-res graphics effects and a hypnotically grating Bollywood beat. Less a testament to Obama's global roots and appeal, or his supposedly postracial politics, than an excuse for tripped-out silliness. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA-451XM-suY>)
 - The poll-tracking website www.FiveThirtyEight.com, brainchild of genius statistician Nate Silver: like Chuck Todd's electoral math wizardry during the primaries on MSNBC, Silver's deep analysis of polling data provides necessary hard facts among the swirling blather of the punditry. How the site will manage the post-election transition remains to be seen, but this has been the best of the blogs this year.
 - "La Pequeña Sarah Palin," perhaps the final verdict on the Palin candidacy. I won't ruin the surprise, but those with finer sensibilities, or who are easily offended (particularly by cross-dressing little people), might avoid this. La Pequeña is perfectly sublime, a leering gargoyle on our digital cathedral. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV8uEzGuvfc>)
- Don't forget to vote! Ⓐ

Art Review

Continued from page 17

capture those she loves and hold them forever, lest the ravages of time claim them before she does.

Unfortunately, time has caught up with her subjects but Peyton, surprisingly, has adjusted to this, as reflected in her mid-career survey, "Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton," at the New Museum. Those that love Peyton will continue to love her and those that hate her most likely will not be swayed, as their prejudices run too deep and are often well founded. Yet those who are willing to reconsider their position on Peyton's work will not necessarily be rewarded but will come away with the sense that there is more to Peyton than was previously evident.

Comprised of 104 works, there are many paintings that will irk Peyton's detractors, from the overly delicate paintings of Kurt Cobain to the self-conscious charcoal and ink drawings of Ludwig II of Bavaria from her 1993 show at the Chelsea Hotel. But something happened to Peyton's work starting around 2003; she seems to have given up her fight against time and has instead come to accept it if not embrace it. *Green Nick* and *Walt* (both from 2003) are simple colored pencil line drawings portraits that show an emerging restraint. One would expect, based on her work from the 1990s, that Peyton would make these men more delicate than they are, instead Peyton draws them as men and not as anachronistic Victorian dandy fantasies. *Peter (Pete Doherty)* (2005) is a startling watercolor on paper. Peyton has succeeded in capturing the beaten up and worn out quality that exemplifies Doherty, lead singer of The Libertines and Babyshambles. His vacant eyes, a motif that frequently appears in Peyton's work, here make sense. Doherty doesn't feel longed for. The love is there but it has been replaced by a sadness for the life he has chosen to live. Her paintings are losing their weightlessness, replaced by a real sense of, if not gravity, then concreteness that before was missing. *Jonathan (Jonathan Horowitz)* (2007) shows the artist Jonathan Horowitz scruffy and middle-aged sitting in a chair. His blue eyes are alive and intense. It is unclear that



E.P. Reading
(self-portrait)
2005

in the past Peyton would have had the inclination to paint these bright, real things as such. This is not to say that there aren't stumbles, she still has an inherent preciousness and her paintings from magazine images and movies feel like throwaway exercises, as evident in the interesting but ultimately empty painting of Michelle Pfeifer and Daniel Day-Lewis from *Days of Innocence*.

Yet it is not "girly art," or at least it is moving away from that, as Roberta Smith concluded in her review of the exhibition. And though Smith ultimately gives "Live Forever" a positive review and does not mean for her characterization of Peyton's art to be a pejorative, she does Peyton a disservice by classifying the work as "girly." For it is assertions like this that only serve to reinforce the tired idea that bearing one's emotions for the world to see is a distinctly feminine act. Peyton is not an aggressive artist, she is not Jenny Saville—a fellow portrait painter whose works are so startling that one cannot help but be overwhelmed by them—she is instead a painter of softness and emotion. Her art is imperfect and at times too self-absorbed but she is worthy of consideration because she strives to display love as an actual thing. Camus wrote of being in the custody of

love and the wonder of a loving heart.

It is our relation to these things that allows us to feel an exalted emotion. While not Camus, Peyton nonetheless strives for the same thing in her work. We may fault her for subject matter and longing but we must accept the sentiment that she commits to. For in an increasingly divisive and unloving world perhaps it is enough to try, even if the execution is suspect, and bring a little love into it. Ⓐ

Important Info about Your Paychecks

We've been notified that some graduate students may have been paying Social Security and Medicare on their wages (particularly on work as an adjunct at another campus). Please review the following information, and contact your appropriate Human Resources department if you think you are paying more than you should be. The DSC's Adjunct Project has been notified about this situation.

Please check: www.nyc.gov/html/opa/html/taxes/socialsecurity.shtml#cuny for more information

CUNY Students Working at CUNY

You are exempt from social security and Medicare if you are a CUNY student working at CUNY and:

You are at least a half-time undergraduate, graduate, or professional student or you are at least a half-time undergraduate, graduate, or professional student enrolled in the number of credit or unit hours to complete the requirements of obtaining a degree offered by CUNY.

The FICA exemption does not apply if you are not enrolled in classes during breaks of five weeks or more, including summer.

Less than half-time students of CUNY who are employed at CUNY and CUNY students working for the City but not at CUNY are subject to social security and Medicare taxes.

Cost of Attendance Askew?

For many students, the excitement of getting a graduate school acceptance letter is followed by the question: "How am I going to pay for this?" Oftentimes student loans from the federal government are a leading source of this payment process, and the financial aid office often determines the amount of federal aid an individual student is eligible for. While any grants, scholarships, or remissions the student may have been awarded are considered, the students expected family contribution, as determined by the student's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is subtracted from the university's estimated cost of attendance to determine the amount of aid a student can receive. This makes the university's cost of attendance figure very important.

Recently it was brought to our attention that the Graduate Center's cost of attendance figure might be considerably lower than it should be; in investigating this, we looked at other universities in the tri-state area, as well as the United States Department of Education website, to determine how cost of attendance estimates are calculated. What we found was that individual universities are free to develop their own cost of attendance figures; indeed, several of the universities had different figures for different colleges and programs within their own university!

Above you will find a table containing cost of attendance figures for the Graduate Center, as well as other schools in our area. The reported figures are for graduate programs within each university, with the exception of Rutgers.

What seems clear is that the Graduate Center's estimated cost of attendance figure is low when compared with others universities in New York City, as well as Yale in New Haven, CT. It is within the Graduate Center's power to reevaluate this figure, and to do so would undoubtedly benefit students.

Visit Our Fantastic Website

Same great address, divine new content: www.cunydisc.org is your one-stop source for student information at the GC. Conceived by DSC Co-Chairs Greg Donovan and Rob Faunce, our site is user-friendly to manage (which saves the Steering Committee a lot of energy) and even easier to surf. Visit the website and download a form, look at our pictures, and catch up on news of note around the GC!

Chartered Organizations

A note to all Chartered Organization leaders: In order for your group to remain chartered (that is, eligible for funding and an office from the DSC) you need to submit updated contact information, a membership roster, and a constitution and mission statement to Co-Chair for Student Affairs Gregory Donovan at dsc@gregorydonovan.org by December 15th at the very latest.

Departmental Allocations

DSC reps are reminded to spend their allocations and submit receipts by the stated deadline on the DSC website,

www.cunydisc.org. Please contact Co-Chair for Business Management, Chris Sula (dsc@chrisalensula.org), to find out how much money your department is eligible for this year.

Open Meetings Law, Quorum, Voting

Since the DSC is subject to the Open Meetings Law and the General Construction Law, we are constantly vigilant about urging our members to attend meetings. Making and maintaining quorum is crucial to our ability to keep an efficient and effective student government working!

If you are a member, it is absolutely imperative that you not miss meetings, and when you must, please send a non-member replacement to serve as your proxy (notifying us in advance, at robfaunce@gmail.com). If you are a member who simply cannot attend the meetings, please get yourself a permanent replacement and resign.

If you are a student from an unrepresented (or under-represented) department, please consider representing your department at the DSC. Simply contact Co-Chair for Communications Rob Faunce (robfaunce@gmail.com) for more information; a complete list of reps' rights and responsibilities is available from Rob on request. The unrepresented departments are Audiology, Earth & Environmental Science, Economics, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, German, Liberal Studies, Mathematics (2), Physical Therapy, Physics, Psychology: Clinical, Psychology: Cognition, Brain, Behavior, Psychology: Cognitive Neuroscience, Psychology: Educational (2). The underrepresented department is Sociology.

Graduate Council and Grad Council Committees

The Graduate Council is the decision-making body of the college, comprised of students, faculty, and administrators. (This is not to be confused with the Doctoral Students' Council, which is the college's student government.) Without substantial student attendance at Grad Council, student voices will not be heard. Additionally, we must continue to oppose efforts to limit student representation at the Grad Council. If you are a Grad Council rep for your

department, please be sure to attend all meetings (twice per semester) and notify your DSC rep if you can't make it (DSC program reps serve as Grad Council alternates). A complete list of upcoming meetings is below.

If you are on a committee and don't know when your next meeting is, or if you are a Grad Council member and are not receiving notices by mail, please contact Alice Eisenberg, the Grad Council Staff Assistant, at aeisenberg@gc.cuny.edu. If you would like to serve on one of the standing committees (Committee on Committees, Information Technology, Curriculum and Degree Requirements, Library, Research, Structure, Student Services), please contact Rob Faunce, DSC Co-Chair for Communications and Chair of the Grad Council Committee on Committees, at robfaunce@gmail.com.

Plenary Guest Speakers

Director of Student Affairs Sharon Lerner, Associate Director of Student Affairs and Director of Student Services Elise Perram, and Assistant VP for Information Technology Robert Campbell were guest speakers at the September and October DSC plenary meetings. Incoming Provost Chase Robinson will be with us on November 21, and Ombudsman Rolf Meyerson and VP for Student Affairs Matthew Schoengood are scheduled for December 12.

Important Upcoming Dates:

DSC Plenary meetings (6:00 p.m./5:30 for food, GC 5414): Nov 21, Dec 12, February 13, March 20, April 24, May 8

DSC Steering Committee meetings (6:00 p.m., GC 5489): Dec 5, Jan 30, March 6, April 3, May 15

DSO Media Board (6:00 p.m., GC 5489): Feb 20, March 27

Visit us online at www.cunydisc.org.

DSC Winter Party: Save the date!

December 12, 8:30pm, Room 5414.

Free food. Free drinks. Free stuff. Music on the iPod. Dancing, delights, delicious, de-lovely, de-stressing winter fun with your representatives from the DSC and your peers at the Graduate Center. ☺

Cost of Attendance for CUNY and Surrounding Universities

	<i>Graduate Center^a</i>	<i>NYU^c</i>	<i>Columbia^{acd}</i>	<i>New School^b</i>	<i>Fordham^{cd}</i>	<i>Rutgers^e</i>	<i>Yale^f</i>
Housing	7,425	17,335	17,550	12,260	12,050	9,942	
Food	2,776			3,000			
Transportation	850	684		684	790		18,000
Books and Supplies	1,016	1,016	2,000	920-2,050	840		
Personal/Misc	3,676	4,315	3,487	1,550	6,130		
Total	15,743	23,350	23,037	17,494	19,810	9,942	18,000

^a Figures based on the 9 month school year

^b Estimated figures are based on student surveys and updates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

^c Housing figure includes room (rent, utilities) and board

^d Based on Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (Each school produces their own estimate)

^e Typical room, board, and fees for New Brunswick student living on campus

^f Includes all expenses

Chancellor Goldstein Declares Himself Emperor for Life

MATT LAU

In a move that has stunned everyone on 80th street except Jar-Jar Binks and a few other affirmative action hires, CUNY's favorite and only chancellor Matthew Goldstein has declared himself Emperor of the entire CUNY galaxy.

"Unlimited power and the idea of being able to destroy entire community colleges and other blights on CUNY's new image were just two of the reasons the Emperor couldn't resist this opportunity," said the Emperor's spokeswoman Mark Schiebe. "And besides, the Star Wars tie-in merchandising will really help us pay for all the CUNY presidents' condo maintenance fees during this time of economic hardship. Do you know what those fees are for luxury buildings these days? We'd have to ask them to give up their various concubines and mistresses and their midtown dungeon without our new ad dollars."

When a reporter asked if the Emperor hadn't in fact purchased his "emperor's cloak" at Ricky's Halloween costume superstore, Schiebe glared at him for an awkwardly long period of time. Finally it occurred to other press in attendance that the Emperor's aide may have been trying one of those Darth Vader moves where you choke a dude out just by looking at him. It didn't work.

Another reporter asked how the Emperor felt about being an Emperor who is still less powerful than the mayor of New York City.

"Actually Lord Bloomberg's decision to change existing laws so that he can maintain his indomitable grip on the city was a real inspiration to the Emperor in his decision. We've even been encouraging Lord Bloomberg to disregard the election process and just stay in office indefinitely. I mean, I think it's pretty clear from the man-on-the-street interviews on local news that *everyone* in the city wants him to remain mayor. The Emperor is a very powerful man and the Mayor is an extremely powerful man. So no,

we don't see it as a contradiction at all."

Rumor has it that the Emperor has a number of changes in mind going forward at CUNY. Among the mostly highly anticipated by himself will be his institution of *droit de seigneur* or *primaie noctis*, the so-called "right of the first night," with CUNY students.

"I know what you're thinking," said the Emperor's spokeswoman. "How can the Emperor be so sexist in the 21st century by demanding sex only from female students?" But I'm here to reassure you that while the Emperor will be forcing CUNY students to have sex with him right after they pass the CPE exam; out of deference to the women's movement and multiculturalism, he will be doing it in the most politically correct possible way.

"He will not just be sleeping with a select few of the students. He will be sleeping with each and every one of our outstanding undergraduates, male or female, straight or gay, American or Muslim."

Concerns were immediately voiced by the press, many of whom work for CUNY student newspapers. Many wanted reassurance that the "first night" policy wouldn't apply to graduate students. Others were afraid enrollment at CUNY would drop precipitously or that failure rates on the CPE would skyrocket.



Just don't tell him his Death Star is broken.

"With grad students it won't be *primaie noctis*; it will be *omnis noctis*—both all nights and ALL night. As for enrollment—that had already occurred to the Emperor in his infinite wisdom—which is why CUNY is planning a war of conquest against all tri-state area colleges and universities. We're going to start with the Cornell University medical center because we know they keep large stockpiles of Viagra and Cialis on hand. The Emperor will need to up his current dosage.

"As for marketing this decision so that people will accept it, can't you already see it? *Look who's wielding god-like power at CUNY?*" Ⓐ

ask harriet

BY HARRIET ZANZIBAR

Dreading a Future of Animal Sex

Dear Harriet,

I met this terrific guy. But I found out on our third date that his parents are into crazy sex stuff. Seriously crazy sex stuff, like, dressing up as farm animals and suckling each other, stuff like that.

So I don't want to be a prude, or judge "Dave" on account of his parents, but all I could think of while he was telling me about this was, does this thing pass on to the next generation? By telling me this, was he prepping me at some level for his own disturbing revelations two or three or ten years down the road?

— Pastoral Intimacy is Gross

Before I get started on your problem, PIG, I want to give a shout-out to the end of the election season and all of the complaining it entails about "my boyfriend is stupid because he's voting for McCain" or "we broke up because she thought Tina Fey was running for president" or "omg lolcats luv teh nader, ok thx bye" that's been clogging up my

inbox like an interminable avalanche now that America has decided to spend half of every presidential term standing at opposite ends of a political football field shouting obscenities at each other like an entire nation of soccer hooligans left in a state of permanent enragement after a botched program of universal lobotomization. It's a wonder that more of my mail isn't originating from state penitentiaries specially set aside for significant others whose chief argument to their lovers' embracing McCain was a blunt instrument upside the head. Americans are seriously indulging in so much mutual scorn and outright hatred it's frightening. I've seen batteries that were less polarized.

I'm glad to see the back of it—though with *my* luck the Republicans will have stolen the election again by the time you're reading this and this whole mess won't be over until sometime next year, by which time the cities will be smoldering ruins and the tribunals will be guillotining cable news pundits by the dozen for their role in permanently

screwing up the country once and for all.

Now to your problem, which reminds me a great deal of a friend of mine who found out, rather startlingly, six years into a relationship that her lover harbored a secret fetish for amputees, and who ended up spending the balance of that relationship, which was not all a very long stretch of time, hiding her left arm behind her back whenever they had sex, so that she's now slightly skewed and tends to walk around with her right breast forward as if she were offering it up for critique. Now you can choose to look at this as a tragedy—the Collapse of a Promising Love Thanks to a Lie; or you can look at it, as I tend to, as six great years, one weird year, and then release: which really comes out to both of them regaining freedom to pursue a better match.

Sixty years ago you were stuck with what you got. If you took Hazel home from the chapel and discovered, upon a suitably respectful sober excavation of her garments, that she harbored an

unsuspected third nipple, why, either you learned to love that extra nozzle or you spent the rest of your life writhing in an unshakable state of heebie-jeebification. But today, not only do we no longer expect relationships to last longer than our current wireless plans, but our capacity of amorous transience releases all the pressure. Discovering a new partner's hidden bodily oddities or peculiarities in their sexual proclivities might not be the big brain-exploder it used to be: not being locked in might make it easier to say, "Huh. Well, that might be fun for a while."

My point, PIG, is that it would be easy to let the potential for a sudden left turn in your sex life hang ominously over you like the sex toy of Damocles, but letting that happen can ruin more than the revelation itself. Have fun with your boy, forget about Cowdad and Bullmom (or vice versa), and enjoy the ride. Who knows? Your bubblegum lipstick could be more of a gross-out than any of the relics tucked away in his wardrobe. Ⓐ