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The *GC Advocate* newspaper, the only newspaper dedicated to the needs and interests of the CUNY Graduate Center community, is looking for new writers for the upcoming academic year. We publish six issues per year and reach thousands of Graduate Center students, faculty, staff, and guests each month.

Currently we are seeking contributors for the following articles and columns:

- ▶ Investigative articles covering CUNY news and issues (assignments available on request)
- ▶ First Person essays on teaching at CUNY for our regular "Dispatches from the Front" column
- ▶ First person essays on life as a graduate student for our "Graduate Life" column
- ▶ Feature "magazine style" articles on the arts, politics, culture, NYC, etc.
- ▶ Provocative and insightful analyses of international, national, and local politics for our Political Analysis column
- ▶ Book reviews for our regular Book Review column and special Book Review issues
- ▶ Local Music Reviews and Art Reviews

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Payments for articles range between \$75 and \$150 depending on the length and amount of research required. We also pay for photos and cartoons.

Interested writers should contact Editor Michael Busch at michaelkbusch@gmail.com.

Out with the Old, In with the...Same Old?

What a couple of weeks.

Let's start with Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's retirement from CUNY. On April 12, the chancellor quietly announced his imminent departure in a Friday evening email to the CUNY community. "Serving this exceptional university alongside so many extraordinary colleagues," Goldstein wrote, "has been the greatest privilege of my professional life." The chancellor made sure to praise his own record at the institution. "Since I began as chancellor in 1999, we have focused on raising the academic profile of the University while maintaining our fundamental goals of access and opportunity. The results of our emphasis on high standards, academic rigor, and student preparation... have been record enrollments, increased graduation rates, and more and more high-achieving students coming to CUNY... Today, CUNY is a transformed institution, re-energized by the creative, dedicated work of professionals across our twenty-four colleges and professional schools."

In response to the announcement, the *New York Times* published a love letter editorial to the chancellor under the banner headline, "The Man Who Saved CUNY." The *Times* highlighted his commitment to raising academic standards of excellence in the university, and celebrated Goldstein for blowing air back into the administrative lungs of the system's bureaucracy while managing to also corral huge amounts of capital into CUNY coffers. In fact, the *Times* piece mirrored Goldstein's letter to the CUNY community so closely that some joked the chancellor had written the article himself. And while the *Times* hints momentarily that Goldstein's tenure wasn't without controversy, any dissent from within the system was shrugged off as run-of-the-mill controversy common to any institution of higher learning. "This is, after all, academia," the *Times* wrote.

What the *Times* didn't mention in its rush to produce puff are all the less palatable legacies of the Goldstein years. As readers of the *Advocate* are well aware, Goldstein's time as chancellor is one of power had distinct privilege over the public interest. As a letter to the editor of the *Times* from CUNY students makes clear, "Mr. Goldstein's initiatives lowered academic standards and restricted faculty autonomy, while black and Latino enrollment dropped. During his tenure, Mr. Goldstein's total compensation doubled to well over half a million dollars, and top administrators' salaries increased. Meanwhile, tuition has almost doubled, and more than half of CUNY classes are taught by adjuncts making under \$20,000 annually."

The *Times* failed to recognize other features of Goldstein's time at CUNY, as well. The chancellor aggressively walked all over CUNY's history of faculty governance over

curricular decision making in his push to implement Pathways over strenuous objections throughout the system. He was slow to defend the academic freedom of faculty, or absent altogether, when it came under attack. And as the student letter quoted above points out, "suppressing dissent has become policy, enacted in police assaults on peaceful protests at Baruch and Brooklyn College."

But coverage of Goldstein's retirement by the popular media wasn't all rosy. Compare the *Times* whitewash to how the *New York Post* reported the story. Following Goldstein's announcement, the *Post*'s Susan Edelman focused on something entirely different—the golden parachute being organized for the departing chancellor by CUNY's Board of Trustees. "We'll craft a special package for Matt," Board Chairman Benno Schmidt told Edelman, adding that "I think he's been underpaid as chancellor." This, despite the fact that Goldstein pulls in just under half a million dollars a year in salary with a generous \$90,000 annual allowance for housing.

The real scandal here, the *Post* reports, is that Goldstein has collected other revenue streams during his time as CUNY's chief executive. "While chancellor, he has served since 2003 as a funds trustee at JPMorgan Chase, which paid him \$325,000 in 2011. Last December, the board overseeing mutual funds elected Goldstein its new chairman, a post that paid his predecessor \$500,000 in 2011."

This is the sort of story that might have generated more outrage had it not been overshadowed by another bombshell development at CUNY. The Macaulay Honors College announced that same week that former director of the CIA, General David Petraeus, will be teaching classes at CUNY next semester. In an interview with the *New York Times*, the former spymaster's lawyer, Robert Barnett, said that Petraeus "had been approached by many universities, but settled on CUNY because he admires the diversity of students, locations, and offerings." Petraeus himself issued a statement of intent, saying he planned to teach a seminar "that examines the developments that could position the United States—and our North American partners—to lead the world out of the current global economic slowdown."

Perhaps sensing that Petraeus's proposal was anchored more firmly in rhetoric than clarity or substance, Macaulay Dean Ann Kirschner explained to the *New York Times* that Petraeus's plan "is in keeping with his research interest in energy, advanced manufacturing, life sciences and information." That may be. But from the sounds of things, his interests are also in reinventing himself as an expert in these areas. The appointment to Macaulay allows him a year of university-based transition from public humiliation

to a highly-paid career in private industry consulting.

But back to the chancellor. As the Petraeus appointment grabbed everyone's attention, there were still questions about who would be tapped to replace Goldstein at CUNY Central. The day the chancellor announced his pending retirement, a friend presciently joked to me that Bill Kelly would take the helm at 80th Street. A few hours after Petraeus officially joined the faculty of Macaulay, the Executive Board of the Board of Trustees met to rubberstamp Kelly's selection as interim chancellor. His selection was announced that night.

Kelly's appointment makes perfect sense. He's young(ish), charismatic, whip-smart, and by all accounts well liked. He's also a gifted bureaucrat and institutional leader. In the fifteen or so years that he held top positions at the Grad Center—first as provost, then vice president, and finally president—Kelly visibly and sure-handedly contributed to the strengthening of the school, and managed to do so without provoking much enduring antagonism or resentment. Indeed, his regrettable characterization of the GC recently as a “roach motel” was remarkable for being not just offensive, but surprising. It's hard to think of another instance where Kelly openly betrayed the student body and undermined its integrity with either carelessness or intent.

So what does Kelly's appointment mean for CUNY moving forward? With respect to things at the Graduate Center, there's the question of who will replace the president when he moves uptown into his new position. Kelly offered the most obvious suggestion in his letter announcing the transition. At the board meeting that secured his selection as interim chancellor, Kelly “recommended to Chancellor Goldstein the appointment of Provost Chase Robinson as Interim President of the Graduate Center.” There's nothing to suggest that Robinson won't get the nod, though the job title change hasn't been made official yet.

In terms of university policy: probably not much. Kelly will take over from Goldstein on July 1, and will almost surely be focused on keeping the ship of CUNY afloat during its period of leadership transition. It's highly unlikely that he'll be interested in rocking the boat. And while we can't possibly know how much time Kelly will actually spend running the show from his new digs on 80th Street, chances are it won't be terribly long. The only outstanding question on this front is whether or not current CUNY protocols allow for Kelly himself to be appointed to the position permanently.


Up until recently, the answer was decidedly “no.” CUNY rules expressly forbade interim chancellors and college presidents from permanent appointments. But the rules of the game changed recently with the permanent appointment of Diane Call at Queensborough Community College after she had been serving in a temporary capacity

as acting president. Could Kelly take advantage of this new precedent? Right now, it is difficult to tell, though everyone at CUNY Central, including Kelly himself, has made clear that a nationwide search for a new chancellor will shortly get underway.

All of this said, Kelly's new powers are not exclusively bureaucratic, nor limited by his temporary appointment. As chancellor, even an interim one, Kelly will enjoy the power of the bully pulpit. As one student commented on the announcement, “He's free to speak about the important issues of the day, start campaigns for causes that are just, and recognize how fucked CUNY is and address it.” This seems exactly right, and something that CUNY students should not only hope for, but organize to bring about.

The reality is that Kelly will face significant pressure to hold the line established by Goldstein during his time in charge. The general contours of the incoming chancellor's agenda are familiar—raise money, figure out ways to sustain and increase enrollment across the system, consolidate and centralize decision making control in the executive office, and press on, full steam ahead, with Pathways.

But Bill Kelly is not Matthew Goldstein. He will doubtless continue to attract private giving to the university, itself not entirely a bad thing, but could do so according to different rules governing how money translates into political power within the system—a tightrope act he successfully navigated at the Grad Center. He could propose inventive new ways to both stimulate healthy enrollment at CUNY *and* reestablish its historic mission as an urban public institution of higher learning for poor, working-class and immigrant New Yorkers—goals which are naturally interlocking, not at odds as the Goldstein administration would have us believe. And in the face of a rising chorus of dissent, Kelly could place a moratorium on the implementation of Pathways. In its place, he could assemble a fully-representative task force of CUNY community members to transparently evaluate Pathways and assess its probable impact on teaching and learning throughout the system. And he could do so in the name of ensuring City University's commitment to academic excellence and rigor—a goal against which no one should be opposed.

If he doesn't do these things or something similar, Kelly will simply serve as the temporary caretaker of Matthew Goldstein's poisonous legacy, nothing more. The odds are that this is precisely what he intends to do. Too bad. Kelly has the ambition and talent to put his stamp on the CUNY system in profoundly important ways—even as interim chancellor—and could do so without taking many risks. There's real opportunity here, however small, to affect change in our university. Let's encourage him to understand this as well, and prepare to work together to make it happen. The alternative—business as usual—is unacceptable. 

Departures and Arrivals

Resistance to Pathways Mounts

The University Faculty senate passed a resolution opposing the continued use of Pathways Common Core Course Review Committees. The resolution was originally brought before the Baruch College Senate, who calls the Pathways Common Core Course Review Committees “extra-governmental” since they are constituted directly by the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs and the University Provost, outside of defined faculty governance structure. While university governance defines existing curriculum committees, these new Pathways Common Core Course Review Committees have taken over the role of those faculty-based curriculum committees. The CUNY Office of Academic Affairs has already extended the deadline for dissolution of these “temporary” Pathways Common Core Review Committees until June 2013. The Baruch College Senate resolution opposing any additional extension of the PCCCRC passed unanimously on April 8. The following night, the University Faculty Senate passed the resolution with only one vote against.

From May 9 to May 31, CUNY faculty will hold a secret ballot on a motion of no confidence in Pathways. According to PSC-CUNY President Barbara Bowen, “University faculties traditionally take No Confidence votes only when the future of the institution is at stake and when all other methods of registering opposition have been unheard. We are in that position now.”

The secret ballot will be administered by a third party, American



Arbitration Association, in order to avoid coercion. Since only full-time faculty will be eligible to vote, adjuncts and graduate students will not have their voice directly represented in the results. However, after numerous resolutions by faculty bodies on individual campuses and the University Faculty Senate, this will be the first CUNY-wide direct-vote method of determining the full-time faculty's opposition or support of Pathways. The results will also provide incoming-chancellor Kelly and the administration with measurable data on the popularity of the initiative.

Openings Across CUNY

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced his retirement, effective in June. Graduate Center president Bill Kelly has been announced as interim Chancellor, with GC Provost Chase Robinson taking over the interim GC President's office. Goldstein's retire-

ment prompted Board of Trustees's chairman Beno Schmidt to announce, “We'll craft a special package for Matt,” indicating that the former chancellor will draw more than the standard retirement, in addition to his six-figure salary at JP Morgan Chase and Company.

While changes in the CUNY Chancellor's office—and the subsequent shakeup at the Graduate Center—have made the news, other high-level positions are also being filled at CUNY.

Baruch College named David Christy as its new provost and senior vice president for academic affairs to fill the vacancy left by James McCarthy when he left last year to serve as the president of Suffolk University.

Medgar Evers Community College president William Pollard appointed Karrin Wilks as interim provost and senior vice president. Last April, Medgar Evers provost Howard Johnson, along with president Pollard, faced a 136–13 vote of no confidence by the college faculty last April after years of allegations of misconduct. President Pollard himself announced his resignation in January this year, but remains in his position until a successor can be named.

The CUNY Board of Trustees also has the potential for a change, as several members are facing the end of their appointed terms. Board members Benno Schmidt, Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, Frida Foster, and Charles Shorter will all reach the end of their terms this summer. While the mayor and the governor have the power to appoint new board members, they may also merely reappoint without any change. Schmidt and Wiesenfeld have been reappointed multiple



times, while Foster and Shorter are facing possible reappointment for the first time.

Look Who's Teaching at CUNY

David Patraeus will be teaching in the Mcauley Honors College. Rather than a simple adjunct, the former CIA director will be a visiting professor of public policy. In addition to his many military honors, Dr. Patraeus holds a PhD from Princeton. Therefore, he does have the formal degree requirement to be a visiting professor. Military command of US forces in Afghanistan and joint forces in Iraq will come in handy for Professor Patraeus as he attempts to navigate the CUNY bureaucracy while teaching an interdisciplinary seminar.

The former CIA director who resigned after his extramarital affair is not the first guest professor to come to CUNY after a very public sex scandal. Former governor Eliot Spitzer taught "Law and Public Policy" at City College in fall 2009.


Mayoral Candidates at Forum

On April 23, CUNY hosted a forum for mayoral candidates to discuss issues of public higher education. Christine Quinn and Adolfo Carrion did not attend, while Bill de Blasio had a family emergency, but sent a statement. Current CUNY trustee Joe Lhota, and Republican primary candidate for mayor, chose not to attend the forum dominated by Democratic candidates. This left only John Liu and Bill Thompson to answer questions on CUNY funding, infrastructure, and unions.

Both candidates lamented the decreasing numbers of black and Latino students at the CUNY senior colleges. Liu cited the increasing tuition costs as prohibitive to lower-income NYC families, while Thompson blamed the failure of NYC public schools to prepare students for a CUNY education. Thompson also said that while he supports unions, because of the Public Employees Fair

Employment Act, CUNY workers do not have the right to strike. Liu suggested reinterpreting the Act in order to account for differences between essential life-saving services and other public employees.

CCNY Appreciates Hip Hop

The City College Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center for Worker Education will host the Fourth Annual Is Hip Hop History Conference on May 10 at 25 Broadway, in lower Manhattan. As part of Hip Hop Appreciation Week, CCNY will bring together scholars, practitioners, and producers to discuss this year's theme: "Origins Debate." Focus on roots will also include the specific role of Latinos in the cultural formation of hip hop. Veejay Ralph McDaniels will be honored with an opening reception and retrospective covering the thirty years of his TV show Video Music Box. The photograph exhibition will run through May 30. 

Rent-Controlled

J.A. MYERSON

Some people somewhere own a real estate firm, which owns my apartment building. These people, whose identity I don't know, receive a sizable portion of my monthly paycheck, in return for which, whoever these people are let me live in my apartment.

My anonymous landlords keep raising the rent. Every year or two, I get a notice to the effect that my lease is about to be up, and, should I choose to renew it, I will need to sign here on the line for the right to start paying the mystery people an even more joy-vaporizing amount of money each month. One of these documents sits unsigned before me now, just as its been doing day after day, silently bullying me.

I want to sign it and stay in my apartment. I grew up in the neighborhood I live in and have intense personal fondness for it. What's more, the parks are out-of-control beautiful, I'm near two useful subways, and there's excellent Dominican food everywhere I turn. My rent is a steal for the area. These are the reasons I live in this apartment, I remind myself. Are they enough to make it worth this amount of money? They are worth it! No, really: they are...I think.

But why the hell do my landlords get to make more and more money off of me each year? None of these things that imbue my apartment with such value are attributable to the people who actually *collect* the value. New York City is responsible for the subways and parks; the Dominican food is thanks to the community that lives here. I would sign the lease before me much less reluctantly if my money were benefiting the city and the local community. But it's really hard to fork over payments in return for all that value to some mysterious, impersonal, remote landlords.

The word itself feels anachronistic, seems to conjure a feudal, agrarian legacy. A "lord" in the age of open source software? "Land" in the age of the digital food delivery service? Indeed, that is just what's up: some people own some land and some boxes that were built on and above it. They let me live in one of the boxes, for a really hefty recurring fee. Perhaps it is the imposition of so outdated a social architecture on the lives of today's urban denizens that I find so disquieting. Why should I respect the right of these mystery landlords to extract rent from me any more than I respect the right of Sir Whateveryouwant-to call him to knock on the huts of the peasants, demanding tribute? The landlords and the knights assert their

right to the property the same way: the threat of violence. Those are the people I root *against* in movies.

Capitalism, which is supposed to have permanently replaced feudalism, allegedly favors profits as the basis for the incomes of owners—an enterprise invests in plant, equipment and labor to produce goods and services consumers purchase with their wages, and the surplus is captured by the owners. Notice how different profit is from rent: income that requires no ongoing cost of production, revenue that is simply a recurring toll on some property that already exists—income that is "unearned." We lump rent-collection in with profits, but only the latter is capitalistic, liberal, and productive.

In other words, when my rent goes up, it isn't because the plumbing, the woodwork, the brick, and the electrical infrastructure of my apartment building are improving. That would be the exchange of goods and services for money and therefore easier to understand as the basis for a rent hike than what is really driving up my rent: the appreciation over time of the land commodity. Roughly 60 percent of the American economy is in real estate, most of which is land value. Land is by far our national economy's most valuable asset: the purple mountain majesties, the fruited plane, and the rectangular plot of dirt beneath my apartment building.

As everyone knows, the three most important considerations in real estate are all "location." Lots of people want to live here badly enough to pay landlords an arm and a leg for the privilege. That is why the urban plot of dirt beats out the equivalent size plot of mountain majesty or fruited plane as the most "valuable" land. It is necessarily much scarcer. Economist Michael Hudson has assessed that the land value of New York City is greater than the combined value of every bit of industrial plant and equipment in the entire United States.

In New York City, the extracted value of the land is shared by rent-collecting real estate investors and the banks that lend them money. All the proof anyone should need that these are the two interests that run the town is available at any newsstand. Real estate interests have their own section in the paper. Wall Street has its own paper.

Here's the play they run: The Flip. Big time landlords don't keep the rent; they ship it to banks. In bidding against one another to buy a property, investors obtain financing by promising to pay the future rental value of the property to the bank, as interest. Letting the rents

carry the loan, the real estate company keeps the property for a few years, while the land value appreciates, before “flipping” it to some new investor. Rather than the rental value, the real estate firm collects the increased value of the land, called a “capital gain.” It’s all unearned income: the rent, the banker’s interest, and the investor’s capital gain.

A good capitalist should want unearned income taxed. In *The Flip*, the interest payments (a cost of business) are deductible, and so is the capital gain, but only if the gain is shoved back into investing in more real estate. Instead of taxing the sixty percent of the economy that real estate constitutes, the United States dumps its tax burden onto industry and, chiefly, labor. This places incentives on continually accumulating real estate fortunes, rather than producing goods and services. In other words, this produces feudalism, not capitalism.

A socialist alternative isn’t too difficult to imagine. If all the land were owned by the municipality, the government could conceivably conduct a need-based policy, perhaps even with a specifically racially integrationist orientation—ending the scourges of homelessness and gentrification. Such new construction as were needed to avoid the many and grievous negative externalities of suburban sprawl could be undertaken through tax- or inflation-supported investment in direct hiring. In the ideal, 3D-printing-housing-from-recycled-materials future, people wouldn’t even have to work hazardous and strenuous construction jobs.

With each new oil spill, and each new horrifying flashpoint in the global slouch toward total climate collapse, I am increasingly tempted by the contention of Henry George, the influential Nineteenth Century proponent of a land value tax, that “as chattel slavery, the owning of people, is unjust—so private ownership of land is unjust.” But even public ownership of land doesn’t quite sit right with me; after all, public employment of slave labor is hardly abolition. Perhaps what makes me not want to sign my lease renewal isn’t merely an objection to those to whom the money flows, but reluctance, as a first principle, to imagine land as owned by anyone, at all.

Not everything has to be owned. Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel Prize-winning political-economic research offers a useful model for considering different broad types of property relations to goods. A two-by-two grid she proposed indexes goods by high or low subtractability of use (the extent to which my ability to use a thing precludes your ability to use it) and high or low difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries from access to it. The resulting matrix includes four types of goods: private goods (like phones), toll goods (like theaters), public goods (like fire protec-

tion), and lastly, common-pool resources.

This last category includes groundwater basins, lakes, irrigation systems, fisheries, forests, and so forth: subtractable, and difficult to exclude potential beneficiaries. Here is a category beyond private and public ownership: non-ownership. I am seduced by the temptation to consider land in this light. Thus, if the capitalist impulse is to tax the land, and the socialist alternative is to seize the land, there might also be a third approach: to free the land.

The problems treating urban land as having similar properties to fisheries or grazing pastures are, needless to say, legion. For one thing, a pasture in Japan or a fishery in Maine will, at an equilibrium appropriately worked out by the Japanese villagers or Maine fishers, self-replenish. An urban neighborhood, on the other hand, decays when abandoned by capital and politicians. Just look at pictures of the South Bronx thirty years ago.

Still, there is hope that city life can include a greater engagement in common tasks and resources. Ostrom’s work makes clear that managing the commons is a task best accomplished by people, meeting face to face, building trust in one another, and establishing cultural norms that reflect their shared long-term goals. How are cities superior to rural society if not at putting people face to face with one another, in the position to produce community? The trust and norms can be tackled with enough imagination and guts, as community and labor organizers will tell you.

The existence of community land trusts (CLTs) suggests possibilities in committing urban land as a common pool resource. CLTs have proven useful in helping to maintain affordable housing, community gardens, and other community assets. In several important ways, a CLT produces many of the key ingredients Ostrom’s research promotes for the management of the commons. Chief among these is the smallness of the polity, enabling the members of the CLT to establish and uphold their own system of graduated sanctions for abuse of the common pool.

The model of a CLT is at present inadequate to the task of liberating urban land from ownership, but its successful applications can at least help stimulate us to imagine more attractive methods of general conversion of land from a toll good to a common pool resource.

So far, no one is proposing even the capitalist approach. The liberal mayoral candidates are all firmly “pro-development” and propose no more fundamental tax shift than slightly raising marginal rates on high-income earners. For now, therefore, I’m stuck with my anonymous landlords, their real estate firm, about which very little can be learned on the internet, and this unsigned lease which pesters me, day after day after anxiety-filled day...

Searching the CUNY Catalog not working for you? You're not alone!

REETHEE ANTHONY

One thing all graduate students have in common across disciplines is the huge amount of time we spend trying to find articles and books for research. At CUNY, it is especially bad. We spend so much time searching for these items that we lose time to actually read them. While some of our searches are successful, some of them result in multiple unclear results or no results at all. This happens quite often as we look up a book, author, article or any item using the CUNY Catalog.

For a very specific example, let's say we want to search for a specific book titled, *Strategies for Selecting and Verifying Hearing Aid Fittings*. What we expect to find is one result for one item. On the contrary, what we get is more than 10,000 results. Now, we are left with the job of sorting through the 10,000 results to find the one we need. This situation is just one of the many problems we encounter related to the CUNY Catalog.

An especially troubling problem with the CUNY Catalog is the fact that CUNY is invisible to, or lacks a thorough interface with, shared catalogs such as WorldCat, ILLiad, and IDSSearch. This leads to lower use of CUNY resources by our own students and more costly inter-library loan requests. This is an issue of accessibility and transparency. State and city funds, as well as student tuition, go in to purchasing library resources. The resources must then be made available.


Many of these problems are very technical and partly due to errors in what is called the 035 linking field. The 035 (OCLC #) in CUNY records are filled with "dirty data" making linking between catalogs such as WorldCat and CUNY+ impossible. Fixing this problem requires a lot of computational effort. A short term remedy has been for CUNY+ to use ISBN fields to link an item to other resources, but ISBN does not exist for items before 1970s. Also, ISBN is not authoritative and not unique. For example, Italian publishers sometimes reuse an ISBN record, which means multiple records use a single ISBN. Finally, many CUNY+ subject and name searches produce multiple matches because indexing clean-up is done infrequently.

CUNY+ contains one record for each title owned by each library. As a result, the database is huge and duplicative. An evolution of the catalog is essential. CUNY's shift to a single-record model, with one unique item record associated with individual library holdings, is best conducted in a vendor-hosted environment. Many other Exlibris/Aleph based libraries use Exlibris cloud-based hosting services. Cloud-based hosting service would mean timely maintenance, timely updates, freedom for customization, freedom for indexing, and incredible computational power.

The CUNY Library Catalog issue is not a new one. Librarians realized this issue long ago, years before even some of us entered the Graduate Center. Resolutions (LACUNY 2009, CUNY Graduate Council 2011, Doctoral Students' Council 2011, 2013, CCL Letter 2012) have been passed in the past and present to improve the Catalog.

This past week, Mr. Curtis L. Kendrick, the University Dean for Libraries and Information Resources, responded to the DSC resolution (passed on March 15, 2013) and has addressed the issue.

"We are aware that users have experienced some dissatisfaction with the system, and continue to make changes to improve. Last year we upgraded to new hardware to improve system performance. We are currently in the midst of a project to re-index the database this summer, and we have initiated planning to migrate to the current release of the software. Funding has been approved to procure a library discovery system that will enable researchers to search across multiple databases and the catalog at one time rather than having to work sequentially, and we recently introduced a service that helps users to discover relevant literature based on usage patterns of researchers around the world. In January 2013 we made a mobile catalog interface available to all users of CUNY libraries *on the go*."

A state-of-art, accessible, and useful catalog is possible for CUNY, and can happen sooner with vendor hosting. The students on the Doctoral Students' Council would support any catalog that works well (as stated in their resolution). For CUNY students, and our reputation within the consortia, we must demand and receive a better catalog than what is currently provided. 

Terror in the West, Texas, Night

AMY GOODMAN

The Boston Marathon bombing and its aftermath has dominated the nation's headlines. Yet, another series of explosions that happened two days later and took four times the number of lives, has gotten a fraction of the coverage. It was the worst industrial accident in years. But to call it an accident ignores that it was preventable, and was quite possibly a crime, as is common with so many dangerous workplaces.

The first call came in to the 911 dispatcher at 7:29 p.m. on Wednesday, April 17. A woman at a playground noticed a fire across the railroad tracks, at the West Fertilizer Co. facility, in the small town of West, Texas, near Waco. The local volunteer fire department was mobilized. Less than twenty-five minutes later, a massive explosion leveled the plant, sending shock waves, debris and fire across West, ultimately killing fifteen people, among them a local EMT, eight volunteer firefighters and a Dallas fire captain who was visiting his sons and joined the firefighting effort.

The call came over the emergency radio system: "We need every ambulance we can get at this point. A bomb just went off inside here. It's pretty bad. We've got a lot of firemen down."

Another call followed, with moaning in the background: "The rest home has been seriously damaged. We have many people down. Please respond."


A mushroom cloud climbed high into the sky. The explosion registered 2.1 on the Richter scale, the same as a small earthquake. 911 calls flooded in, with people reporting a bomb, many injured and others engulfed in a toxic cloud. Sixty to eighty houses were leveled.

One week later, the fires are out, most of the funerals have been held, but major questions remain unanswered. A team of up to seventy investigators is probing the source of the explosion. Reuters reported last Saturday that the plant had on site 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate. This is 1,350 times the amount that would require a facility to self-report its stockpile to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Ammonium nitrate is a fertilizer used in industrial farming worldwide, and is stable when properly stored. It can be highly explosive when ignited, especially when mixed with fuel, as Timothy McVeigh demonstrated with the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. West Fertilizer Co. never reported its ammonium nitrate to DHS.

The concern with theft of ammonium nitrate by potential bombers is the basis for this reporting requirement. Numerous other federal and state agencies are supposed to regulate fertilizer plants, chemical storage facilities and workplaces in general. Yet OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, last inspected the facility in 1985. An inspection report filed with the Environmental Protection Agency in June 2011 listed 54,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia, a different fertilizer, but claimed there was no serious hazard.

The West Fertilizer explosion happened just a day after the 66th anniversary of the Texas City disaster, said to be the worst industrial accident in U.S. history. Two thousand, three hundred tons of ammonium nitrate bound for France, as part of the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction and aid, caught fire aboard the ship, the SS Grandcamp. The explosion that followed killed at least 581 people, wounded 5,000 and destroyed 500 homes. You would think Texas would be sensitive to the potential hazards of this dangerous chemical. Yet Gov. Rick Perry told The Associated Press, "Through their elected officials [people] clearly send the message of their comfort with the amount of oversight." He recently touted the lax regulatory environment in Texas while trying to lure businesses there from states like California and Illinois.

April 28 is Workers' Memorial Day, commemorating the 4,500 workers who die on the job annually in the U.S. Thirteen workers, on average, go to work each day and never come home. Tom O'Connor, executive director of National Council for Occupational Safety and Health, said, "As companies decry regulations and emphasize profits over safety, workers pay the ultimate price."

Those who died in West, Texas, were workers, volunteer first responders, retirees and neighbors. Unsafe workplaces cause injury and death on a daily basis in this country, but seem to be tolerated as simply the cost of doing business. Gov. Perry declared West a disaster area and asked for prayers. But that's not enough. As legendary labor organizer Mother Jones said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living." 

Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column. Amy Goodman is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,000 stations in North America. She is the co-author of "The Silenced Majority," a *New York Times* best-seller.

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FORWARD ON CLIMATE
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WELCOME

The Radical Greens

How Divestment, Direct Action, and Leftist Politics are Shaping the Environmental Movement

MIKE STIVERS

Just off the Washington Monument, there's a mass of people in front of a soon to be lively stage. They're protecting themselves from the whipping wind chill with fleece jackets and knit hats. Individuals from over thirty states and innumerable environmental organizations are in attendance. Direct action contingents on the frontlines of the Keystone XL pipeline, college students from nascent fossil fuel divestment campaigns, and a cornucopia of other groups populate the now muddy lawn. Perhaps the most interesting sight is one on the edge of the crowd, though. A few people are arrayed in a standing circle, beating drums. Their pulsing chants, borrowed from the Spanish Indignados and popularized Occupiers in Zucotti Park are unmistakable: "Ah, Anti, Anticapitalista!"

This amalgam of activists, organizers, environmentalists, and otherwise concerned individuals, gathered in Washington, D.C. on February 17 for the Forward on Climate Rally, offered a kind of microcosm of the environmental movement in its current form. 40,000 rallied on this frigid day and while they specifically targeted the Keystone XL pipeline, these people sent a message that was seemingly bigger than one piece (albeit a big piece) of infrastructure. What organizers of the event deemed "the largest climate rally in history" showed, if nothing else, was a reinvigorated environmental movement resuscitating some old ideas, exposing innovative new tactics, and maybe even a projecting a novel ideology.

This resurgence is long overdue. For decades, scientists, activists, and even a few politicians have iterated and reiterated the potentially fatal consequences of unchecked human-induced climate change. For decades these voices of reason have fallen on deaf ears. In 2012, though, US citizens began to see and feel the effects of this largely abstract and vaguely understood problem. Droughts in the country's breadbasket, unusually aggressive wildfires out West, sweltering summer temperatures, and of course Hurricane Sandy, seem to have awoken many Americans to the dire status of our climate, not to mention the social, economic, and political catastrophes that accompany it. As

the *Daily Beast* bluntly put it, "Climate Change Is Here." The only doubt that remains is how we'll respond to it, and how bad things will get before we do.

In August of this past year, 350.org founder Bill McKibben published an article in *Rolling Stone* entitled "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math." In it, the writer-turned environmental activist made the imminence of catastrophic climate change glaringly clear with three simple numbers:

- ▶ 2°C—The scientifically established limit for a global temperature increase. Consensus was achieved on this figure at the 2009 conference at Copenhagen. 167 countries responsible for 87 percent of global emissions have signed onto the Copenhagen Accord, including the United States and China. So far, we've raised the temperature about .8°C.
- ▶ 565 gigatons: The amount of carbon that scientists estimate we can burn and stay under that 2° limit. This wouldn't be as worrying if global emissions were falling or even leveling off - but they're rising. 2011 saw the highest jump yet—31.6 gigatons worldwide. At this rate, we'll burn through that 565 gigaton limit in just sixteen years.
- ▶ 2795 gigatons: The amount of carbon the fossil fuel industry already possesses in its known reserves (including state owned companies), as calculated by the Carbon Tracker Initiative.

That last number merits another glance. Fossil fuel companies already have five times as much carbon that scientists say we can afford to burn without careening off the climate cliff. In no time at all, the article exploded onto the social media scene and sparked a twenty-one city "Do The Math Tour." Out of a biodiesel bus and sold out concert halls, McKibben publicized that ominous equation he had developed and then offered a solution: divestment. The call, issued by 350.org, called on to students across the country to ask, convince, and demand that higher education administrations divest university holdings in companies that profit from the burning of fossil fuels. In just over six months, more than 300 campaigns are underway and four colleges have already divested.

The movement is even spreading to city and state funds. As Jay Carmona of 350.org writes, “In San Francisco, organizers are preparing for a hearing at City Hall on a resolution to divest around \$1 billion from the 200 fossil fuel companies on our list. In Maine and Vermont, 350 activists are working on state-level divestment legislation. Divestment resolutions are also moving forward in religious communities, from the United Church of Christ to Methodist congregations.” Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn has already called on the city’s pension fund managers to divest from fossil fuels.

The movement is not without its skeptics though. Christian Parenti, contributing editor at *The Nation*, though supportive of the tactic, doubts its economic implications. In the *New York Times*, Parenti emphasized the fact that “three-quarters of the world’s oil is owned by governments and government companies” and that “some of the worst carbon polluters,” like the climate change denying brothers of the privately-owned Koch Industries, “do not even sell stock.”

Parenti is right to question the impact of divestment on the shift to renewable energy. But as McKibben recently made note of on *Democracy Now!*, when Nelson Mandela visited the United States for the first time after the end of apartheid, he made sure to stop at the University of California at Berkeley. Berkeley was a hot bed of divestment activity during the South Africa divestment movement of the 1980’s (the fossil fuel campaign is modeled off of it). After protests across campuses, sit-ins at presidents’ offices, and even make shift shanty-towns on quads, the California university system eventually divested its \$3 billion in holdings. As Desmond Tutu said “The end of apartheid stands as one of the crowning accomplishments of the past century, but we would not have succeeded without the help of international pressure,” especially from “the divestment movement of the 1980s.”

Divestment is not a silver bullet, but it can be part of a buckshot offensive that bolsters public support, engages students in the climate justice movement, and stigmatizes the use of fossil fuels. As was done in South Africa, it can reframe the debate as a moral issue rather than an economic (or in this case scientific) one. To do so, it’ll need to be executed and integrated with a number of other tactics, many of which are already underway.

Just a few days before the Forward on Climate Rally, the Sierra Club decided to break its ban on civil disobedience as President Michael Brune was arrested for zip-tying himself to the White House gates. “For 120 years, we have remained committed to using every ‘lawful means’ to achieve our objectives,” Brune wrote in the *Huffington Post* in January. “Now, for the first time in our history, we

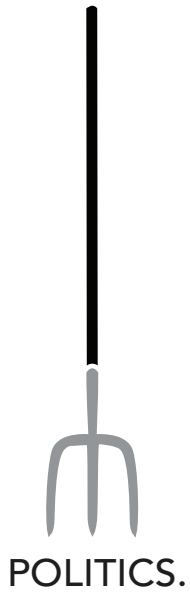
are prepared to go further.” “Traditional tactics of lobbying, electoral work, litigation, grassroots organizing, and public education” are apparently proving insufficient in containing the market induced destruction of the climate.

That said, non-violent civil disobedience is nothing new for the environmental movement. Groups like Tar Sands Blockade, “a coalition of affected Texas and Oklahoma residents and organizers using nonviolent direct action to physically stop the Keystone XL [pipeline],” are merely carrying the torch once wielded by Edward Abbey, Julia Hill, and innumerable others. The group recently coordinated a week of protest against the pipeline that saw fifty grassroots organizations stage fifty-five actions across the continent. Groups like Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Greenpeace USA, and numerous Occupy contingents stopped traffic, sat down in corporate offices, and rallied against institutional enablers of the pipeline, like TD Bank. Even the progressive petition hub CREDO has jumped into the mix by facilitating a “Pledge of Resistance.” Over 50,000 individuals have signed on to commit “peaceful, dignified civil disobedience” should President Barack Obama approve the Keystone XL pipeline.

These increasingly frequent direct actions against those profiting from the burning of fossil fuels and the growing movement for divestment are inspiring. They have, if nothing else, injected a much-needed shot of adrenaline into the nationwide struggles for environmental justice. What’s still unclear, though, is exactly what these individuals and organizations are fighting for. While the unlikely partnerships and diverse coalitions have empowered the movement, they have also made it harder to project a common ideology. Previous incarnations of environmental activism have typically had specific targets, such as preserving a natural area or phasing out a specific source of pollution, or maybe even ending a power source capability like nuclear energy. Necessity demands, however, that the movement embrace a more holistic perspective in the current struggle against climate change. It’s not a singular coal plant that needs to be shut down or an isolated area that needs to be conserved, but the entire system that powers our societies that needs phasing out. If the equilibrium of our global climate is to be reestablished, a truly transformative change is needed. That much seems to be agreed upon. How to affect this transformation is still up for debate.

One trend that does seem to be gaining traction is the increasingly anti-corporate nature of the dialogue, a testament to the tacit but powerful influence of Occupy Wall Street. For decades now, activists have been calling for the systemic changes necessary to ensure a sustainable planet—changes that involve regulation, oversight,

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and even dissolution of certain industries. This newly focused aim at the profit motive in the extractive capitalist economy appears to be striking a chord with an indignant population.

Contrasting this call for a check on corporate power are President Obama's repeated calls for a "market-based" solution. His language coincides with the reality of his administration's policies (which consistently applauds the record levels of oil and gas production as part of an "all of the above" energy strategy). The subscript for this jargon? That renewable energy and a sustainable planet will not come at the expense of the fossil fuel industry's profit. This is not to simply vilify Obama. Without congressional and state legislative support, Washington could not provide billions of dollars in subsidies, allow unregulated companies to spew huge amounts of noxious carbon, and even fill the executive cabinet with ex-industry executives, like recently appointed Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz. The lobbying efforts and campaign donations of these corporations, thoroughly unleashed by the 2010 Citizens United ruling, are of course invaluable in this royal treatment.

This contradiction of sustainability and regulation against growth and profit is stark. The question recently posed by Noam Chomsky on *Truthout.org*: "Will Capitalism Destroy Civilization?" is not an unfounded one. "The externality that is being ignored is the fate of the species," writes the world-renowned writer and activist.

If this sounds dystopian, recall McKibben's thesis: if humans hope to limit the temperature increase to 2°C, then we can afford to burn no more than 565 gigatons of carbon. Yet the fossil fuel industry already possesses 2795 gigatons. This math is frightening enough as is, but even more worrying are the market forces that surround them. These fossil fuel reserves are those that are already known, that corporations and nation-states have already laid claim to. As McKibben notes, these assets are "economically aboveground—it's figured into share prices, companies are borrowing money against it, nations are basing their budgets on the presumed returns from their patrimony."


McKibben continues: "John Fullerton, a former managing director at JP Morgan who now runs the Capital Institute, calculates that at today's market value, those 2,795 gigatons of carbon emissions are worth about \$27 trillion. Which is to say, if you paid attention to the scientists and kept 80 percent of it underground, you'd be writing off \$20 trillion in assets. The numbers aren't exact, of course, but that carbon bubble makes the housing bubble look small by comparison. It won't necessarily burst—we might well burn all that carbon, in which case investors will do fine. But if we do, the planet will crater. You can have a healthy fossil-fuel balance sheet, or a relatively healthy planet—

but now that we know the numbers, it looks like you can't have both." Something has to give. And unless we humans want to resign our societies to the annals of history textbooks, it'll have to be the wealth and power of those within the industry. If there was ever a more urgent call to fundamentally restructure our economy, and our societies as a whole, this is it.

Exactly which aspects of modern capitalism will need to be phased out and just how quickly are intricate questions that merit serious thought and reflection. What is irrefutable though is the notion that if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change within the short time we have left, the capitalism we know and live today will have to change drastically. It may, as Chomsky suggests, have to dissolve altogether.

Anti-corporate crusader Naomi Klein, who's currently writing a book on climate change, has also taken note of the fundamental contradiction of market capitalism and a livable planet. As she wrote in *The Nation* in 2011, "Responding to climate change requires that we break every rule in the free-market playbook and that we do so with great urgency."

"We will need to rebuild the public sphere, reverse privatizations, relocalize large parts of economies, scale back overconsumption, bring back long-term planning, heavily regulate and tax corporations, maybe even nationalize some of them...Of course, none of this has a hope in hell of happening unless it is accompanied by a massive, broad-based effort to radically reduce the influence that corporations have over the political process." Achieving these transformations will be a monumental struggle in and of itself. The fact that we only have sixteen years left makes it seem implausible. So how do we get there from here? As Klein writes, "the only wild card is whether some countervailing popular movement will step up to provide a viable alternative to this grim future." Finally, after a quarter century, that movement is emerging.

Divestment and direct action will be vital tools in this struggle for justice, as will traditional tactics like delivering letters, pressuring elected officials, and yes, altering individual behavior so as to be more sustainable. But these efforts will be in vain if they are not guided by an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to the current political-economic structure. The climate crisis is truly, as the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change called it, "the greatest market failure the world has seen." But this failure may also be the greatest opportunity for a transformation. The climate crisis might just open up enough space to affect truly transformative change—to generate alternate theories based not on profit and growth, but sustainability and above all, continued existence. 

The Trouble with Professor Petraeus

ARUN GUPTA

When CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced that retired four-star General David Petraeus would be named Visiting Professor of Public Policy at Macaulay Honors College he lauded Petraeus as a “distinguished leader with extraordinary experience and expertise in international security issues, intelligence matters, and nation-building.”

Petraeus was highly regarded in Washington after overseeing the “surge” of 30,000 US troops into Iraq in 2007, which many credit with diminishing the anti-US insurgency. From there he headed up a similar surge in Afghanistan, was appointed director of the CIA and was considered presidential matter before resigning his CIA post in November 2012 after his extramarital affair with his biographer, Paula Broadwell, became public.

A flawed but storied figure, Petraeus has a lot to offer undergraduates if they do their homework. A good place to start is Iraq. The same week Petraeus’s professorship was announced, sectarian warfare flared in Iraq with the Shia-dominated government attacking Sunni protesters, leaving 190 dead after four days. Year earlier Petraeus made decisions as head of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq that are still reverberating today.

The story begins in April 2004. A year after US tanks rolled into Baghdad, toppling Saddam Hussein, the occupation was on the ropes. Public services such as electricity and water were in disarray, poverty and unemployment was rampant, and US military night raids, checkpoint killings and mass arrests had alienated most Iraqis. That month two spontaneous revolts, one by Shia in Baghdad and the other by Sunnis in Fallujah west of the capital, exposed the fragility of America’s national-building project. Then in May photographs and eyewitness accounts were published exposing systematic torture in the sprawling US prison camp at Abu Ghraib in Baghdad.

President Bush tapped Petraeus to ride to the rescue. In June 2004, Petraeus began revamping Iraqi security forces after their collapse with the aim of training 271,000 soldiers and police. The US strategy was to fight fire with fire, so it recruited former members of the ruling Ba’ath

Party by installing Ayad Allawi as prime minister in June 2004, creating a spy service culled from the dreaded Mukhabarat, and setting up the Special Police Commandos drawn from Hussein-era Special Forces. Petraeus and his staff were instrumental in backing the Commandos, who would quickly gain notoriety for extrajudicial assassinations, brutality and torture.

Now, the Bush administration choose Allawi, a CIA asset, to give a veneer of Iraqi rule, but the United States was paying all the bills and had personnel in every important ministry. Similarly, Petraeus tried to distance himself from the Special Police Commandos. In February 2005, The Wall Street Journal reported the Commandos were among a dozen “pop-up” militias, most with government funding and backing, totaling 15,000 men that began forming around September 2004. Despite thousands of heavily armed men organized into trained units at military bases the Americans claimed they “stumbled” across the militias after they were formed.

Yet a US government report noted that Petraeus and other senior officers concluded in the summer of 2004 that Iraq “urgently needed” Commando-style units, “trained, equipped, and prepared for counterinsurgency operations.” In June, Petraeus added \$850 million to police equipment and training, nearly doubling the budget. One of the main advisers to the commandos, Col. James Coffman, Jr., was described as Petraeus’s “eyes and ears out on the ground.” And Gen. Adnan Thabit, the head of the Commandos, told The Guardian recently that contrary to reports presenting him as the mastermind, the Americans choose him to run the outfit and the main person he “used to contact was David Petraeus.” The *Guardian* also claimed that Petraeus had been introduced to Thabit and other commandos by Coffman and another US military advisor and veteran of Latin America’s dirty wars, Col. James Steele.

Then in July 2004, Allawi said the government would establish “internal intelligence units called General Security Directorate, GSD, that will annihilate terrorist groups.” Jane’s Intelligence Digest reported that the GSD “will include former members of Saddam Hussein’s feared security services, collectively known as the Mukhabarat.

These former Ba'athists and Saddam loyalists will be expected to hunt down their colleagues currently organizing the insurgency."

In any case, Petraeus never hid his support for the outfit. He called the Commandos "a horse to back," and he gave "the fledgling unit money to fix up its base and buy vehicles, ammunition, radios and more weapons," according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

This history matters because the Special Police Commandos were central to tipping Iraq into a bloody sectarian war that prevails today. In January 2005, retired Gen. Wayne Downing, former head of US Special Forces, spoke approvingly of the "Salvador option" in Iraq, a reference to the use of US-backed death squads in Central America during the 1980s that killed tens of thousands of civilians. Downing stated, "We have Special Police Commandos now of the Iraqi forces which conduct these kind of strike operations."

Contrary to reports presenting the Commandos as a professional force, terror was their calling card. They aired a reality TV show called "Terrorism in the Grip of Justice," in which alleged insurgents confessed to improbable crimes like "drunkenness, gay orgies and pornography" and "raping and beheading civilians." The *Guardian* noted some insurgents had "the swollen and bruised faces and robotic manners of those beaten and coached by police interrogators off-camera." The show was said to be a big hit among Shia and Kurds, but was stoking religious tension by depicting Arab Sunni nationalists "as nothing more than a coalition of thieving scumbags."

And then reports started accumulating of torture and death-squad activity by the Commandos. Confessors who appeared on the show started turning up dead days later. In July 2005 a cable from US officials noted two incidents in which up to 20 Sunni men were tortured and killed by the Commandos, adding that the incidents gave credence to charges of "sectarian violence aimed at Sunnis." The cable also quoted an Iraqi human rights official charging that the seventh floor of the Interior Ministry housed torture chambers. Other accounts cast doubt on the Commandos being well-disciplined warriors, with evidence they would loot and torch houses in some cities.

That July, The *Guardian* reported on the seventh-floor torture chamber, said to be one floor below the offices of the Americans, and it detailed two other torture centers

Petraeus and other senior officers concluded in the summer of 2004 that Iraq "urgently needed" Commando-style units.

run by the Commandos. The *Guardian's* recent investigations state there were up to 14 secret prisons in Baghdad alone run by the Commandos. Gen. Thabit and Gen. Muntadher al Samari involved in the policing effort said Col. Coffman and Col. Steele, Petraeus's advisers, "knew exactly what was going on and were supplying the commandos with lists of people they wanted brought in."


Samari said "the American top brass and the Iraqi leadership knew all about these prisons. The things that went on there: drilling, murder, torture. The ugliest sort of torture I've ever seen." One American soldier likened the Commandos to the Nazi Gestapo, saying they would torture anyone whom they considered suspect.

Conveniently in June 2004 the US military issued an order not to investigate such abuses "unless it directly involves members of the coalition." This was an effective method to outsource torture and murder to the Iraqis while the Americans could claim ignorance.

Gen. Samari recounted one incidence in which he was having lunch with Coffman and Steele. The door happened to open and outside an Iraqi captain was torturing a prisoner who was hanging upside down. "Steele got up and just closed the door, he didn't say anything – it was just normal for him."

Over the next two years Iraq would plunge into civil war. Commando ranks swelled to more than 10,000 as the Shia-led government that came to power in 2005 stocked it with sectarian militiamen. At the height of the civil war in 2006, some 3,000 bodies a month were turning up on the streets of Baghdad alone. The well-documented study on excess mortality in Iraq published in the *Lancet* medical journal, estimated that by mid-2006 a staggering 655,000 Iraqis had died as the result of the war.

But Petraeus was long gone. In late 2005 he took charge of training programs for the entire US Army, writing its first manual on counterinsurgency warfare in more than 20 years. When he left Iraq of the 100,000 troops who were "trained," only one battalion was capable of independent combat operations. The fact that he returned in 2007 as head of the US troop surge was an admission that his training mission in Iraq was a complete failure. To this day Iraq is one of the most violent countries in the world, it has the highest rate of unemployment and poverty in its history and Iraqis continue to flee their homeland because of the violence, corruption and destroyed country the Americans left behind.

There is much Petraeus can obviously teach about "international security issues, intelligence matters, and nation-building." 

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Irregular Future

A Conversation with Matt Kennard

MICHAEL BUSCH

This past March marked the tenth anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, a decade of fighting which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, destroyed an entire country, and destabilized the broader Middle East. As journalist Matt Kennard argues in his new book, *Irregular Army*, the war in Iraq—as well as that in Afghanistan—also had deleterious consequences for the US military itself. Faced with declining enlistment numbers as fighting dragged on year after year with no clear end in sight, Kennard shows that the American armed forces looked for alternatives to populate its ranks. In the process, regulations were weakened, rewritten and in some cases, not enforced.

The results are disturbing. According to Kennard, the military was suddenly tolerant-

ating the open presence of white power extremists and street gang members in the rolls, and actively recruiting physically and psychologically unfit Americans to fill enlistment gaps. While evidence suggests that these lax recruitment standards have already resulted in death and murder on the battlefield, the consequences could prove equally upsetting here at home. If the Sikh temple massacre is any indication of what may be in store, Kennard's argument that the United States faces an uncertain future as these veterans return from home from war couldn't be more urgent.

I recently spoke with Kennard about his research into these issues, how government brass has responded to these threats to the integrity of its armed forces, and what the irregular American army might mean for Americans in the years to come.

• • •

The tenth anniversary of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq just passed this week. Give us a sense of how the American military has changed in the last decade, and what it looks like today.

What happened to the American military, and I'm not the only one to point this out, during the war on terror and up to this day constitutes in some ways the biggest change the American military has ever gone through, at least since the twentieth century. What was implemented during the war on terror was a massive restructuring of the Pentagon under the aegis of Donald Rumsfeld, who had this plan to basically eviscerate the civilian US military and replace it with private contractors. This has come to be called "transformation" in specialist circles. He made this famous speech the day before 9/11 where he said that he wanted to modernize the military, corporate speak for corporatization of the military. We have to update our enlistment tech-



niques, our training techniques, and the like. Under all the rhetoric was a plan to really scale down the Department of Defense, and replace it with companies like Blackwater and other groups.

There was also a strategic shift that was part of this transformation that recognized that as the cold war wound down the United States no longer needed large land armies. The new threats facing the United States were asymmetrical, they were no longer state-based in nature but came instead from non-state terrorist groups. There were significant disagreements with this new proposed posture. Colin Powell, who had previously been the highest ranking officer in the military, argued that Washington needed to maintain a serious, large land army that could be deployed quickly in the case of emergency. In the end, Rumsfeld won out and the invasion of Iraq happened with many less troops than Powell and Eric Shinseki, chief of the army at the time, wanted.

Eventually, after Iraq failed to go as planned, Powell and Shinseki were proved right—that the American army really couldn't just go into a place like Iraq, smash the place up, and then get out within a couple of years. They were in a quagmire there, and this was shown to be the case again in the case of Afghanistan. As the war got worse and worse over time, and in the absence of conscription, the military found itself needing more and more personnel—precisely the opposite of what Donald Rumsfeld had wanted or foreseen. In order to do this, to pump up its numbers, the military began to change its regulations. They did this with some groups quite openly. For example, the raised the ceiling age for enlistment, from thirty-five to forty, and then again to forty-two, because they didn't get the numbers they needed the first time.

The stuff that I looked into were the groups that the military was a little more embarrassed about—from white supremacists to street gang members to criminals. For some reason, I'm the only journalist, for some reason, who's done serious work on the presence of gangs and neo-Nazis in the American military. There's been quite a lot of work done on criminals in the army. Henry Waxman investigated the presence of serious criminals in the military. Over the last ten years, you've seen a complete realignment of who can qualify as a soldier in the United States military.

Now, I've never been a big fan of the military adventures of the United States, but everyone knows that the standards in the US military were always quite high. This was especially the case after Vietnam—twenty-five years were spent basically jiggering the military so that the standards were high. During the war on terror, all of this was completely jettisoned. So what we have now is a military that

is not held up as an exemplar of professionalism around the world, but as an example of what happens to a military when there aren't enough troops and the government is too scared to institute conscription.

There're questions, of course, about how this will play out moving forward. Take the Libya intervention by NATO, for example: the whole debate was rehashed again. Barack Obama actually endorsed the Rumsfeldian idea that the United States needed to slim down. If some state-based enemy rises again and the US military has to deal with it, you'll probably see the exact same issues crop up again. And in fact, if you look into it, you'll find that many of the standards haven't been restored to their former levels even though recruiting quality troops has gotten easier with the current economic crisis. The military is unrecognizable now from what it was when the war on terror started. And that's not a mistake. It's basically become exactly how Rumsfeld envisioned it: a hollowed out military replaced by private contracts working alongside special forces. Jeremy Scahill's new book, *Dirty Wars*, for example, documents how JSOP are now carrying out many of the tasks that were previously the responsibility of the American military. Everyone says that the war on Iraq was a massive personal failure for Rumsfeld, but in fact, in many ways, his vision has won out.

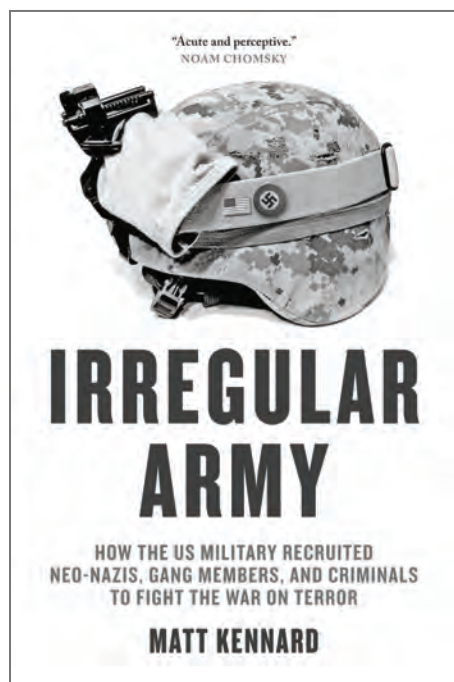
The most disturbing finding of your research is the extent to which white power extremists have penetrated the United States military, something which first came to light as far back as the mid-1970s. How do they get in? What happens when they get discovered? What have been the most immediate consequences of their presence in warzones?

It is important to note that there are a raft of regulations that govern the presence of white supremacists, both during the recruitment phase, and then afterwards if they are discovered within the ranks. But the trouble with these regulations is that they've always been reactive. So you have cases where white supremacist cells have been exposed in different bases, from the 1970s. And every time this happens, whether that is a neo-Nazi killing another soldier, or killing someone in a nearby town to a base, every time there is a short-term outpouring of anger, the military responds by saying that they have tightened regulations. The first time something like this happened, in 1976, the military said being in a white supremacist organization was inconsistent with service. That can be interpreted any way you want. To my mind, the ambiguity related to the regulation of white supremacists is deliberate, i.e., the military doesn't want these people in the military, but in times when they can't afford to kick troops out, the regulations allow them enough leeway to ignore it, or

have enough plausible deniability, to leave these people in.

During the war on terror, regulations were basically not adhered at all. So, for example, you had people who were able to get into the military with swastikas tattooed on their skin. I spoke with the head of recruitment for the United States army about this, he said, “well, there’s first amendment rights.” If someone says they like the way swastikas look, or claim that they are Native American symbols which look very similar, then the commander can basically blow it off. So, there are regulations on tattoos—which are frequently the best indicators for recruiters—that were broadly ignored.

And then you had the other side, when these people are discovered after they are already in, there are other



regulations to deal with that. So, if you are caught posting messages on websites like StormFront, or writing racist messages on places like the New Saxon, a sort of neo-Nazi Facebook, you can be disciplined, and maybe even kicked out of the military altogether. But that didn't happen, either. In fact, I received reports from the Criminal Investigative Command (CID), which is the criminal investigative arm of the Army, about what happened to white supremacists when they were caught. Some of it is really shocking. In one instance, a soldier passed a military explosives manual to the leader of a white supremacist group. In the report I received from the CID, the military terminated the investigation because the soldier in question had been shipped off to Iraq. This is somebody who may have been planning a domestic terrorist attack! Jaw-dropping.

There are obviously first amendment rights. But if you

are training, equipping and then sending white supremacists to a country of brown people, I think that really does trump first amendment rights. I focus on the war on terror, but I could also mention Michael Weigh Paige, who carried out the Sikh Temple Massacre last year. He was serving in the 1990s, a period during which there was supposedly a harsh crackdown on white supremacists in the military, by the military, following the Oklahoma City bombing. *Stars and Stripes* interviewed friends of Michael Weigh Paige, who told the paper that he was completely open about his Neo-Nazism the

But it's not just white power groups that are populating the military. Other gangs have also colonized the American armed forces. Can you talk about what other gang activity exists within the military?

It's tempting to focus on the problem of white supremacists in the military when thinking about undesirable elements in the armed forces. It makes sense—these people often have goals which are terrorist goals. They want to kill people to further the cause of racial holy war. But in terms of numbers, and everyday violence, the street gangs problem in the military is much more serious. I have spoken with security experts who estimate that up to 10 percent of the American military is made up of gang-affiliated troops.

During the height of the war on terror, we saw it all along the border, where active duty soldiers carried out the murders of other soldiers, not to mention of the enemies of local drug traffickers nearby to the bases. Gangs see the military as a good way to traffic drugs—when soldiers are on a base, they are not subject to the same rigorous law enforcement as you are when you are civilian. Cartels look to recruit soldiers who are on bases, or recruit soldiers

We've seen evidence of this up to this day. Recently, there was a case in which the DEA carried out a sting operation on a group of soldiers. DEA officers posed as representatives of a Mexican drug cartel, and offered the soldiers money in return for carrying out hits against rival factions. The soldiers agreed. The DEA knew this was a good tack to take, because they're very aware that trafficking groups are in constant contact with active duty

personnel.

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have dragged on, you show that the military increasingly focused on recruiting kids and older adults to serve in the armed forces. How did they go about doing this, and what have been the consequences?

The most serious consequences have been the number of people who have died. I focus on older people and the young in my book. The military has regulation on the issue of age. It used to be that basically no one over the age of thirty-five could be recruited into the military. That changed during the war on terror when the age was raised, first to forty and then to forty-two years of age, because they were struggling to find troops. That regulation wasn't arbitrary. When soldiers are older than thirty-five, they face higher risks on the battlefield related to psychology and physical fitness. I discuss a couple of soldiers in the book who died during their service, likely as a result of their relatively advanced age. One died of a heart attack; the other of appendicitis. So that's the most serious consequence—people have died as a result of these changes.

The other consequence has to do with the moral issue of colonizing the high schools of America. It's not well-known about, but No Child Left Behind Act—which was passed with great bipartisan fanfare in 2001—has a small caveat which mandates that schools turn over the phone numbers and addresses of all their students to military recruiters or face funding cuts if they refused. At first, this wasn't used much because the war on terror hadn't yet started. But when troop deficits became a chronic issue, it began to be used all the time. Recruiters spent a decade terrorizing high school students—cod calling them, turning up at their houses, turning up at their schools—trying to persuade them to go to war.


There was one famous case where a high school student recorded a recruiter telling him that his life would be finished if he exited the Delayed Enlistment Program. Under the DEP, students can sign up for the military while still in high school—basically promising to join the military upon graduation. But it is not binding. But many students aren't told it isn't binding. In this case, the student recorded the recruiter telling him that if he failed to honor the DEP, he wouldn't be able to get loans for college, wouldn't ever be able to find a job, and the like. It didn't work on this one kid, because he was smart and decided to record his conversations with the recruiter. But you can imagine how often these sorts of tactics, and this kind of manipulation, *do* work on young people. And you can imagine how many of these young people were sent to Afghanistan and Iraq, and in all likelihood some of them have died. In combination, then, these two sides of the age

issue highlight an overriding moral issue, and that is the fact that tons of people who should have never been sent to war, were.

You suggest that the full consequences of the irregular army cobbled together by the United States haven't yet been fully realized. Are we in for an irregular future? If so, how?

In my opinion, the war on terror—which was fought mainly in Iraq and Afghanistan, but in other places as well—is now coming home. All of the extremists that the Pentagon allowed into the military during the war on terror are coming back to the United States, and not to become priests. These people have their own goals, and they will spend the next decade or two attempting to bring these goals forward. We see this in smaller scale following the first Gulf War. Take the Oklahoma City bombing, which took place a few years after the United States withdrew from Iraq the first time. These things have a fairly long incubation period. My sense is that because the military has trained so many crazy people in advanced weaponry and tactics over the past ten years, there will be cases—hopefully not as serious as the Oklahoma City bombing—like the Sikh Temple Massacre, cases where the violence of disgruntled veterans with a racial bone to pick, or any other really, will be taken out on random civilians.

We are seeing that slowly. Recently, there was a case in which a group of soldiers at a base were planning to assassinate President Obama and poison the water supply in Washington. Thankfully, this plan was busted, but we have to ask ourselves: how many similar cells like this are in the United States, and how long will it take for us to see them act out their fantasies? I'm not particularly optimistic about the future on this front. There's another point that must be made, as well. It is sometimes said that a country's military is a reflection of the population from which it is drawn.

Many problems we witnessed in military during the war on terror were reflections of a society that was changing under the stress of fear that was inflicted on the American population. We can point to the rising numbers of convicted felons allowed into the military, but that was merely a reflection of the increasing number of people being locked up across the country. We can point to the increasing numbers of overweight soldiers allowed to serve in the military, but again, this is just a reflection of an increasingly obese American society. So in a sense, many of the troubles experienced by the US military right now are a reflection of a society which is going backwards in key respects, not forwards. Hopefully this will change. But there are very few indicators right now to suggest this is likely going to happen. 

Recovering the Black Cultural Front

► Brian Dolinar's *Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation*, University Press of Mississippi, 2012

ANNE DONLON

Commonly, we hear of figures in the 1930s and early 1940s who may have been involved in John Reed Clubs, radical newspapers, writers congresses, and communist-affiliated organizations, but later in the forties and fifties, broke with the Communism, denounced its politics, or took efforts to publicly distance themselves from the Party. Versions of this narrative attend the biographies of Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. The cartoonist Ollie Harrington was different. Indeed, as Brian Dolinar observes in *Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation*, "Different from the experiences of other black writers and artists who broke with the Communist Party, Harrington moved closer to the Left in the postwar years."

Ollie Harrington began drawing cartoons for newspapers as an art student in the 1930s, and after World War II became politically active working on public relations for the NAACP in its various campaigns. He went on to be much more involved on the Left, however, traveling to the Soviet Union, and living in East Berlin from 1961 until his death in 1995. In the 1930s, before going to the Yale School of Fine Arts, Harrington published cartoons in the *National News* and the *Amsterdam News*. He was working for the latter when the paper fired several writers, and workers went on strike for eleven weeks and organized a boycott. When the strike was settled, Harrington returned with the "Dark Laughter" cartoon series that featured the character "Bootsie" that he continued to draw over the next several decades. "Bootsie" became a popular culture touchstone.

Within a few years, his cartoons were picked up by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a black weekly newspaper with a sizeable circulation. Harrington syndicated his cartoons to many publications, and he joined Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s newspaper *The People's Voice* in 1942. During World War II, he traveled to Europe to cover the war, among the first African American journalists the United States War Department allowed to cover a war. Harrington's political commitment markedly increased after World War II, when he worked for the NAACP on a campaign for justice in the face of racialized violence in Columbia, Tennessee

and Monroe, Georgia in 1946. In the same year, he worked for justice for Isaac Woodward, a black veteran who was beaten and made blind while traveling through South Carolina in uniform.

It was during this that Harrington's Bootsie cartoons became more politicized. Soon after, Harrington split with the NAACP and became more active on the Left. He was involved in Labor Party campaigns, did public relations for the Communist candidate Ben Davis's bid for a seat on the City Council in New York, and chaired a committee to elect W. E. B. Du Bois to the Senate. He worked for Paul Robeson's newspaper *Freedom* in the late 1950s, and contributed to many campaigns to defend people against anticommunist persecution. Harrington eventually moved to Europe to escape the political climate in the United States., living out the remainder of his life in East Berlin.

Brian Dolinar's book devotes one of its chapters to Harrington, and argues that though Harrington was a prominent popular artist of the time, his association with communism led to his subsequent obscurity. Dolinar is interested in recovering such figures and histories. Focusing on the impact of the National Negro Congresses and the work of Langston Hughes, Chester Himes, and Ollie Harrington, Dolinar points out the many ways that politics fostered in the 1930s continued to inform the politics and art throughout later decades. In his chapter on the National Negro Congress, for example, Dolinar describes the interconnected organizing networks that brought artists and writers together, and introduces a cast of characters that recur throughout the remainder of the book. The section on Hughes links his newspaper reporting in the Spanish Civil War to the "Simple" stories he published in the *Chicago Defender* in the following decades. Jesse B. Semple's observations in the later stories often present political views continuous with his views in the 1930s, including critiques of the anti-communist efforts of the state. The chapter on Chester Himes points out the connections between his experience and writing during the Works Project Administration era, and the detective fiction Himes wrote in the following decades.

Langston Hughes scholarship is somewhat haunted by his testimony at the House of Un-American Activities Committee, where he infamously denied affiliation with the Communist Party. Dolinar provides a more complex picture than the public testimony presents. Looking at transcripts from the private questioning conducted by



"BROTHER BOOTSIE WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOU DRIPPIN' IN TO WISH US MERRY CHRIS'MUS. BUT WE GOT A FEW THINGS TO DO RIGHT NOW, SO DROP BY SOME OTHER TIME... AROUND' THE FIRST OF APRIL FOR INSTANCE!"

Roy Cohn two days previous to the public hearing, Dolinar points out the contrast between the charged private testimony—in which Hughes stated there was a time he desired a Soviet form of government and coyly responded to Cohn's queries about other Party members that he'd never seen anyone's party cards—and the more subdued tone of the public hearing. Dolinar argues that Hughes's performance in the public hearing shouldn't be seen as a "retreat from politics," but rather a strategy of survival. Hughes continued to be outspoken and critical after the hearing. Dolinar also notes that the literary works that concerned the committee were not only the radical poems of the 1930s, but also recently published Simple stories including "Something to Lean On," and "When A Man Sees Red," in which Simple stands up to his boss and says, "In my opinion, a man can be black or red—or any color except yellow. And I would be yellow if I did not stand up

for my rights."

Dolinar also sets out to rescue novelist Chester Himes's engagement on the Left and reinsert it into scholarly conversations on Himes. Himes first published prison stories in *Abbott's Monthly* and *Esquire* as an inmate in the 1930s, and, after he was released in 1936, he eventually found work with the WPA. Working at the Cleveland Public Library, he met Jo Sinclair, the pen name of the lesbian Jewish writer Ruth Seid, who based a character on Himes in her unpublished work of fiction, "They Gave Us a Job." Himes went on to write for the Ohio Writer's Project, and connected with the Karamu House in Cleveland. At Karamu House he met Langston Hughes, and made connections that eventually led him to Hollywood. The geography of this chapter shifts the hubs of black literary activity from Harlem and Howard to Cleveland and California. Himes, like Harrington, Richard Wright, and others, eventually emigrated to Europe to escape the racism and political suppression of the United States.

Dolinar's work is strongest in his narration of the detailed histories surrounding these figures. His account of Hughes in the Spanish Civil War is well-researched, providing a meticulous account of Hughes's activity in Spain, his activism on behalf of Spain in the United States, and the cast of characters Hughes interacted with during that period of his life. Dolinar provides thorough accounts of the National Negro Congresses and the efforts that grew out of them, including performances, rallies, and the George Washington Carver School in Harlem, a "people's institute" where the artist Elizabeth Catlett taught a class on "How to Make a Dress" and Gwendolyn Bennett taught a class on black history. The book's storytelling is gripping, and Dolinar makes a particular effort to point out the crossings of his main players: Hughes meets Himes at Karamu; Himes and Harrington attended an "international party" hosted by Hughes in 1944; Hughes compares his Simple character to Harrington's Bootsie when proposing Harrington as an illustrator for a book project (though the collaboration didn't come to fruition). **A**

Black Cultural Front's organizational strategy emphasizes individual figures, though certain networks and infrastructures clearly emerge as crucial. The chapter on the National Negro Congress underlines one key organizing hub that brought a wide range of artists, activists, and writers into contact. In the chapters on Hughes, Himes, and Harrington that follow, although individuals take the forefront, infrastructures like the black press, especially its weekly newspapers, institutions like Karamu House, and the Works Project Administration play key roles in creating threads that run through these individuals' lives. Dolinar's overall project might have benefited from the addition of a few explanatory remarks on the logic of the book's organizing framework, and on the importance of certain trends that appear within the latter chapters without structural highlighting. For instance, while the presence and contributions of women like Gwendolyn Bennett, Marvel Cooke, Jo Sinclair, and Esther Cooper Jackson emerge, and the international aspects of these networks are noted, the book's organization doesn't particularly highlight them. Even the role of black newspapers, whose centrality is clear, is not particularly announced. The history Dolinar presents is rich and textured, and one can imagine future projects that take up some of the themes that go unremarked, or are mentioned in passing, such as the importance of children's book projects in this period.

Black Cultural Front aims to make a historiographic intervention. *Black Cultural Front's* title alludes to Michael Denning's groundbreaking *Cultural Front: The Laboring of Twentieth-Century American Literature* (1996), a book that describes various and interconnected artistic projects on the Left. For Denning, the "cultural front" is largely mapped onto the Popular Front, and the book focuses almost exclusively on the culture of the 1930s and early 1940s. For Denning, despite the fact that "the Popular Front was defeated," the *work* of the cultural front lived on to have a "profound impact on American culture, informing the life-work of two generations of artists and intellectuals." In distinction, for Dolinar, the cultural front itself existed into the McCarthy era. He speaks of "those who were still a part of the black cultural front" in the late 1950s. And, Dolinar writes, "it was the atmosphere of McCarthyism that put a strain on relationships and eventually led to the break-up of the black cultural front." Thus, he states in the introduction, "I will avoid referring to black cultural radicalism in terms of the Popular Front, the period of 1935-1939 that Denning says best characterizes the coalitional politics that attracted artists and writers to the Left. Such a framework, I would argue, is too narrow to understand this phenomenon."

Dolinar's intervention, then, is to describe a cultural front concerned with antiracist activity, enlivened by African American players, that was not defeated with the Popular Front, and that did not give up the fight against fascism at home. The black cultural front Dolinar describes survived into the late 1950s and 1960s. In the *Cultural Front's* focus on the age of the C.I.O., May 1 or International Workers' Day is a touchstone date. In the *Black Cultural Front*, February 14 is the commemorative date that comes up again and again. Frederick Douglass's birthday was the day of the 1936 National Negro Congress, the second day of the first Southern Negro Youth Congress in 1937, and the day that the first issue of the *People's Voice* came out in 1942. February 14 was also Ollie Harrington's birthday, which informed the date of the February 10, 2007 "sketch in" of black cartoonists, discussed in Dolinar's conclusion. In the final pages of the book, Dolinar gestures towards connections between the black cultural front and the contemporary moment, citing Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins series of detective novels, set during the Cold War, and his "Tempest Tales," modeled on Hughes's Simple stories, and Aaron McGruder's *Boondocks* cartoon series, "one of only a small handful of black cartoons in syndication since the days of Ollie Harrington and the black press."

In taking a holistic view of the middle decades of the twentieth-century, Dolinar's text joins several scholarly works that link Popular Front and post-war literary culture. Recent literary studies like Alan Wald's *Trinity of Passion: Anti-Fascism and the Literary Left*; James Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*; Lawrence Jackson's *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960*; and articles like Smethurst's "'Don't Say Goodbye to the Porkpie Hat': Langston Hughes, the Left, and the Black Arts Movement"; and Frederick Griffiths's "Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Angelo Herndon" have highlighted the impact of 1930s left culture on literature in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Similarly, historians speak of a long civil rights movement, linking struggles in the 1930s directly with the period more commonly referred to as the civil rights era. Dolinar contributes a level of historical detail in the accounts of these lives and cultural networks, in particular in the recovery of Ollie Harrington. *Black Cultural Front* fills in some of the interpersonal and intertextual genealogies of black cultural work in the United States, and attempts to shift the narration of these lives from before and after Communism to an understanding of a continuous movement that had a dynamic relationship to a variety of political climates. 



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The Passion of the 99 Percent

► *Tenth of December* by George Saunders,
Random House, 2013. 251pp

JAMES HOFF

Tenth of December is George Saunders' fourth collection of short stories, and it is perhaps his darkest. It is certainly his most trenchant. Like *In Persuasion Nation*, published in 2006, *Tenth of December* offers an always sharp-witted but deeply emotional critique of twenty-first century America. However, while Saunders' previous collections have tended to focus on the perils of consumerism and technology, frequently examining the unnervingly and increasingly fine line between self and product, the stories in this collection are much more concerned with the emotionally and psychologically destructive social concepts of money, class, and status.

Like a Steinbeck novel on Mescaline, the stories in *Tenth of December* craft, with deep pathos and psychological depth, the debilitating effects of inequality and precarity, offering a stark and characteristically grotesque portrait of the human casualties of an economy gone wild. Towards this end *Tenth of December* offers up a menagerie of misfits, failures, and working class losers all trying just to make it through another miserable day. Harried mothers, desperate fathers, shell-shocked vets, failing business owners, dementia-riddled old men, and narco-rehabilitated bad-luck murderers populate the cluttered interiors and suburban and sub-rural landscapes of Saunderson's America, where ghoulish "hobos" stand around with signs that read "PLEASE HELP HOMLESS"—"hey sorry you lost your hom!"—and young boys named Bo are chained like dogs to backyard trees because their medication makes them grind their teeth. Again and again Saunders gets us inside the heads of these characters, often moving back and forth between members of different classes, and in the most pedestrian language possible, lets us eavesdrop on their wants and worries.

And *Tenth of December* is pervaded with worry! Characters fret about how to pay their bills, they obsess about their children's futures, they sweat their ill-health and old-age, they mourn their deteriorating beauty, and they struggle with their own deep resentments and their barely contained desires to do violence to those whom they believe have harmed them in some real or imagined way. But mostly these characters just end up hurting themselves. Unable to articulate or name the real source of their

unhappiness, and unable, anyways, to do anything about it, they trudge along, dreaming of fitter, happier, brighter lives, adoring spouses, European vacations, healthy, grateful children, and well-deserved promotions up the ladder of success. As one character puts it, trying to rationalize the sense of inferiority he feels in the face of other people's wealth and happiness: I "am not tired of work. It is a privilege to work. I do not hate the rich. I aspire to be rich myself." Such declarations feel like they could have been drawn straight from the mouths of some right wing Fox pundit, and indeed, many of the characters of these stories resemble your typical Fox viewer. In language as simple as an eighth grade book report, Saunders artfully renders the mental detritus of his characters' conservative thoughts, but without a trace of condescension. Saunders' characters are without a doubt deeply flawed, profoundly credulous, and wholly interpolated into capitalist consumer culture, yet time and again we feel a close kinship with them, a kinship of shared helplessness and suffering.

Nowhere is this sense of kinship and mutual suffering more deeply manifest, perhaps, than in the main character of "Home." Mike is a US soldier who has just come back from the Middle East to find his wife and children living with another, much wealthier, and seemingly psychologically healthier, man. Raised poor, and freshly returned from a war most Americans have already forgotten about, Mike's resentment finds outlet in his continual criticisms of his former wife and family. Not surprisingly, these criticisms have much to do with the incredible inequality he sees around him upon his return. While his mother is evicted from her home, his former wife seems to be doing just fine, living in a big home with three cars in the driveway.

"Three cars for two grown-ups, I thought. What a country. What a couple of selfish dicks my wife and her new husband were. I could see that, over the years, my babies would slowly transform into selfish-dick babies, then selfish-dick toddlers, kids, teenagers, and adults, with me all that time, skulking around like some unclean suspect uncle."

As Charles Bukowski eloquently put it in *Barfly*, "nobody suffers like the poor," and Saunders seems keenly aware of that dictum in this collection. In fact, "Home" offers a startling metaphor (a kind of objective correlative for the entire collection) of the ways in which the poor themselves are manipulated to bring suffering upon others. As Mike plans his revenge against his wife and her

new husband he thinks back upon a time in high school “when this guy paid me to clean some gunk out of his pond.”

“You snagged the gunk with a rake, then rake-hurled it. At one point, the top of my rake flew into the gunk pile. When I went to retrieve it, there were like a million tadpoles, dead and dying...their tender white underbellies had been torn open by the gunk suddenly crashing down on them from on high...I tried to save a few, but they were so tender all I did by handling them was torture them worse....

It was like, either:
(A) I was a terrible guy who was knowingly doing this rotten ting over and over, or
(B) it wasn't so rotten, really, just normal, and the way to confirm it was normal was to keep doing it, over and over.”

In his typical fashion, Saunders takes a seemingly mundane recollection or observation, and draws deep wisdom from it. Indeed, this story of senseless destruction and learned indifference haunts the collection and provides a potent image of the connections between the military war in Iraq and the economic war at home, which grinds up and tosses away the budding tadpoles of human potential.

In this respect Saunders' characters in *Tenth of December* resemble those of the great Nathaniel West or Raymond Carver: these are ordinary folks whose lives have come undone for reasons seemingly beyond their control. Whether it's the inferiority-fueled violence of the inept but ruthless rapist in “Victory Lap,”—continually hampered and hectored by the abusive words of his dead step-father—or the shame and status-driven mistakes of Saunders' latest everyman in “The Semplica Girl Diaries,” who bungles away his lottery winnings on an ill-conceived—and grotesquely inhumane—birthday present

for his young daughter, Saunders captures the continual folly, disappointment, and banal brutality of contemporary capitalism. And although the depressing world that Saunders paints for us can sometimes feel an awful lot like the last scene of *Day of the Locust*, in which a crowd of celebrity hounds bursts into self-destructive riot, it is also, contra West, a place of redemption and grace.

Indeed, rather than West or Carver, it is perhaps to



Flannery O'Connor that Saunders owes the greatest debt, for, as with the best of O'Connor's short stories, misfortune and sorrow are always a step away from salvation, and many of the stories in *Tenth of December*, though morbidly, sometimes hilariously, fixated upon the humiliations of and alienations of life under capitalism, end with a kind of unexpected flash of realization or triumph. In “Victory Lap,” for instance, the “bean-pole kid,” Kyle Boot, whose every action and every thought is tightly controlled by his domineering, but seemingly well-intentioned, parents, manages to transcend that rigid adherence to rule and authority only by beating to near death the man who tries to abduct, and who plans to brutally rape, his high

school crush and neighbor. Saunders describes young Kyle, Perhaps the only traditional “hero” of the collection, sprinting across the forbidden yard, barefoot and shirtless, in the throes of a kind of epiphany—“oh God, suddenly he saw what this giddy part of himself intended, which was to violate a directive so Major and absolute that it wasn’t even a directive.” Likewise, the mother of the mawkishly titled story “Puppy,” who seems to be living on the edge of subsistence, has a kind of visionary realization at the end of her long day’s suffering, that “*love was liking someone how he was and doing things to help him get even better.*” What would be considered pabulum from any other writer, rings as true here as any more eloquent observation on human nature by Emma Bovary or Isabel Archer.

Unlike O’Connor, however, who one feels is driven by a deep—perhaps deeply Catholic—disappointment in humanity, Saunders is guided more by the Buddhist call to deeply feel and understand the suffering of others. Whereas O’Connor’s temporary moments of grace are almost inevitably the result of an engagement with evil, Saunders’ characters experience redemption mostly through their suffering. Take for example, Jeff, the protagonist of “Escape from Spiderhead.” Like the eponymous Jon, from Saunders’ earlier story of the same name, whose sole experience of life is as a kind of captive product tester for young teens, Jeff also lives a life of altered reality and confinement. Forced by court order to live in a laboratory in order to avoid prison, Jeff is subjected to a series of experiments involving mood altering drugs with trademarked names such as Verbaluce™ (which allows one to speak as eloquently as a young Will Shakespeare), Vivistif™ (which, you guessed it, allows men to experience rock-hard erections indefinitely), and Darkenfloxx™ (which sends the subjects into a deep state of despair and inevitable suicide—the only way out of Spiderhead). Jeff’s escape comes only after he refuses to administer Darkenfloxx™ to one of the other inmates at spiderhead, and decides to take it himself instead. After smashing his head against the corner of the desk to escape the immense suffering caused by the drug, Jeff’ spirit slowly rises above the lab.

“From across the woods, as if by common accord, birds left their trees and darted upward. I joined them, flew among them, they did not recognize me as something apart from them, and I was happy, so happy, because for the first time in years, and forevermore, I had not killed, and never would.”

Saunders captures
the continual folly,
disappointment, and
banal brutality of
contemporary capitalism.

This romantic sense of unity, this nirvana-like state of connection and its subsequent absence from ordinary life, is a recurring theme of much of the collection and therefore this moment, which might otherwise feel schmaltzy or over-wrought, becomes truly profound. How, Saunders seems to ask, might such a sense of connection and meaning be achieved in real life?

“Tenth of December,” the eponymous, final, and easily most successful story of the collection, offers a tentative response to this question as well as a much needed and intensely moving antidote to the relentless hopelessness of stories like “The Semplica Girl Diaries” and “Home.” Here, finally, we find a story of connection, cooperation, and acceptance. The story traces the paths of two protagonists: a pale young boy, “with unfortunate Prince Valiant bangs” out for a day of battle against the imaginary forces of evil he’s contrived to destroy, and Don Eber, a middle aged man with a “brown spot” on his brain who is intent on ending his life before things get worse by simply laying down in the bitter cold and drifting off. These plans are cut short however, when the young boy tries to return Eber’s discarded jacket, and in the process falls through the ice on the frozen pond. Forced to respond to the needs of another, Eber is drawn out of his own misery and back into the world. Safe in the young boy’s house, Eber looks around and reflects upon his earlier decision.

“What a thing! To go from dying in your underwear in the snow to this! Warmth, colors, antlers on the walls, an old-time crank phone like you saw in silent movies. It was something. Every second was something. He hadn’t died in his shorts by a pond in the snow. The kid wasn’t dead. He’d killed no one. Ha! Somehow he’d got it all back”

Once again, to have not killed, to have lived and not caused suffering, to have put aside one’s own desires or needs for another, is to achieve at least some kind of peace, however temporary it might be.

Although the characters of *Tenth of December* may not understand their alienation—though too often they think of their suffering as something natural and inevitable—we do understand. We, the readers, get it, and end up feeling a strong sense of camaraderie and empathy with these characters, whom we wish to reach out and help. It is the construction of this deep sense of compassion that is, and always has been, Saunders’ real genius. The difference this time around, perhaps is that we are much more like these characters than we might ourselves be willing to admit.

The Heroism of the Middle

► Al Held, *Alphabet Paintings* at Cheim & Read

CLAY MATLIN

Allow me to begin with a personal anecdote: When I was in seventh grade in upstate New York in the early 1990s my math class was assigned a project in which we were told to put nails into a piece of plywood, about 10" by 18" in size, and then make some sort of geometric pattern by passing different colored strings around the nails. One of my classmate's mothers, let's call him LD, was Al Held's housecleaner. Al Held essentially did his project for him. I know this because LD told me the day the projects were due. While the rest of us brought in terrible looking boards with crooked nails and slack strings, LD had, what should in all likelihood be in the Al Held estate, a project so sophisticated that it was a marvel to behold. I was furious. The teacher proudly displayed it on the classroom wall. I never forgave LD. Perhaps indicative of the lasting irrationality of the teenage mind, I even carried a grudge against Al Held into adulthood. When I thought of his paintings I immediately remembered my own terrible string project, which was my first encounter with the artist.

Later on, I tried to familiarize myself with his work and came to know his bright, colorful geometric paintings from the mid-1980s into the 1990s. It was not, nor continues to be, I must confess, the type of abstraction that speaks to me. His floating geometric forms, and later abstract landscapes, remind me more of exercises in perspective and draftsmanship than rigorous painting. They read like a game of object placement: a beautifully painted triangle here, a cylinder there, a plane, a cube in the background—all of it elegantly rendered, but a bit dull. More math than art.

Yet now I realize that this was an unfair characterization. While I am still lukewarm on his later works, his *Alphabet Paintings* (1961-1967), recently on view at Cheim & Read, culled from private collections and comprising seven paintings and two drawings, are real masterpieces of abstract painting. As David Rhodes elegantly put it in the *Brooklyn Rail*, the massiveness of the paintings, often constructed on panels—the smallest measures seven feet by six feet—is a bit of shock to viewers of contemporary abstract painting, whose experiences are bound by such concerns as the limits of studio space. Referencing both geometric shapes and letters of the alphabet, the paintings

are gorgeous and, in their own way, tremendously brave. Dore Ashton knew it, and there isn't much she's missed in the art world, when she observed in 1964 that he managed to avoid making work that was merely decorative. This is an especially difficult task with abstract painting, not because it is inherently decorative, but because it has the capacity to become decorative or to be made a vessel for decoration. Think of any recent home makeover show. At some point the lead designer will probably buy a blank canvas from an art supply store, apply some paint with a roller, and then proceed to place a random number of garish brushstrokes on it. And voilà, an abstract painting. This "painting" will then be hung in the new bedroom or den and will proudly be referred to as "art." While potentially aesthetically pleasing, it is just decoration, an object that serves to make the room more attractive by adding some amount of ornament. The "painting," or "art," is as banal as a new coat of paint. If successful, it melts into the room, becoming part of the whole.

For Held, though, there is no danger of this happening. The viewer is forced to confront his alphabet paintings, not only because of their size, but because of the rigor of their creation. Held was aware of the lurking seduction of decoration: "every art form has traps," he said to Ashton. "The trap in my style is decoration. The trap of action painting is verbosity." He was right, of course. As great as Jackson Pollock was, he can be verbose, especially in his early work which often says too much—the hand simply moved too fast. The later Pollock, say in *White Light*, (1954) or a little earlier in *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* (1950), is much more controlled, and thereby powerful, than the path-breaking, but nonetheless more talkative and wild *Full Fathom Five* (1947). For Held, paintings like the enormous *Circle and Triangle* (1964)—which measures twelve feet by twenty-eight and is comprised of four panels: the two on the left contain a magenta circle with a thinner blue circle around it, the two on the right a black right triangle with the top and bottom left corner missing—betray no ostentatiousness. Instead, and this is a rather difficult thing to accomplish when working on the scale of these paintings (most are twelve feet by nine-and-a-half feet), Held managed to create both real emotional power and calming influence.

The paintings are never gratuitous or verbose, which is in direct contrast to his contemporary Cy Twombly, who like Held was born at the peak and end of American inter-

war prosperity: 1928. (Perhaps there is something to that birth date on the cusp of so much profound loss: one went full bore into his paintings and one maintained a measure of reserve). There is no question that Twombly was a great artist—if you doubt this, just spend five minutes in *The Fifty Days at Iliam* room at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Nevertheless, Twombly apparently never encountered, with his calligraphic and cryptic scribbling, a canvas that wasn't in some way worthy of his masturbatory mysticism and declarations of genius. Take, for example, the thirteen foot high, fifty-three foot long *Untitled (Say Goodbye Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)* at the Menil Collection's Cy Twombly Pavilion. It's magnificent, but the work might also be the height of painterly egomania. Whereas Held always seemed to be finding his way through some perilous middle ground of artistic confrontation rather than engaging with the overly gestural or restrained qualities that seem to characterize so many of his contemporaries. It is this navigation of the middle that makes Held so important.

Much has been made of the “heroic” quality of Held's paintings. I'm not sure what this means; I assume it's an allusion to the size. Though the heroic need not only reference how big something is. Richard Tuttle's very small sculptures are heroic, maybe not in a way that is stereotypically macho or filled with the longings which we attribute to abstract expressionism and its second generation, of which Held was a member. Heroism ought to come in many sizes, and if we are to think of Held as heroic in any way, perhaps that heroism should be found in his desire, and capacity, to negotiate a middle passage. Robert Storr is right in his catalog essay: Held's paintings are emblematic of a conflict between a painter who wanted to, and eventually did, free himself from the strict modernist ideology of a mid-century Formalism that wanted flat, picture-plane hugging, anti-illusionism.

When Held painted the *Alphabet Paintings* the high priests of this vision were Michael Fried and Frank Stella. Held's paintings are a direct struggle with what Storr astutely calls an “ideological mandate.” One can see Held moving against the hard-edge painting of the time (embodied by artists like Kenneth Noland and Ellsworth Kelly), while the related, and generally overlapping, post-painterly abstraction that defined so much of the 1960s (think Frank Stella, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski, and Helen Frankenthaler) was too much beholden to the very flatness that Held sought both to confront and escape. There is depth and space to the *Alphabet Paintings*. They do not just sit on the canvas. Their size is only part of the story. Dore Ashton called Held's mission an “extravagant dream” in 1964, a dream to “find a fresh way to cope with the

implacable flatness of a canvas surface: to invent a unique means of dividing its area so that an authentic experience of forms in space is effected.”

We need dreamers, and we should not forget those like Held who wanted, as Storr correctly understands it, to contemplate the Cubist attack on “Alberti's model for projecting three dimensions into two.” Held's thick paint, almost like lacquer, but with a rich, supple quality, rises off the canvas. He achieved in the *Alphabet Paintings* a three dimensionality that his contemporaries were not interested in. Those enormous block letters are not just part of the picture plane. The relationship between Held and someone like Ellsworth Kelly is one of generation, not of vision. This is no slight to Kelly. Artists need not have the same mission. Held struggled with the confines of the canvas, and that struggle is evident everywhere in these works.

Again, perhaps we should not think of Held's heroism in terms of the size of his paintings, but in the challenge he posed to the romantic longings of abstract expressionism and the anti-romantic strictures of its second generation. It is a precarious position to navigate the middle ground, it requires a tension and emotional fortitude that is can be difficult to maintain. If we think of a great talent who was destroyed by the pursuit of the middle then we ought to think of Camus. Were his stakes higher than Held's? Probably. The desire to be a moral voice without being a moralizer, to speak of freedom without betraying your heart, to seek a position so resolutely in the middle that it forces one into silence has something of the tragic. Held had no such weight to bear. There is no deep tragedy in






his paintings, no Algerian War. Life does not hang in the balance if one chooses to react against Formalism or not. Silence here is not equated with complicity. Besides, what could complicity entail in the world of painting anyway? There are no art historical emergencies; no life or death struggles—at least not right now. This is not to imply, though, that there are not important questions worth asking, or answers worth trying to find.

Held's middle ground was important because it shows us that the middle *can* be traversed. We can pursue an avenue of investigation that is real and purposeful, something that does not succumb to the past or gives into the fashions of the present. Al Held was never fashionable. Yes, he made massive paintings when everyone else did, but his were different. The dream was his own. He *should* be fashionable. There *should* be a survey at that old folks home for white men known as MoMA. If Brice Marden can have a massive retrospective before his seventieth birthday then Al Held has been sadly dismissed. Did Marden deserve it? Maybe. There are others, though: some older, some dead, tucked away in MoMA's seemingly endless racks of

modernist paintings, now drifting away into history, often forgotten. Joan Mitchell could stand to have a retrospective. She was probably the greatest of the second generation, potentially even surpassing the accomplishments of the first. Soon the Agnes Martins will be put in storage too. The pattern is familiar. We celebrate those who stayed, but tend to forget those who died or left (Mitchell moved to France, Martin to New Mexico, Held split much of his time between Boiceville, NY and Italy) to forge their own way.

To see the *Alphabet Paintings* is to see Held with fresh eyes. To see a certain type of artistic bravery that is in short supply these days. His paintings are unironic, made with heart and motivated by important aesthetic questions. It is too easy now to be ironic. Real irony should be hard. It should count for something. The stakes must be high. Kierkegaard reminds us that irony is the urge to be a human being once-in-a-while. We must use it sparingly. Al Held's paintings show us that his humanity was never in doubt. And in the end, this all we can ask from our artists. 



The Very House of Difference

- Paul Taylor Dance Company: *Speaking in Tongues* and *Esplanade*. David Koch Theatre at Lincoln Center, Thursday, March 21
- *being Here...* by Marjani Forté, performed at Danspace Project

MEREDITH BENJAMIN

Paul Taylor, hailed as the “last living member of the pantheon that created America’s indigenous art of modern dance,” has been choreographing since 1954. His works, which range from playful to darkly tragic, are, at their core, distinctly American. He has made scenes from American life—from the congregational dynamics of a Southern Pentecostal church to life on the home front during World War II—suitable subjects for dance in a way that few others have managed, avoiding both bland universality and hokey literalness.

There are no pyrotechnics in Taylor’s works, no jaw-dropping leg extensions or dizzying sets of multiple turns. Rather, his basic choreographic vocabulary comes from the pedestrian movements of everyday life: walking, running, jumping, falling, and changing direction. If one of his dancers soars into the air, there’s a good chance they will finish that leap on the floor. The not-quite-pointed feet and relaxed *port de bras* (positions of the arms) result in an aesthetic that can seem strange at first to eyes used to more highly stylized forms of dance, but this understated style achieves a balance of athleticism and naturalness that allows emotion to come through unalloyed.

Speaking in Tongues, which premiered in 1988, is a dark work, taking as its subject “certain impulsive projection of private religious emotion into the public setting of a communal prayer service.” This is a challenging subject to tackle through movement, not in the least because none of the dancers ever actually speak. The practice of speaking in tongues is rendered instead by bodily convulsions, which interrupt the more conventional social dancing that opens the piece. By making visceral this experience of private emotion, Taylor also points to the underlying sexual dimensions of such expressions, as the projection of these emotions brings bodies into contact with one another.

As “A Man of the Cloth,” the clerical leader of this rural group, Michael Trusnovec was chilling: his stiff jerky movements in stark contrast to the convulsive abandon or impassioned unison of his congregation. His ominous

appearances in the doorway of the rustic wood-paneled backdrop often signaled a shift in the groups’ dynamic, as their dancing shifted from undirected social groupings to forcefully angry unison.

Taylor mixes hints of narrative and vaguely defined relationships with explicit scenes of unflinching realism, as when we witness “Her Husband” (Sean Mahoney) rape “The Daughter Grown Up” (Michelle Fleet) behind a row of chairs after her pleas for help have been rejected. This is a work about belonging and exclusion, but also about who and what is visible in a world in thrall to a sanctimonious leader.

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The exuberant *Esplanade* is about as far as one can get from the darkness of *Speaking in Tongues*. First performed in 1975, it has become perhaps Taylor’s most famous work, and with good reason. Set to two Bach concertos, *Esplanade* is the epitome of Taylor’s revolutionary approach to dance, in which pedestrian movements become the stuff of art.

The curtain rises to reveal nine dancers, clad in cheery shades of orange, pink, and purple, easy smiles on their faces. Their movement consists almost entirely of running, walking, skipping, and jumping, yet despite the limited movement vocabulary, *Esplanade* is never boring or repetitive, and is frequently surprising in its inventive simplicity. More than once, the audience gasped as women flung themselves into the air and into their partners’ arms or as a dancer stepped on top of, or balanced on, her partner’s supine midsection. Taylor explores the glorious potential inherent in everyday movement, emphasized by the genuine engagement of the dancers with one another. Parisa Khobdeh in particular stood out for her daring and exuberance, as did Michelle Fleet, the piece’s frequent odd woman out, who relishes rather than laments her independence.

The final movement, to Bach’s *Double Concerto for Two Violins in D Major*, is an exhilarating celebration of the joy of falling and of testing the limits of balance. The pace increases as the dancers enter and exit, throwing themselves at the floor with joyous abandon. Falling, in this dance, is not merely a means of getting to the floor, or a contrast to rising, but is a valid and purposeful movement unto itself.

The company looks magnificent in the David Koch Theatre at Lincoln Center, eating up the full expanse of the stage. However, both pieces were performed to recorded



music, which the theatre's sound system did no favors. The tinny sounds of the score for *Speaking in Tongues* were particularly grating. What a treat it would be to hear the spontaneous energy of the dancers matched by that of the music as interpreted by live musicians! For now though, we'll have to be content with the glorious opportunity the company's three-week Lincoln Center season offers us to witness the range and depth of Taylor's work.

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A woman sits or stands in front of us and begins laughing. Or is she crying? When she sighs, it's unclear whether she is exhaling from exhaustion or pleasure. Her noises slowly become more specific, the beginnings of words that are never quite formed, that can't be understood. This scene, with minor variations, is repeated a number of times in choreographer Marjani Forté's first evening-length work, *being Here...*, performed at Danspace Project last month. The struggle to be understood, to find one's voice, and to express oneself is at the heart of this work, which purports to examine "mental illness and addiction in the face of systemic injustice." The work was informed, in part, by the stories Forté heard from women from the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health, where she spent time doing research for the piece.

The cast of six women (Rebecca Bliss, Tendayi Kuumba, Jasmine Hearn, Autumn Scoggan, Alice Sheppard, and Samatha Speis, each powerful and captivating in her own way) included performers of diverse skin color, body types, and abilities. Difference is in many ways at the heart

of this piece, and yet Forté refuses to reduce any performer to being defined simply by a particular dissimilarity. I am reminded of a phrase from Audre Lorde's "biomythography," *Zami*, where she writes that "our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one difference." As the women of *being Here...* come together in various groupings (if only to separate again), Forté asks us to consider the ravages of mental illness and addiction as one of many (non-defining) iterations of difference.

In one section, introduced by the tell-tale ding-dong that signals the closing of subway doors, three different women enter and alternately amuse and frighten the passengers with their antics, ranging from overly brash singing along to an imaginary iPod to brash, expletive-laden rants. Forté asks us to look more closely at these interlopers we so often ignore: at what point do we consider someone "crazy" and thus ignorable? That the two white performers are the passengers, and the interlopers all women of color, forces us to think about the racial dynamics of this question: are certain bodies, dressed in certain ways (here, mismatched oversized layers) more likely to be interpreted as disruptive, as "too much"?

Forté's choreography makes the connection between body and speech explicit: the women's muddled enunciations are mirrored by facial and bodily twitches and shaking; the effort to speak is made visible. The role of breath and of the tongue as integral components in speaking are foregrounded as well. At one point, the dancers draw large lateral arcs in the air with their tongues, seeming both to

taste the air and to mark the space as their own. Later, another dancer, her back to the audience, voraciously sucks, licks, or kisses her own arms, exaggerating the smacking sounds of her lips.

In a duet with Bliss, Sheppard, in a wheelchair, assumed the active role, supporting and pushing her partner, driving and guiding the action with the same easy sureness she displayed in an earlier solo. Their duet, which began playfully, later turned aggressive, returning to the theme of emotional volatility that characterizes the piece. Having cast off Bliss, Sheppard puts her hand to Scoggan's mouth, in what is at once a violent silencing and a potentially compassionate act: relieving her of the burden of explaining herself to others.

The powerful penultimate section took on a militant tone, as movements became larger and powerfully aggressive. While the group continued to fragment and re-form, the more frequent collective movement in this section added to its forceful impact. In the final moments, Sheppard and Speis came to face each other, with a mix of compassion and curiosity. Their outstretched fingers almost touched, but then slowly changed direction to point back toward their own chests, in a shared moment of self-realization. This final image illustrates the hopeful potential of living and loving together “in the house of difference.” This dance is not about making oneself intelligible to others, but about the ways that we view and respond to what we consider unintelligible. **A**



Above: Marjani Forté's being Here... at Danspace.

Lies to Help You See

- *Isaac's Eye*. By Lucas Hnath. Directed by Linsay Firman. At the Ensemble Studio Theatre. 6 March 2013.
- *The Flick*. By Annie Baker. Directed by Sam Gold. At Playwrights Horizons. 27 March 2013.

DAN VENNING

I have recently seen two plays at venues devoted to presenting new work by emerging playwrights. At The Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST), a member company founded in 1968 and, according to its mission statement, “committed to the discovery and nurturing of new voices,” I saw *Isaac's Eye*, written by Lucas Hnath and directed by Linsay Firman about conflicts between Isaac Newton and the scientist Robert Hooke. At Playwrights Horizons I attended Annie Baker's *The Flick*, a new play directed by Sam Gold about employees of a small movie theater in current-day Massachusetts. Playwrights Horizons was founded around the same time as EST, in 1971, and according to its mission statement is dedicated to a similar goal—“the support and development of contemporary American playwrights, composers and lyricists, and to the production of their new work.”

Although differing in subject matter, the two plays had some striking similarities. Both were plays for small casts of four actors—three men and one woman—and both featured love triangles between the central male roles and the female character. Despite the historical plot of Hnath's play, each was staged in contemporary dress. Also, both *Isaac's Eye* and *The Flick* focus on essentially the same topic: interrelations between people of differing ages in the same field, who engage in a relationship that involves both mentoring and antagonism. The plays conveyed their messages with varying degrees of success, but ultimately both were fascinating to watch and valuable examples of new American plays by young authors.

At the opening of Hnath's *Isaac's Eye*, which was co-produced by EST and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (a foundation devoted to the development of science in society), an actor (Jeff Biehl) appears to let the audience know that many of the facts depicted in the play are true. The actor sets up the rules of the game: whenever something historically accurate is said, it will be written in chalk on a blackboard upstage. For example, Isaac Newton (Haskell King) indeed believed that light was made of particles, rewrote parts of the bible, and had a friendship with Cath-

erine Storer (Kristen Bush), the daughter of an apothecary in his hometown of Woolsthorpe. Robert Hooke (Michael Louis Serafin-Wells), the curator of experiments in the British scientific Royal Society believed light was made of waves, explained combustion, designed an artificial respirator, and explained elasticity (now called Hooke's Law). After setting up these rules, the actor, in Brechtian fashion, announces the first scene of the play and Newton, in a black sweater looking very much like an Emo-kid in his twenties, appears.

Just as they are costumed expertly by Suzanne Chesney in contemporary clothes—Hooke, like a modern-day narcissistic professor, is dressed in a blazer, button-up shirt, and wears stylish glasses—Hnath's characters speak in a witty, biting modern style. The crux of the play is that Newton wants to get into the Royal Society, and needs Hooke's recommendation. Hooke, having read Newton's papers, realizes that Newton's ideas conflict with his own and wants to stifle this potential challenger to his research. Catharine becomes involved with both men, realizing that as she gets older her prospects for marrying and having children are steadily decreasing. Biehl also reappears as Sam, a man dying of the plague, whom Hooke and Newton subject to experiments. Newton purloins Hooke's sex diary, a real document in which the elder scientist kept a log of all his ejaculations, as well as descriptions of an affair with his niece, Grace Hooke. Using this diary, Newton blackmails Hooke, demanding a recommendation for the Royal Society. Hooke deftly reverses the blackmail and demands that Newton conduct a proposed experiment on himself, putting a needle into his tear duct in order to bend his eye to see if colors change (demonstrating that light is indeed composed of particles). At the end of the play, the two men reach a sort of détente as Newton heads to Trinity College, Cambridge, to begin his studies.

As the actor reveals in the conclusion of the show, while many of the events depicted are “true” (recorded historical facts), others were invented. Hooke probably never really met Catharine Storer, and Newton and Hooke didn't meet until later in Newton's career, although they indeed had a noted rivalry. The narrator describes how these invented stories were “just a little lie to help you see something that's difficult to see.” What that is, precisely, is a bit unclear. Perhaps it has something to do with the personal problems that can accompany genius: the human price Newton must pay in order to become a triumph as



a scientist. Still, Hnath's play, for all its crackling wit and moving interpersonal conflicts seems to lack a significant purpose. *Isaac's Eye* feels somewhat unfinished. The play's greatest success is engaging concept that allows the audience to see the past as very much like the present. Newton, as played by King, seems like he might be somewhere on the autism spectrum due to some his inability to emotionally connect with others (particularly effective is King's way of delivering Newton's repeated line "yaaaaaay," a passive-aggressive, tentative line of semi-celebration). The acting was excellent all around and each scene was meticulously directed to wonderful effect by Firman, but the show, while thoroughly entertaining, ultimately felt a bit precious and left me wondering what, exactly, Hnath wanted me to see through *Isaac's Eye*.

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In *The Flick*, Annie Baker tells the story of Sam (Matthew Maher), Avery (Aaron Clifton Moten), and Rose (Louisa Krause), three employees of a single-screen, second-run movie theater in Massachusetts, "The Flick," which houses one of the last non-digital, 35 millimeter projectors in the state. The thirty-something Sam and twenty-year-old Avery clean the movie theatre auditorium after each showing, while Rose runs the projector. The (real) audience watches the show as if from behind the in-

visible screen—we look out into a stunningly detailed set created by David Zinn (who also designed the costumes) of movie-theater seats. Scenes are separated by the flickering lights from the projector. Because the action takes place among rows of seats, director Sam Gold (a frequent collaborator of Baker's, they worked together on Baker's Obie award-winning *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *Aliens*, and her recent adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* at Soho Rep) has created blocking that is meticulously detailed as Sam and Avery sweep, have discussions about life and love, joke, and learn about one another between showings.

Maher, who plays Sam, has a harelip and slight lisp that he uses to build a character pushed to the margins of society. Sam carries a torch for Rose, an alienated and angry young woman who has poorly-dyed green hair and wears boots and shapeless black shirts that obscure her femininity. Sam mentors Avery, who is working in the movie theater during some time off from college following a failed suicide attempt. Sam quickly learns that Avery is profoundly in love with cinema, and has chosen this job specifically because of the 35 mm projector. Early in the show, Sam and Rose reveal to Avery that they embezzle 10 percent of each day's receipts, because the unseen owner of the theater is a "total dick" and an idiot who will never notice. Avery is reluctant to participate since as a young

African American he feels he may be more subject to suspicion from the (possibly racist) boss. But Sam and Rose convince Avery to participate in the “dinner money” scheme out of solidarity.

At times the pace of the three-hour-long show is unbearably slow. Sam and Avery clean for what seems like minutes without speaking, or play games of “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” that take ages as Avery demonstrates his knowledge by connecting stars from different genres and time periods. (Along similar lines, one striking crossover between *The Flick* and *Isaac’s Eyes*, coincidental I’m sure, is that at one point Avery reveals that his middle name is Newton!) Sam, Avery, and Rose chat about work, astrology, and movies, creating a vivid and realistic depiction of coworkers in a dead-end job. Yet Sam and Avery develop a real connection: Sam tells Avery about his mentally disabled brother, while Avery shares the story of his suicide attempt. They become friends. Then two heartbreaking betrayals take place: while Sam is away at his brother’s wedding, Rose makes a play for Avery that is only stymied because Avery is more enraptured by the movie they are watching than by the woman at his side. And after The

Flick is sold, the new owner figures out “dinner money” and blames Avery alone. Rose and Sam let him take the fall, saying that while they need their salaries for rent and, in Rose’s case, student loans, Avery can just return to college on his parents’ dime. His time at The Flick has just been a detour.

The final scene is one of the most painful examinations of betrayal and failed friendship to come out of the contemporary theatre scene. The old projector has been replaced by a digital one, and Sam, who now works with a new partner (Alex Hanna) invites Avery back to the theater to give Avery the old projector and some 35 mm reels that the previous owner never returned to the distributor. It is a sensitive and thoughtful peace offering, if one that cannot fully make up for Sam’s betrayal of his solidarity with Avery. Avery responds with vitriol in a vicious speech in which he says that he and Sam were never really friends, just coworkers, and that he will go on to accomplish great things after college while Sam will always remain a meaningless worker in a low-end movie theater. Sam responds to this attack with grace in a marvelously written speech about human dignity, describing the fulfill-




Louisa Krause and Aaron Clifton Moten in *The Flick*.

ment that any person can find in daily life, or in love. It is unclear whether Sam and Rose have gotten together, but Sam finds satisfaction with his lot in life. As Avery storms off, Sam attempts to mend fences by posing one last, very difficult “Six Degrees” question. The audience waits for minutes, in silence, to see if Avery will return to solve it, or if he will leave Sam in silence. Avery comes back. While the two may no longer have a place in one another’s lives, in this final, extraordinarily moving moment, Baker allows the two to find mutual respect and a glimmer of the friendship they once had.

The Flick has received significant acclaim from critics: it was designated a Critic’s Pick by the *New York Times* and given glowing reviews in a variety of other publications. Baker’s play, under Gold’s expert direction and with these extraordinary actors and Zinn’s astounding set, absolutely deserves it. (I will be very surprised if Zinn does not win several awards for his design). But *The Flick* is not perfect, nor is it for everyone. Sam’s speech on human dignity at the end is absolutely crucial, since during the first act I frequently felt that I was watching something like facile “class tourism,” as a mostly upper-middle-class audience was given a window into the vagaries of blue-collar work. Clearly, this was intentional: we are meant to see the world of *The Flick* through Avery’s eyes until Sam reveals, so eloquently, a very different perspective on the world. On another note, several times I wondered if scenes could have been moved along faster, at least slightly. Baker and Gold aim for naturalistic detail, but the drawn-out pacing sometimes seemed positively sluggish and allowed dramatic tension to dissipate. Some audience members could not handle this: the middle-aged couple sitting next to me left at intermission, after joking periodically about the pace as the first act was running. While *The Flick* is a marvelous piece of writing, it simply would not work on Broadway, with a larger audience frequently less tolerant of plays that challenge them. In fact, Playwrights Horizons received enough feedback from some of its core audience that Artistic Director Tim Sanford sent a letter to the company’s subscribers alerting them to the length and silences. But in the end I found the challenges presented by Baker’s style led to a genuine breath of fresh air in a new play that is touching, heartfelt, and an important examination of human connection across lines of gender, education, race, and class.

While I ultimately felt that Baker’s *The Flick* was more satisfying than Hnath’s *Isaac’s Eye*, it is worth noting that Playwrights Horizons, on Theatre Row on 42nd Street, clearly has far more financial resources than EST, which is located in a tiny space on the second floor far west on

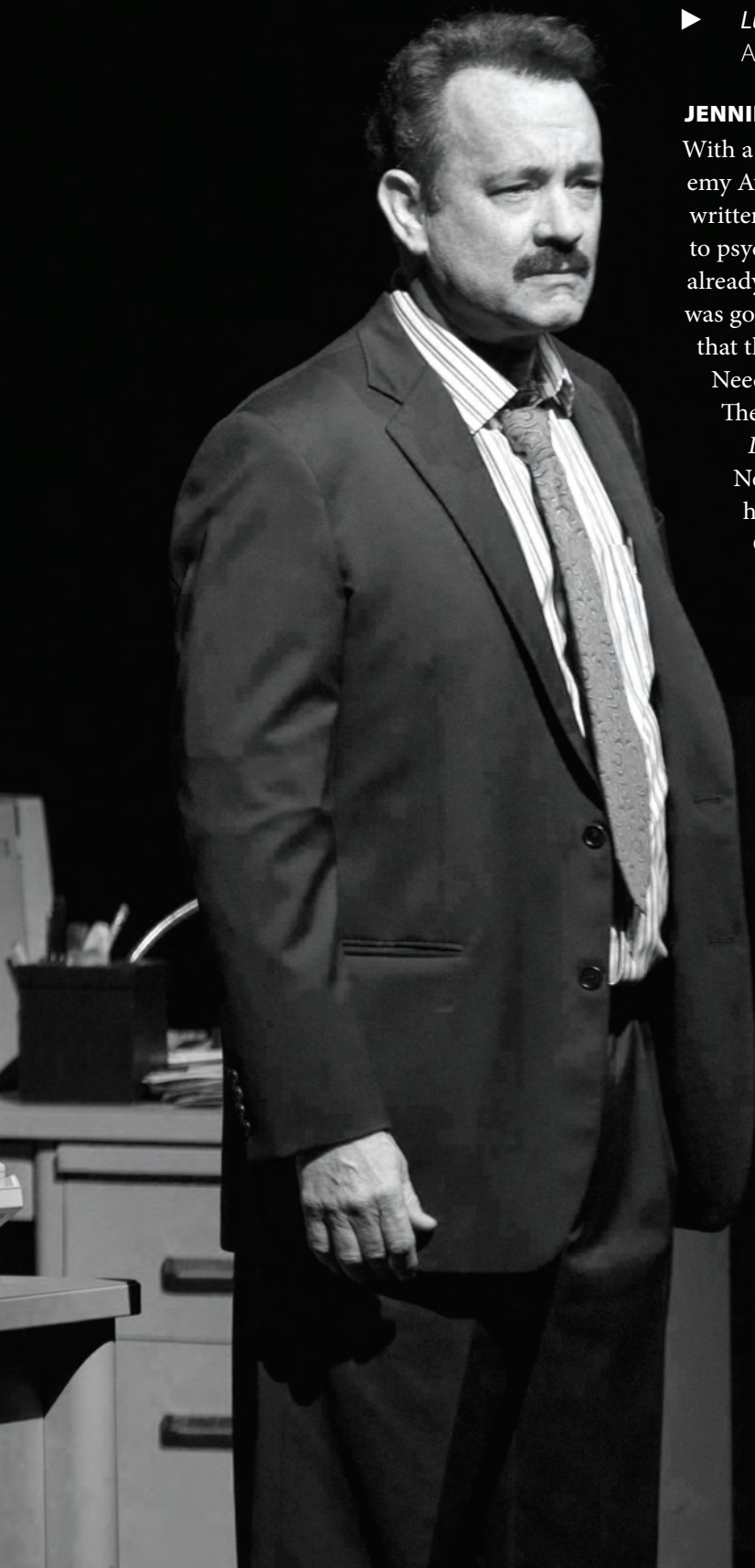
52nd Street. The two plays fit their individual theatres well, though: *The Flick* required the production values available with the resources of Playwrights Horizons, and the moving, enlightening, and slightly unfinished-seeming *Isaac’s Eye* seemed entirely at home in a stereotypical off-off Broadway space. EST can take bigger risks because it is a smaller, scrappier company that presents shows that are earlier in their development by playwrights earlier in their careers. Playwrights Horizons frequently produces works whose creators hope to transfer them to Broadway. Nevertheless, the two plays demonstrate that young authors and directors, even when approaching similar topics, can engage audiences by doing so in radically different ways. I expect that *The Flick* and perhaps also *Isaac’s Eye*, new plays by American voices who deserve to be heard, will soon be seen at regional theatres around the country, and I look forward to seeing Hnath’s and Baker’s next plays. (In fact, I’ve already got tickets to see Hnath’s *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney* at Soho Rep in May.)

As a final note, it has been a delight to review theatre for the *Advocate* this academic year. From the Fringe and *Into the Woods* and *Prelude* to these new plays, from avant-garde shows at HERE and Brecht at LaMama to *Einstein on the Beach* to competing adaptations of Shakespeare and the Metropolitan Opera, the variety of theatrical offerings in New York remains one of the city’s greatest attractions. My favorite from this season remains Dave Malloy’s *Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812*, which is returning May 1 at “Kazino,” a replica of a Russian supper club constructed especially for the show in the Meatpacking district. I’ve already got my tickets. I would not be surprised if *Natasha, Pierre...* becomes a fixture of the New York theatrical scene, much like *Sleep No More*. While that was my top pick, most of the other shows I reviewed did not fail to entertain and frequently challenge their audiences. Of course, I missed a great deal too, since it is pretty much impossible to see everything available each season. I eagerly await next season’s offerings, and wish a productive and enjoying summer to all my readers. 

Isaac’s Eye. By Lucas Hnath. Directed by Lindsay Firman. Presented by The Ensemble Studio Theatre and The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Set by Nick Francone. Costumes by Suzanne Chesney. Lighting by Les Dickert. Sound by Shane Retting. Stage management by Erin Maureen Koster. Featuring Jeff Biehl, Kristen Bush, Haskell King, and Michael Louis Serafin-Wells. At the Ensemble Studio Theatre, 30 January–10 March 2013. Tickets: \$30 (\$20 student/senior).

The Flick. By Annie Baker. Directed by Sam Gold. Set and Costume Design by David Zinn. Lighting by Jane Cox. Sound by Bray Poor. Stage Management by Alaina Taylor. Featuring Alex Hanna, Louisa Krause, Matthew Maher, and Aaron Clifton Moten. At Playwrights Horizons, 15 February–7 April 2013. Tickets: \$70.

Confidence Man



► *Lucky Guy* by Nora Ephron.
At the Broadhurst Theatre.

JENNIFER TANG

With a star-studded cast headlined by two time Academy Award winner Tom Hanks, I expected *Lucky Guy*, written by Nora Ephron, to be good. Still, I didn't want to psych myself up too much for it. After all, it had already been widely celebrated in the media. Plus, I was going to see only the fifth staging of it, so I worried that things perhaps had not yet settled into the groove. Needless to say, my expectations were not just met. They were surpassed.

Lucky Guy tells the tale of Michael McAlary, a New York City newspaperman who, having paid his dues writing about sports and local issues in Queens, lucks out with a once-in-a-lifetime story. As a result, McAlary is offered the opportunity to be a reporter at the Manhattan office of *Newsday*. Through his own tenacity, diligence, and a sprinkling of luck, McAlary builds his reputation and soon becomes a columnist for the New York *Daily News*—one of his dream jobs. As his career takes off, however, he manages to piss off colleagues, editors and his friends with his lack of grace and graciousness, and an ego matched only by his ballooning salary. At the height of his frenzied scramble up to New York newspaper industry, fueled by a bidding war for him between the *Daily News* and the *Post* and his own propensity to drink, McAlary winds up in a near fatal car accident on his way home in the wee hours of the morning. Afraid to miss a beat despite the gravity of his accident, McAlary rushes back to work and make some questionable calls in reporting which ultimately result in a libel suit. It is at this low point that he is also diagnosed with colon cancer.

And as if that isn't enough, McAlary must confront a petition signed by a laundry list of journalists condemning his reporting mistakes. All of it is too much. McAlary begins to doubt his conviction that he's a top-shelf New York City columnist. It is only through his loyal and supportive wife Alice, that McAlary survives. McAlary bounces back, and during his fight with colon cancer, writes a series of columns about the brutal rape of Abner Louima by a gang of New York cops which earns him the Pulitzer Prize. In accepting this award, McAlary recognizes that his writing and his life as a New York journalist is indebted to the vibrant people, culture, and industry that define the New York newspaper business.

The pacing of the play did well to mirror the pace of the newspaper industry as well as the frenetic life of New York City in the decades between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. The dialogue, the movement of the actors, the cutting of the scenes move quickly from one to the other, all of it orchestrated for maximum efficiency and punch. Only in scenes of tenderness and contemplation did the action slow down appropriately. On the whole, it was a story that had a place to go, a journey it wanted to take you on, but it was at a place where it could still look you in the eye.

The set was mobile and malleable, just like New York City tends to feel to those negotiating its dynamics. It was fitting for the production that the pieces that made up the set, the pieces those things that are key to telling the story, are almost always present on stage. The desks that made up the office of the newsroom, the bar where the journalists would all congregate around were either at the center or periphery, but never offstage. When transitioning from setting to setting, actors who were not part of the scene at that moment all help to move the set into place. What I also found interesting was that throughout the play, the floor is littered with bits of paper, adding to the slightly haphazard feel of the industry and the city. All of this said, while the props and lighting were effective they were never so prominent as to draw attention away from the actors and the action.

Truly, it would be difficult to redirect the spotlight away from the actors. Without doubt, their work and abilities were the truly spectacular aspects of the show. Tom Hanks was simply superb in affecting the range of McAlary's personalities as he developed from an eager wannabe, to a comfortable crime writer, to a brash columnist, to a man laid low by his own fallibility but who then rises again on



the strength of his own mortality. Surrounded by an impressive cast—including Peter Gerety as McAlary's mentor John Cotter, who was always at the ready with nuggets of wisdom and a stiff drink, and Christopher McDonald as his big talking lawyer Eddie Hayes—the acting sparkles. And Maura Tierney, who plays McAlary's wife and bedrock Alice, is never overshadowed by the star power of Tom Hanks.

But Hanks is clearly the heart of the show. His

postoperative, morphine fueled heart-to-heart with Hap Hairston (played by Courtney Vance) will leave audience members moved. We witness Hanks' prowess as an actor through his ability to communicate the rawness of his fall from grace, but also its absurdity, his absurdity. It is brilliant to watch.

Nora Ephron, being Nora Ephron, didn't miss the opportunity to highlight the dearth of women journalists in the 80s throughout the play. One character, the reporter Louise Imerman (brought beautifully to life by Deidre Lovejoy), denounces the newspaper industry for so easily and readily marginalizing women, rendering them merely as supportive players. It's true: even in the dramatization of McAlary's life, the women played only the roles of caring wife, aggressive career commandos, and shepherding managers. It is our luck that we had Nora Ephron to tell this story, and serves to remind us of the importance of continuously asking where the women are in the making, telling and retelling of the stories that make up our culture and our cities.

Lucky Guy was the last piece Nora Ephron completed before she succumbed to pneumonia in her battle against leukemia in 2012. She began this play after receiving her diagnosis and continued to work on it through her treatments. While she had completed writing the play before her death, it was still in production when she passed. It's a shame. If she intended to leave a piece that expounds upon her reverie of the profession of journalism, New York City, and the resiliency of both of these amidst constant commercial, cultural, and human flux, then she accomplished it. This production of *Lucky Guy* stands as a fitting act of respect and homage to its creator. **A**

The DSC Year in Review

The 2013-2014 Doctoral Students' Council elections are open, and students can submit their ballots online until April 30, 2013, at 11:59 p.m. In addition to program and at-large DSC representatives, students can vote for representatives on Student Academic Appeals Committees, the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Panel, Student Elections Review Committee, the OpenCUNY Board, and the *Advocate* Advisory Board.

At the plenary meeting in March, Provost Chase Robinson was the guest speaker. He responded to the resolution that plenary passed unanimously at the February meeting, affirming the Robert E. Gilleece Student Center's location on the fifth floor, written in response to a proposal to move the student-controlled spaces on the fifth floor to the C-level of the Library. Provost Robinson answered questions about the proposal and student participation in creating the plan. Following the meeting, the provost wrote to the DSC leadership to say that the administration would not be pursuing the move.

Also at the March Plenary, the body endorsed a letter on Open Meetings, urging the administration to ensure that programs are convening program standing committees and stated the DSC's position that program standing committees fall under New York State Open Meetings Law (cunydisc.org/resolutions).

Associate Provost Louise Lennihan replied to say that the provost had contacted all Executive Officers at the Graduate Center requesting they confirm that their programs were in compliance with the Graduate Center bylaws, particularly the ones that stipulate the existence of these committees and the membership of student representatives. If programs are not in compliance, they are to submit a plan for correcting that. Associate Provost Lennihan offered that students could be in touch with her if they had issues or questions.

The DSC plenary also passed a resolution on the CUNY Library Catalog, written by an ad hoc committee on the library catalog to which Curtis Kendrick responded by email (cunydisc.org/resolutions).

A fuller discussion of the issue and Dean Kendrick's reply is covered in this *Advocate* article: <http://opencuny.org/gcadvocate/2013/04/10/searching-in-the-cuny-catalog-not-working-for-you-you-are-not-alone/>.

On April 30, the Outreach Committee will host an International Student Town Hall.

DSC Activities in 2012-2013

Over the 2012-2013 school year, the DSC continued to offer services including its regular services—free legal services, fitness classes, room reservations, and discounted movie tickets. Standing committees and steering officers distributed grants, developed health and wellness resources, reached out to connect with students based at campuses other than the GC, and identified a variety of student needs. In addition to the work of the standing committees, several ad hoc committees and working groups addressed specific issues that arose this year, including parental leave, gender neutral bathrooms, the new fellowships and GC restructuring, blood drives and the FDA ban on MSM blood, and the Robert E. Gilleece Student Center. The DSC also hosted a Town Hall with the Adjunct Project this semester.

Outreach

The Outreach Committee held off-campus events targeting students based at City College, Baruch College, and Queens College. These events informed students about services of DSC and goings-on in the activism & advocacy communities within CUNY, connected students from various programs, and offered suggestions and follow-up assistance in regards to student organizing and representation within programs.

We also held a Student Organizing Workshop in the fall to help students better understand the tools and resources available to them within the CUNY community, their programs, and at GC. This workshop also served as an early connector for students who were interested in organizing around the issue of GC fellowship restructuring, following up on the Town Hall held the week before.

In addition, an International Student Town Hall will be hosted by Outreach on April 30. This gathering will feature as a guest speaker Douglas Ewing from the Office of International Students, and will serve as both an information session and a discussion space for issues that are common to many international students.

Grants

The Grants Committee funded twenty-eight grants this year, allocating \$18,628 to student-organized initiatives. In addition, they approved two \$150 start-up grants. In total, \$18,928 was allocated for student organized events and

activities for CUNY graduate students!

Student Services

Student Services worked to facilitate non-DSC room reservations for students. They also worked to get approval for student tabling in the eighth floor dining commons. In the fall, they organized the first ever finals library comfort station, which included a nap area, chair massage, and other amenities. The Student Life Survey closed April 18.

Health & Wellness

This academic year, DSC Health & Wellness has made uninsured and under-insured graduate students a priority. To this end, we've added a good deal of material to the Health & Wellness site (opencuny.org/healthdsc), providing information on how students can get insured, and offering details of free and low-cost clinics for treatment in the meantime. We've also distributed, by email and in pamphlet form, details of these resources available to uninsured students.

We've also launched a series of five posters, featuring a variety of health and wellness information and advice, which are displayed on the GC's electronic notice boards, and on our website.

The H&W site has also been significantly updated over the year, with information on free hearing tests and services at the GC, and on disability services at the GC and CUNY-wide; additional student-recommended health providers; and a new section on graduate student wellness, with resources for quitting smoking, and practicing safer sex; as well as details of ergonomic considerations for academia, and of where to get meningitis vaccinations in light of the recent NYC outbreak of the disease. Among our regular blog posts have been a number informing students about the impact of the Affordable Care Act—or rather the lack thereof—on NYSHIP coverage.

We just had a very well attended workshop on how best to deal with NYSHIP so as to avoid huge, unexpected bills and get the most out of one's coverage. This was jointly organized by the H&W Committee and the Adjunct Project. Our participation in the annual GC Wellness Festival also went really well—among other things, we offered students free massages, and giveaways promoting the H&W site so that more students become aware of it.

Another project of ours has been to inform students of the existing health, wellness, and family services available to them at the GC, and we've produced and have been distributing a pamphlet with listings of those services.

The Monday afternoon DSC coffee breaks—aimed at improving the GC environment in a small way by creating a social space at for students to interact with people from

other programs—has proven popular. We'll also shortly be sending out our annual health and wellness survey to reassess what services and provisions grad students most need.

And, finally, we've been working for some time on providing dispensers for condoms and other barrier methods for safer sex in the GC bathrooms so as to allow students easy, comfortable, and convenient access to these. We're yet to get approval from the administration, but we are continuing to work toward this.

Governance & Bylaws

The Governance and Bylaws committee this semester made several changes to DSC governance.

- ▶ It expanded the capabilities of OpenCUNY, our free and open source medium, by designating a new Coordinator for Organizing & Action to work directly with groups that share its mission—including the Adjunct Project, the Free University, and more.
- ▶ It made it easier to apply for DSC grants by increasing the number of review opportunities, raising the maximum start-up grant award, and clarifying the process for expedited review and revision.
- ▶ It took steps toward making the University Student Senate more transparent, accountable, and representative, by establishing a standing committee to support the USS Delegate in tracking USS Student Activity Fees and proposing revisions to USS governance.
- ▶ It increased the representation on the DSC's standing committees of international students and students from satellite campuses.
- ▶ It designated a standing Governance Task Force to aid programs in guaranteeing students' voice and vote in their respective committees for faculty membership, curriculum, admissions, and elections, as well as the program executive committees.

Technology & Library

The 2013-2014 Student Tech Fee Committee voted on a budget that included the following:

- ▶ \$11,000 for the purchase of hardware for the New Media Lab
- ▶ \$56,000 towards the purchase and installation of new wireless access points throughout the Graduate Center
- ▶ \$90,000 towards hardware for the IT Client Services
- ▶ \$253,000 for towards Mina Rees library databases
- ▶ Addressing lack of tech resources to Ph.D. programs located on other campuses
- ▶ Maintaining current printing capacity

The Student Tech Fee Committee was informed by the annual Student Tech Fee survey, which the Officer for Technology & Library publicized via the DSC website,

Facebook, and Twitter. In addition, she attended monthly meetings with the IT department for updates on student tech requests and IT projects. She also contributed to the ad hoc library committee's efforts to raise awareness around the current state of the Mina Rees library catalogue, that resulted in a new DSC resolution regarding the catalog and an Advocate article on the issue.

From the University Student Senate Delegate

Due to concerns about the University Student Senate's integrity, including questionable use of student monies, I decided that the Graduate Center cannot represent GC student interests through direct participation in the USS. This year I represented the interests of USS through alternate means including creating an Ad Hoc Committee to strategize how to negotiate a relationship to USS that is comfortable and ethical.

In order to be able to report on the events of the meetings, I used the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) to request minutes, budgets and expenditures. In addition to this I also maintain the Unofficial University Student Senate (UOSS) OpenCUNY site, where I post information collected largely through FOIL requests. By the end of my term I plan to have this updated with as much information as has been made available to me.

In addition to FOILING minutes, budgets, and expenditures I have requested other information that would give that information a context such as correspondence between the CUNY central office, administrators and Vice Chancellors. This information has proved harder to acquire because it has not been explicitly denied (so I cannot automatically appeal) but rather the process has been dragged out, making the grounds for appeal less obvious. The details of this will be included in the May issue of the Advocate.

The ad hoc committee has brainstormed several ideas for representing the Graduate Center's interests with the University Student Senate, particularly in the misuse of our student activity fee money. The committee has also helped to construct the subjects of the Freedom of Information Law Requests that the USS Delegate requested. One of them is the #USSFAIL/#our330K Twitter Campaign which will be launched again with the publication of an *Advocate* Article on USS in May.

Finally, one of the duties of this office is to participate as a voting member on the Executive Committee of Graduate Council. For this entire school year the committee has scheduled meetings at times when they knew I could not attend even though I have requested that the meetings time be changed to accommodate me, at least for one of the four meetings. This disregard for student participa-

tion and governance is problematic and should be noted publicly.

Ad Hoc Committee on New Fellowships

The Ad Hoc Committee on New Fellowships has drafted a petition that details some objections to the implementation of the new fellowships:

We, members and supporters of the CUNY Graduate Center, fully endorse President Bill Kelly's recent assertion that it is "practically and ethically" necessary to provide better funding to graduate students. We therefore urge the Graduate Center to fulfill its ethical obligations not only to incoming students but to current students as well. The new Graduate Center fellowships fail to address the serious funding and labor issues faced by current GC students, who are consistently underpaid and overworked. Remedying these economic inequities will ensure an appropriate time-to-degree of current students, reduce attrition rates, and increase students' career prospects. Therefore, we demand that:

1. The GC administration present, with full transparency, the details of any existing and future funding packages and admissions policies to the entire GC community.
2. The teaching load of current students with fellowships be reduced to one course per semester, equal to the 1 : 1 teaching load stipulated by the new fellowships.
3. Any and all new sources of funding obtained henceforth be dispersed to graduate students without funding or with funding equaling less than \$25,000 per year. Henceforth, whenever new funding sources are obtained, they will be dispersed to first, un-funded and second, under-funded students, rather than to incoming students only.
4. The GC administration work with current faculty and students to create plans to provide sufficient financial support (up to the level of the new \$25,000 fellowships) to current Graduate Center students, prioritizing first, un-funded and second, under-funded students (including any graduate student receiving less than \$25,000 per year).

The City University of New York is a public and publicly accountable institution with a mandate to "educate the whole people." As the primary doctoral degree granting body of the CUNY community, the Graduate Center represents the University's commitment to preparing high level scholars, educators, and intellectuals for careers in research and public service.

We, the undersigned, applaud the Graduate Center's efforts to provide increased funding to incoming students in the form of the new Graduate Center Fellowships, and agree that sufficient financial support is vital to ensuring the success of doctoral students throughout all stages of the degree. We the undersigned call on President Bill Kelly and Provost Chase Robinson to act on their laudable commitment to supporting scholarly achievement at the Graduate Center by responding to these specific demands, in writing, to the entire GC community.

Parental Leave Working Group

The Parental Leave Working Group raised awareness of the Graduate Center's current lack of a policy for parental leave, and, in a series of meetings with the administration, advocated that a policy be established as follows:

All full-time GC students—without regard to gender or method of family-forming (birth, adoption, etc.), and without regard to fellowship status—should be eligible for coverage under this policy, which should provide all of the following:

- ▶ Guaranteed health care;
- ▶ Immediate return to pre-existing fellowship or position, including seniority;
- ▶ Automatic one-semester extension of deadlines without penalty;
- ▶ A one-semester salary at the rate of 1/2 GCF with a minimal work requirement;
- ▶ Students retain their matriculated status and receive tuition remission.

In addition, the working group recommends that a policy statement include a preamble explicitly calling for a culture of universal support. Given the current state of graduate studies in the United States and the world, CUNY has an opportunity to become a global leader in creating a healthier, more welcoming environment for families.

The working group conducted a survey on parental leave, which was open from December 20, 2012 to January 31, 2013. 97 percent of 263 respondents overwhelmingly supported the Graduate Center adopting a Parental Leave Policy. Students reported a pervasive institutional lack of support for parenting due to the Graduate Center's lack of policy and transparency, as well as disparaging comments and/or lack of information from department chairs and advisers. 98 percent of 264 respondents reported having received no "information from [their] program about how fellowships are or are not affected by having a child." Almost 100% of 262 respondents indicated that their program did not explain how the financial support of students who become pregnant is affected. Additionally, students reported that fear of losing the NYSHIP health insurance prevented them from taking a leave of absence. Students reported negative attitudes from chairs and advisers regarding becoming pregnant.

Students specified features of an ideal parental leave policy, including:

- ▶ Coverage for all new parents (not just pregnant women);

- ▶ Coverage for all students (not just those with fellowships);
- ▶ Paid leave (requested time varied);
- ▶ Keeping health insurance;
- ▶ Schedule flexibility for course work; and
- ▶ "Stopping the clock" for time-to-degree.

Other suggestions included changes in work duties; providing Family and Medical Leave for students; using existing policies such as the Family Medical Leave Act, New York City's policies for city government workers, or other graduate program policies as a guide for shaping a policy; access to / assistance with daycare that includes infants; and more support for breastfeeding in Graduate Center facilities. A concern that medical leave (regardless of the specific reason) counts against fellowship funding was also reported. Several students reported they delayed child rearing due to CUNY's lack of financial /institutional support.


The survey points to the pressing need for The Graduate Center to develop a parental leave policy and to make this policy an inclusive one that respects all students' rights to create families regardless of sexual orientation or work status within CUNY. Additionally, increased transparency, support for students, and compassionate professionalism when addressing life issues would be welcomed regarding all communication between the administration and the student body.

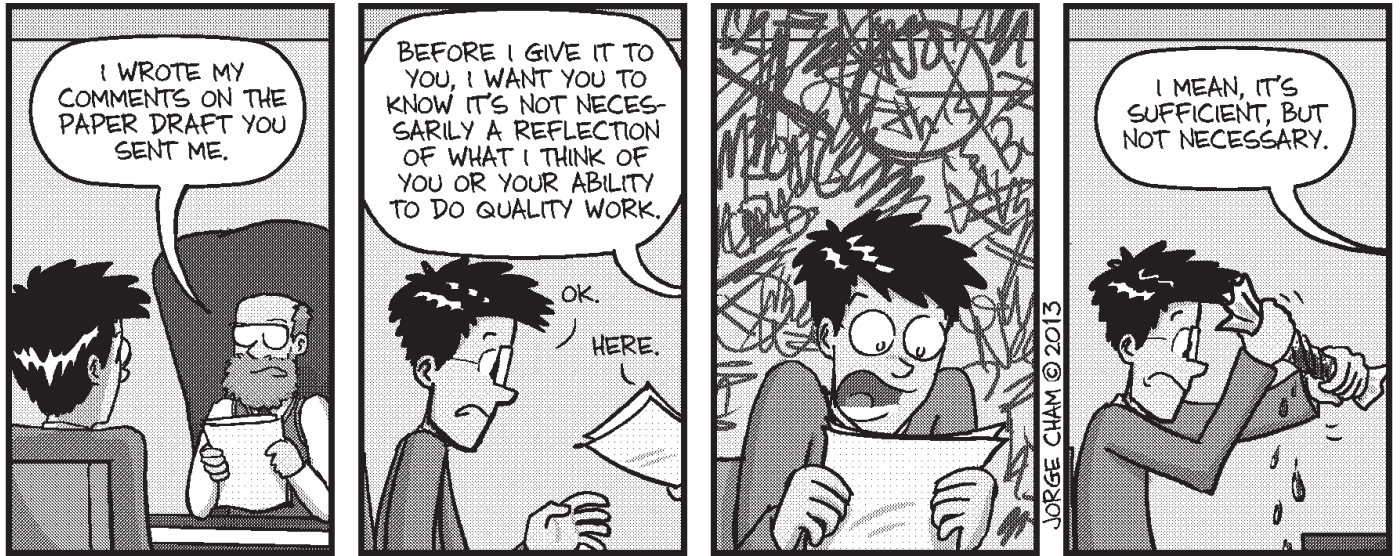
Emeritus DSC Leadership Advisory Board

The Executive Committee voted to create an Emeritus DSC Leadership Advisory Board (EDLAB), to explore the possibility of instituting such a board through bylaws, as a way for current DSC leadership to draw on the institutional knowledge of previous leadership.

Blood Drives Off Campus

In spring 2012, the DSC passed a resolution calling for blood drives to be moved off-campus until the FDA lifts its ban on the blood of men who have sex with men. The DSC successfully pushed the administration to move blood drives off campus. The February blood drive took place on 35th Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues, in a New York Blood Center mobile bus.

On the day of the blood drive, DSC Steering Committee members tabled in the Graduate Center lobby, collecting signatures for a petition to fund necessary research to lift the FDA ban on the blood of men who have sex with men, and collecting symbolic donations of red straws from people ineligible to donate because of the FDA ban. 

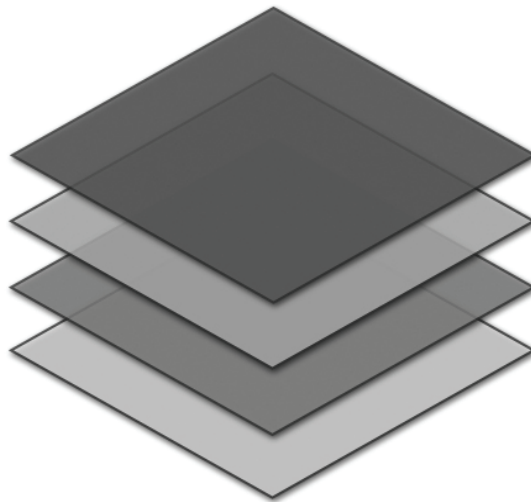


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