



Volume 27 Fall no. 1, 2015

BERNIE \$ANDERS: Capitalist Pig in Socialist Drag

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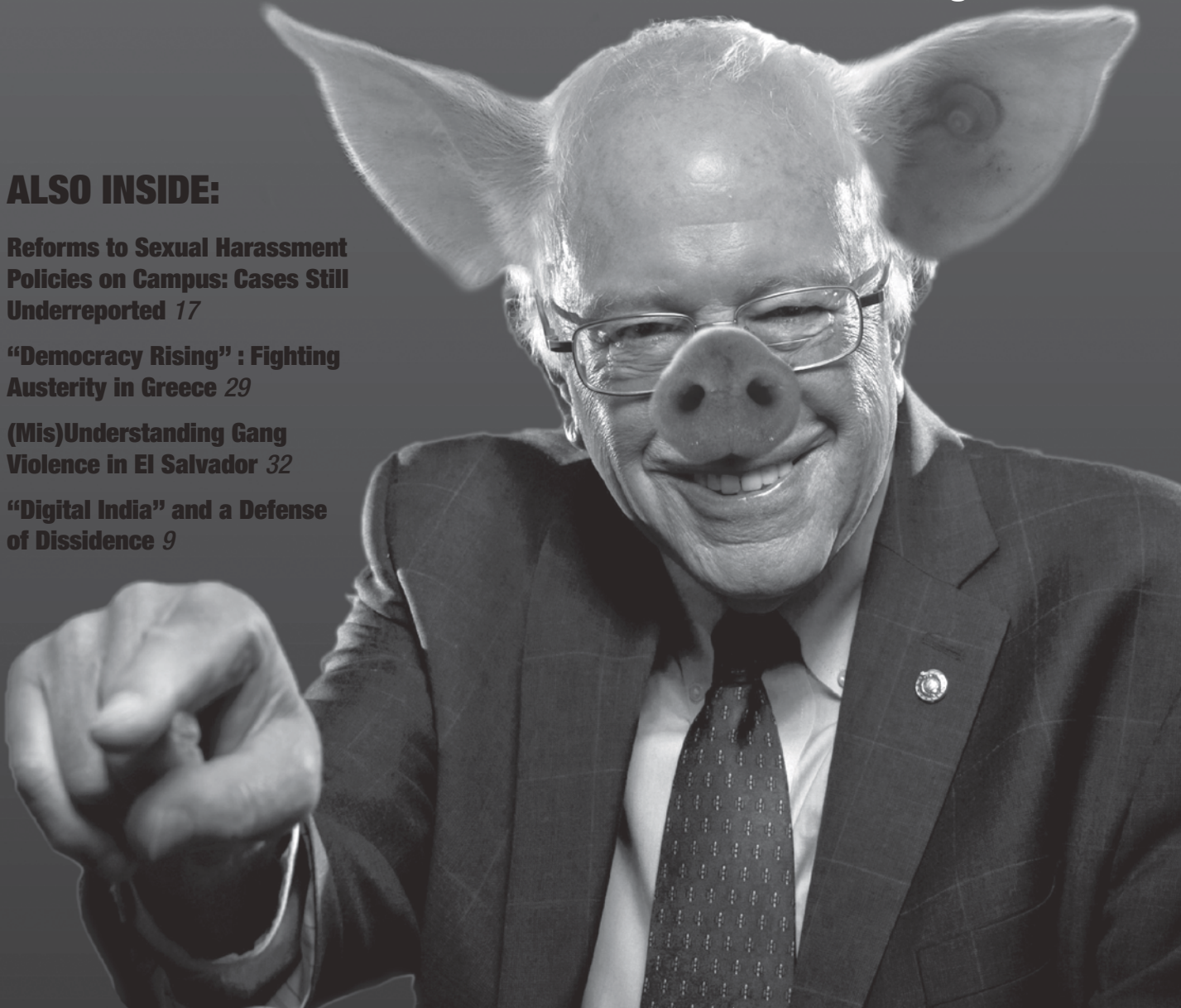
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Underreported 17**

**"Democracy Rising" : Fighting
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**"Digital India" and a Defense
of Dissidence 9**





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advocate

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dadland Maye

I have long been concerned about the vulnerability of the Graduate Center as an ethical place of knowledge acquisition and production. For how can there be ethically productive exchanges among the inhabitants of this place if our operational structures solely allot agency and visibility to certain bodies and voices? As the new Editor-in-Chief, I occupy this position with an old sickening burden: Me tired ah being lonely. All around me are wonderful smiling people, yet the elevators feel lonely, the lounges stink with strangeness, di Dinning Commons is the big haunted room! Me tired ah me head hurting with questions about how and when will this madness end. And it doesn't get easier, knowing that I must learn and deploy the conventions of the dominant culture in ways that perpetuate its entitlement syndrome. There is an expectation that I must skillfully utilize the existing strategies to disguise and erase the characteristics that denote the validity of Diasporas of color. Today, therefore, I will use this space and scream rebellion. Me will scream me names.

I must scream enough so I can hear myself and remember who I am—that I can think—that I can speak what I can think—that I can practice how to be silent and listen to others who embody freethinking. I must amplify my names so that you feel the fire and a consequent temptation to scream your own names as part of a long process of destroying the Graduate Center's garments that comfortably cloak voices and bodies like mine. Outside the doors of the Graduate Center, on its very steps, my body automatically positions me as a shooting target for the police. And within its doors, in every elevator ride to another floor, on most admissions committees, in every incoming cohort, names like mine that carry certain baggage and bounty of histories are shot down and shut out of opportunities. So in what way must this Afro-Jamaican speak his name into visibility while rebuking traditions of black testimonial erasures?

The article of former Editor-in-Chief, Gordon Barnes, addresses an event with Bernie Sanders and the protestors of Black Lives Mat-

ter. As I read Gordon's contribution, I wonder—is there any usefulness in borrowing from BLM's activist strategy that disrupted the town-hall meeting with Martin O'Malley and Sanders months ago? Is it time to disable politeness when speaking to those who claim to stand as allies with people of color? How should I, for instance, get the attention of the English department in which I am doing research on Caribbean and African LGBT persons who obtain US political asylum?

As a queer political asylee, I just cannot cuddle conventions of politeness comfortably. Back in Portmore-Jamaica, fifteen years ago, I woke from a dream and discovered my apartment on fire. Fleeing the blaze, I rushed outside to find homophobes firing bullets at me. This is one of many episodes that raised me into a tradition in which I had to fight with my voice, hands, and feet, from elementary school yards to adulthood streets. And nights saw me masturbate to ejaculate away the pain of histories in order to fall asleep with some amount of joy and peaceful heartbeats. But the follow-

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ing days, I often rushed to mirrors only to discern whether wrinkles had appeared in my face too soon. Thank goodness, though, I still believe I'm handsome. For look at my hair, I say to myself, these locks—the queer, tangled growth like my personality—wild and eccentric. And don't I have this graceful scar in my face, given to me in my teens because homophobes thought my hips had swayed like a woman's? And what about the slashes along my back? These latter body markings—once upon a time prints of shame—have now become the symbols of my affirmed identities, my names, because I confronted the strangers and family whom I loved, and I forced them to hear the screams of my many names.

Therefore, I must turn to a fact that it has been at least three years now that our English Department—which I love—has been hosting yearly pre-admissions events. The flyers for the events claim to have a special desire for African-American applicants. Yet year after year, I observe the department's enrollment ratios barely change. African-American students remain disproportionately represented when considering New York City's racial composition. How do I say to my beloved department where most of the faculty have been welcoming to me and to black discourse in their research and conference talks—I am sick and tired of your f**king bullshit!

Oh yes, it unnerves me that I have to cloak the identity of the word that precedes bullshit in the same way that institutionalism has tradition-

ally cloaked and punctuated the reality of my identities with sanitized scholarships and conference talks. Here, as victim of institutional practices that erase identities, I am reinscribing those problematic conventions by cleansing the orthography of a word—its authentic character, passion, pride, rebelliousness, and resilience—only so I can glorify polite readership tastes. I want to tell my department and all the other departments in this building—Stop trafficking in blackness! Black lives matter! Yes, black lives really matter. And don't tell me that All Lives Matter. If that were the case, it would have reflected in our yearly incoming admissions population and faculty hiring trends.

Yes, I support the view that, in order to eradicate marginalizing practices, it's fundamental to expose persons who establish careers by purporting to be laborers for the most vulnerable populations. For that reason, in the spring semester, I attended a DSC meeting to ask President Chase Robison a question. Whether we like his management style or not, let us give credit where it is due. As provost for five years, Robinson positioned our college as one of the leaders of the digital humanities—an area on which Bhargav Rani's article sheds light from an Indian geographic perspective. Robinson also initiated programs such as the Advanced Research Collaborative and the Initiative for the Theoretical Sciences. Yet, since it has become overwhelming to hear everybody with the word Diversity at the tip of their tongues,

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I asked the president, what were his anticipated next steps towards equitable racial representation in the Graduate Center's enrollment and hiring practices—and what specifically could he accomplish now which was impossible while serving as provost?

Fluently, the president explained that he appointed a committee to address the issue. I observed the calmness on his face as he spoke. I took keen note of his temperament in handling the question. Obviously, the question was an easy abc for him. Things are easy when we are overexposed to them; aren't they? Quietly, I listened as he performed his answer. President Robinson's response embodied the skillfulness of a corporatized, institutionalized, rhetorical design. Softly I smiled and shook my head. For what else could I have done in response to a performance than allow my own smile to perform peacefulness?


Indeed, I must scream my names here to let you know what I bring to this paper and where I hope to take us. It is already clear that issues of race, sexuality, and high education bureaucracy concern me.

But I would hope that you will not place me into an ideological bucket because I will disappoint you. My politics navigate in no specific direction. My views—not my integrity—changes as the days and seasons go by. In fact, I enjoy this privilege because, as a doctoral student, I am constantly exposed to new ideas that nurture my ever-evolving understanding of our world. I consider it dangerous that our culture demonizes persons who consistently reevaluate their ideological positions. This remains prominent in electoral campaigns where lines from twenty years ago haunt presidential contenders. I want to assure you that this paper will serve as a space for contending and evolving ideas. Here, there is no ideological agenda to take to Walmart's shelves, and no ideological plantation to fertilize.

Plantation mentalities unsettle me. Such ways of thinking and speaking are produced in ideological fields managed by Massa-style liberals, conservatives, radicals, civil rights activists, queer scholars, feminists, environmentalists, and others. Say, for instance, one may sug-

gest that Donald Trump may have a point addressing the country's broken borders. Such an acknowledgement can result in a person being labeled an Uncle Tom if s/he is a person of color, or racist if s/he is white. A second scenario may involve critics arguing that some feminist scholars fail to acknowledge that many of their articulations reinsert the very gender inequities their work seeks to dismantle. Such critics may face accusations that they are sexist if they are male, or still living in the intellectual dark ages if they are female. Evidence of the plantation mentality occurs even close to us. There have been cases of students engaging some members of the DSC, arguing that their activism fails to understand that the college will sometimes have to pay big bucks to attract academic stars and high-profile administrators who will raise the college's prestige. Such students have been accused of being in the pockets of powerful administration members. The plantation mentalities use a body of rhetorical platitudes harvested from the farms of identity politics. And rather than interrogate and refashion the platitudes, members of ideological plantations unleash their verbal violence to cripple opponents.

While one of my major goals is to accommodate a plurality of views, I must mention that if sufficient articles are not submitted, there will be only few good options from which to choose. Certainly, it is the job of the editorial staff to solicit good articles, but I would encour-






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EDITOR'S NOTE

age participation rather than support judgmental and non-proactive practices. Patterns of only criticizing rather than also seeing ourselves as a community is pointless. I have heard numerous persons criticize the paper for not providing enough views and not having great articles—and their complaints piled up into the heavens—but what have they done to remedy the process? Why didn't they submit an article for consideration?

In response to these questions, they remind you that they were busy doing research. But as master's and doctoral students, aren't we all busy with our academic careers? That's the problem—there are too many of us who benefit from the student activist tradition, but have no idea who labored behind the scenes. Consider the article by Liza Shapiro and Cecilia María Salvi, whose University Student Senate work addresses the problem of university-wide sexual harassment patterns. Aren't these writers doing valuable work that safeguards the basic rights we enjoy from being a part of the Graduate Center community? What about the names of the men and women who, year after year, battle and negotiate with the administration and faculty leadership in order to foster programs and policies that fund students and give them more voting access on transformative committees? How about the names of our DSC leadership that we sent into office for 2015-16—Amy Martin, Jennifer Prince, Hamad Sindhi, Liza Shapiro, Saiful Saleem, Jeremy Randall,

Kyla Bender-Baird, Charlotte Thurston, Theodor Maghrak, and Carlos Camacho?

Naming and screaming our names and those of others are important. It creates a culture of awareness, affirmation, celebration, and confidence. It destabilizes tendencies that favor subject invisibility and erasures. By sharing pieces of my names today, some might argue, I have circumvented the genre of popular editorial writing. And the question of genre circumvention is one with which I wrestled as I wrote this piece. But do you know what kept me going? It was the recurring thought that nobody owns my thoughts. I am a free thinker. One of the most fundamental concepts I hope to channel within every issue of this paper is the need to break outside the borderlines that have traditionally delimited freethinking. By screaming our names to this paper in the form of submissions, and screaming our multiple names to colleagues in bars, and to faculty members, including advisors,

“There are too many of us who benefit from the student activist tradition, but have no idea who labored behind the scenes.”

in closed offices and committees, we aggressively project and protect our visibility of bodies, talks, and thoughts. Everyone must be seen and recognized to ensure that the Graduate Center is not a lonely place for people who look like me while being a nurturing home for people who look like President Chase and the majority of the English Department. How can the consciences of our scholars, educators, administrators, and students be at peace knowing that the necessities of screams aren't remedied in the same manner as certain whispers?



Coffee and Conversation at City College

October 9th 3pm–5pm in Shepard Hall, room 150. If you teach, do research there, or are simply near the area, please come join us for an afternoon of coffee,



Performance of Iddo Netanyahu's play at CCNY sparks protests

The City College Center for the Arts in partnership with the Division of Humanities and Arts presented a play, *A Happy End*, by Iddo Netanyahu, brother to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, earlier this month. On 10 September, the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee, Students Without Borders, and NYC Students for Justice in Palestine came together at the performance venue, Aaron Davis Hall, to protest against CUNY's active endorsement of the Zionist ideology.

A radiologist, novelist, and playwright, Iddo Netanyahu served in Sayaret Matkal, the Special Forces unit of the Israel Defense Forces. And he has been a vocal advocate of his brother's genocidal expeditions into Palestine. His play, set in 1930s Berlin, dramatizes the dilemma

of a well-to-do Jewish couple, grappling with whether to flee Germany and leave behind their home and friends, or to stay put in the increasingly perilous political climate of Hitler's rise to power.

While the theme in itself holds a promise of empathetic association with the protagonists by invoking a dark history of immense cruelty and terror, the political context of its current production render the play, to put it mildly, grossly misplaced and inappropriate. Even as the actors strive to make the audience feel for the plight of the Jewish couple in Hitler's Germany, the inherent contradiction surfaces when one considers the exactly same predicament of the millions of Palestinian civilians under perennial threat of bombing by the Israeli state.

This perverse irony was of course not lost on the students gathered outside the venue to speak out against CUNY's complicity in the dissemination of reactionary ideologies. Apart from the hostility they faced from some spectators, there was also the constant presence and threat of the CUNY Public Safety officers. The organizers had also scheduled an open public forum at the end of the play. However, when the protesting students tried to enter the Hall to participate in the "open" forum, they were barred from entering by the security officers on ridiculous grounds. One of the students who confronted the Dean of Humanities for the right of all students to participate in the forum was arrested and issued a summons.

As pointed out by the RSCC, SWB, and NYC SJP

in a joint statement on the protest, "It has always been clear that CUNY Public Safety is not here to protect the interests of the students, the staff or the community. They are the repressive apparatus that reinforces the ruling class agenda which is carried out by the Board of Trustees and Administration." It must also be noted that the coercive apparatus of the university is not limited to the threat of violence and repression that the CUNY Public Safety officers represent to students who choose to speak out, but is seamlessly interpolated into its academic structures as well. Students of the Theatre department at CCNY were required to attend the play as part of their credit, which in itself is coercive and all the more insidious in its banality.



A Wake-up Call for Chancellor Milliken



A year since Chancellor James B. Milliken assumed office there is little change in the status of the long-pending contract for CUNY faculty and staff. With this start of a new academic year, employees of the university have gone without a contract for five years and without a raise for six. Moreover, the Professional Staff Congress, the union of CUNY faculty and staff, now remains the only union of public employees in New York State without a contract or a raise since 2009.

Chancellor Milliken has also failed to effectively counter the austerity measures that are particularly detrimental to a public university system like CUNY. More than half the CUNY undergraduates have family incomes of less than \$30,000 a year, and three-quarters are Black, Latino, or Asian, and what is at stake is the very quality of education offered in the university. Due to the consistent budget cuts, the 31 percent increase in tuition fees since 2011 is being put to

use not for new programs or progressive educational reforms but, as the DSC remarked in the last *Advocate* issue, for literally “keeping the lights on.”

The PSC has called for an intensification of its resistance and arranged an “escalated series of actions” to demand for a swift approval of a contract with fair terms of employment for the faculty and staff. Throughout September, it organized union meetings at various campuses across CUNY. It called for a demonstration outside Chancellor Milliken’s expensive Manhattan apartment paid for by the university on 1 October, the morning of the first CUNY board meeting of the year, and we urge our readers to participate in solidarity. In addition, the PSC planned two weeks of local actions and organized teach-ins at the various campuses, from 19-

30 October, leading up to a “Disruptive Mass Action” on 4 November.

Although Barbara Bowen, the President of the PSC, writes that the union’s resistance will be “escalating further if needed,” it might do well to remember the legal limits of “escalation” that the PSC was forced to confront earlier this year. The PSC organized a series of town hall meetings and teach-ins in February, much like its present proposed plans, as part of the National Adjunct Awareness Week, which was an offshoot of a nation-wide movement, the National Adjunct Walkout Day, observed on 25 February in many universities

across the country. However, CUNY employees’ decision to abstain from a mass walkout is rooted in the New York State’s Taylor Law of 1967, which prohibits public employees from going on strikes, penalizing those who do with fines of two days’ wages for every day of work missed. Faced with an administration that has consistently failed to stand up for its employees and a state that outlaws civil disobedience, it is imperative that we reflect imaginatively on the methods of “escalation” to be employed and conceive of ways to aggressively push for a fair settlement of a contract that has been long overdue.



those **FOOLS** *you* *call* **Intellectuals**

Bhargav Rani

In the political climate of our times, “intellectual” is a dirty word. It is more often than not invoked in a tone of disparagement, in a manner of cursory disdain, to dismiss an unsavory political discourse by bringing the very credibility of the agent of discourse into question. The word “intellectual,” in its literal sense, signifies a “person possessing a highly developed intellect,” deriving from the Latin *intellectus*

meaning “understanding,” or *intellegere*, “to understand.” However, the disparaging application of the label in contemporary political practice is a complete reversal of its original signification, for it is employed to convey precisely a lack of understanding of the political situation by the “intellectual.” Moreover, the target of disdain is the very characteristic that defines an “intellectual” - the reliance on intellect. That is, the credibility of “intellectuals” is brought into question primarily because their knowledge is perceived to be rooted in thought as opposed to being derived from political practice or experience. It

“Digital India” and a Defense of Dissidence

is this age old dialectical drama of theory and practice that all too frequently finds a stage in the arena of contemporary politics.

A particular disambiguation of this drama came to the fore again recently when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his plans to visit Silicon Valley in California on 27 September. This visit is, in part, geared towards promoting the government's new program, "Digital India," an ambitious project that aims to develop digital infrastructure in rural India to provide widespread connectivity and cultivate digital literacy. Some of the program's initiatives include providing mobile Internet connectivity to rural populations, increasing transparency in bureaucracy and digitizing the workflow through such methods as biometric attendance, and the concomitant creation of jobs. In addition, Modi is scheduled to meet with a number of Indian diasporic entrepreneurs in an effort to foster Indo-US business linkages and facilitate a cross-flow of investments.

Soon after the announcement of Modi's intended visit to Silicon Valley, a collective of scholars and academicians engaged in research in a range of interdisciplinary concerns constituting the broad field of South Asian studies in various universities across the United States published a statement expressing their reservations. The signatories of the statement, about 135 of them, include some of the most distinguished professors studying and writing on India like Arjun Appadurai, Sheldon

Pollock, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, and CUNY professors Meena Alexander and Manu Bhagavan of Hunter College. That is, it was a statement by a group of intellectuals by vocation, in the primary sense of the word. These scholars advocated for an exercise of caution in subscribing to the propositions of "Digital India," calling for a more critical evaluation of "its lack of safeguards about privacy of information, and thus its potential for abuse."

As the statement notes, "Digital India" seems to ignore key questions raised in India by critics concerned about the collection of personal information and the near certainty that such digital systems will be used to enhance surveillance and repress the constitutionally protected rights of citizens." Moreover, the collective of scholars, with "particular attention to history," that being their job, drew attention to the manifold acts of repression by the Modi government over the past year, including various episodes of censorship, impositions on academic freedom, and the violations of religious freedom in the country. The tenor of this unfolding history, the scholars argued, demands that we assume a skeptical, critical position with respect to the government's proposals, and they urged those who lead the Silicon Valley technology enterprises to be "mindful of not violating their own codes of corporate responsibility when conducting business with a government which has, on several occasions already, demonstrated its

disregard for human rights and civil liberties, as well as the autonomy of educational and cultural institutions."

The rebuttal was swift and vehement. Days after the statement was published on a blog, its signatories came under strong attack in a number of right-wing news outlets in India, with their call for prudence touted as a demand for boycott and painted variously as either "comic" and "arrogant" or as "malicious" and "slander." An opposing group of scholars, many of them known advocates of "Shri" Narendra Modi's regime, soon published a counter-statement staunchly endorsing the government's proposed schemes to "urge some academics to lift their veil of ignorance that wages economic war against India."

The most vocal among them was, not surprisingly, Madhu Kishwar, a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, and an active propagandist for the right-wing regime (and so, although an intellectual by vocation, not an "intellectual"), who supplemented the counter-statement with another lengthy rebuttal of her own in the right-wing newspaper, *First Post*. To quote just one from the many gems of logical vacuity that are profuse in the article, Kishwar, while accusing the dissident scholars of conspiring to "keep India mired in poverty, promote strife among its people, and keep it vulnerable to terror attacks," goes so far as to characterize their criticism of the Modi government as "a McCarthy type witch-hunt against a popularly

elected chief minister.”

While it is not in the scope of this article to appraise the truth-value of the statements of the dissident scholars, let it suffice to say that the claims to verity that each faction of the debate asserts are founded on two mutually exclusive domains of discourses. While the advocates of the political Right draw from the “official” history composed of discourses “legitimized” by the state, like the judicial documents that acquit Modi of wrongdoing in the 2002 Gujarat riots and much of the corporate, national media that celebrates him daily, its critics, with a due sense of the politics of historiography, question such uncritical faith in the incorruptibility of the state apparatus that produces these discourses. However, my interest in this article is not in the quagmire that is the debate on the truth-value of either discourse, but rather in the question of who constitutes a “truth-teller.” What is most striking about the general tenor of most discourses that emerged from the political Right in defense of the ruling regime is that they consistently, often through the means of the same set of rhetorical maneuvers, questioned the credibility of the dissenting scholars – those fools you call “intellectuals.”

The most recurrent motif in the rhetoric informing the pejorative application of the word “intellectual” in this specific case relates to the subject position of these dissident scholars. That is, the principle argument propounded by the political Right in their effort to delegitimize

the agents of the dissident discourse is that they are all scholars working in universities in the United States, that is, the “intellectuals” are all “Americans.” At the outset, the diasporic identity of these scholars, which forms the focus of criticism, hardly seems at odds with the case in question, for, one would assume, Indian scholars working in universities in the United States would logically be at an advantageous position to comment on policy matters pertaining to the relations between the two nations. However, that was obviously not how it was perceived. The rhetorical manipulation underlying the invocation of the “American”-ness of these scholars is two-pronged: the first relates to the idea of “forsaking” the homeland, and the second to their “alienation” from the realities of the homeland.

The nationalist undertones to the logic of “forsaking” the homeland

“The argument goes that these dissident scholars have renounced their rights to comment...when they migrated from their homeland.”

are self-evident, and I don’t mean that as a compliment. The argument goes that these dissident scholars have renounced their rights to comment on the political state of affairs in India when they migrated from their homeland. “Forsaking” here unequivocally implies betrayal. It not only posits the “forsaking” individual as the Other but also absolves the self of complicity in the process of Othering, for it locates the logic and praxis of “forsaking” within the body of the “forsaking” individual. That is, “forsaking” is self-imposed, an act of agency, in which volition is implicit.

Thus, the power relation between the “forsaking” individual and the “loyal” citizens of the homeland is distinct from other modalities of migration like exile. This passivity of the self in the Othering of the “forsaking” individual is what constitutes the basis for the moral high ground that the advocates of the political Right assume. This “forsaking” is, in essence, a “forsaking” of the nation, and the rhetorical manipulation underlying such a characterization of the dissident “intellectuals” is in the service of invalidating their status as possible “truth-tellers.”

But the hollowness of this argument evinces when we recognize that the diasporic condition of the dissident scholar is, in fact, no different from that of the successful Indian entrepreneur and technocrat in Silicon Valley. The conditions of migration in either case can be appraised within the larger context of the neoliberal turn in the Indian

economy from the 1990s and the globalization of human capital. That is, both cases of migration stem from a philosophy that has enjoyed wide currency in India, particularly after the IT industry boom of the 1990s, which is that of the diasporic condition constituting itself as a utopia, a transcendent realm with the promise of emancipation from the drudgeries of the everyday in the homeland.

Notwithstanding the critiques of this philosophy of diaspora as utopia that functions in the service of capitalism, the question that arises is this: what warrants the qualification of the migration of the dissident scholar as a “forsaking” of the homeland when Modi’s visit to Silicon Valley itself stands as an affirmation, even a celebration, of the diasporic condition? What makes the scholar’s migration an act of betrayal when the engineer’s

migration stands as an act of empowerment, not just of the migrating individual but also of the nation? This selective persecution only goes to show that this characterization as the “forsaking” individual is a politically charged rhetorical construction that implicitly strives to strip the dissident scholar of the right to dissent.

The second rhetorical maneuver at play is the argument that the dissident scholar, lodged in the “ivory tower” of academia, is hopelessly removed from the socio-political realities, again a recurrent motif in Indian politics. The invalidation of the credibility of the dissident scholar through this argument involves the perpetuation of an essentialist reading of the theory-practice dialectic. It categorically culls the “encounter with truth” from the realm of intellectual activity and definitively locates it within the realm of phenomenology. However, at the very outset, it must be noted that this rhetorical manipulation can be accomplished only when the many years of practical, phenomenological engagement of the scholars with their fields of research, that is, the practice of research that preempts theory and that which constitutes a significant part of every scholar’s life, is erased from the public consciousness.

In addition, such a rhetoric must also turn a blind-eye to the abundance of discourse that emerged from the mid-twentieth century on the relation of theory to practice, the “logic of practice,” and ignore the fact that self-reflexivity about

the relation of one’s discourse to their field of study is now pretty much a necessary condition of academic rigor. That is to say, the construction of the much maligned figure of the senile scholar locked in the “ivory tower” of academia demands an ambiguation of what a scholar really does and a revitalization of the mythology of the colonial historian or anthropologist on the stage of contemporary politics.

At the most basic level, the use of “intellectual” in a disparaging sense to discredit a dissident scholar unambiguously implies, or often explicitly mentions, that the scholar in question is “leftist” or “Marxist.” In the Indian political parlance, the pejorative connotation of “intellectual” is almost exclusively reserved for “Marxists,” which includes, apart from the Marxists of course, any individual who questions the actions of the state. Another closely related us-and-them term of disdain is “anti-national.” At one level, one can’t help but smile at the fact that this conflation of “intellectual” with “Marxist,” albeit pejorative, is an implicit acknowledgement, a silent nod, to the immense contribution of Marxist scholarship to critical thought for over a century. At another level, the “intellectual” as “Marxist” is in itself a very convenient rhetorical maneuver to establish the dissident scholar as definitively dubious, simply because “Marxist” is an even dirtier word in Indian politics, especially so in the current political climate. It is aimed at establishing the scholar as the irreconcilable Other, and hence ineli-

**“this conflation
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gible to make any claims to “truth.” If I may be so bold as to return a metaphor to its appropriate context, this is what would qualify as a “McCarthy type witch-hunt.”

I wouldn’t want to completely dismiss the fact that all the signatories of the statement were academics from universities in the United States. It is not clear if the statement is meant to reflect the position of Indian diasporic scholars on an issue that concerns the diaspora or that of scholars critical of the right-wing regime. If it is the latter case, the inclusion of scholars only from the United States is, I believe, simply bad rhetoric. But what I find most troubling about this US-centric collective has little to do with the right-wing rhetoric of “Marxism” or “anti-nationalism.” It rather has to do with the fact that this list of signatories is reflective of the general centralization of knowledge production in mostly US and European universities.

My advocacy for a decentralization of knowledge production is not rooted in an ideology of nationalism but rather in the resistance to capitalistic monopolization of knowledge in the context of the increasing neoliberalization of the university. This nuance is, however, lost on the political Right, for if the quality of research produced in the country is a priority for the state, we wouldn’t be having Y. Sudarshan Rao, a historian of questionable methods who endorses the caste system, spearheading the direction of historical research, and an indubitably second-rate actor, Gajendra

Chauhan, at the helm of the premier film institute of the country.

In the way of a conclusion, I might as well touch upon my own subject position, if that hasn’t been glaringly obvious. As an Indian doctoral student being trained in the practices of intellectual production in a university in the US, not only am I the subject of my own discourse, however tangentially, but the very credibility of this discourse hinges on my own credibility as a scholar. Here we come to the relation of “truth” to the “truth-teller.” It is not merely that the truth-value of this article is incumbent on the validation of my credentials, but the estimation of the “truth” of this discourse itself determines my credibility. Filtered through the rhetorical prisms of “Marxism” and “anti-nationalism” by the political Right, the truth-value of my discourse is always already judged and condemned by the extent of its deviation from the sanctified discourse of the state, and it is this dissidence that calls my credibility into question, not the other way around. It is then that the whole range of rhetorical maneuvers is put to work. That is to say, the academic credentials of the dissident scholars are brought into question not in the service of estimating the truth-value of their statement but rather the conviction of their argument as fraudulent and malicious, by virtue of its dissidence against the state, is what leads to their disqualification as scholars of no merit. Dissidence is what turns them into those fools you call “intellectuals.”



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Portable INDIA

A Vision of Responsible Literacy in Digital Democracy

Rahul K. Gairola and Arnab Datta

On 21 August, 2015, Director Pra-dipta Banerji of the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee (IITR) and Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla of the University of California, San Diego, hosted a roundtable discussion for junior faculty that explored strategies for improving technological innovation in India. Although India is the world's third largest Internet user, after the United States and China respectively, only twenty percent of all Indians have Internet access. Of the 4.4 billion people in the world who are still offline, twenty-five percent reside in the world's largest democracy. Interdisciplinary research which combines Microelectronics and Communication along with Comparative Literature and Critical Theory can address these statistics. This interdisciplinary alliance empowers us to tackle one of South Asia's most pressing issues in the twenty-first century,

that of digital literacy among rural populations. By "digital literacy," we mean the hypertexts, databases, and resources that comprise the soft materials for education and research along with the hardware and infrastructure needed to support them.

One consequence of the poor infrastructure is the lack of electronic access to literary/ pedagogical tools in rural India. In the context of our definition, the absence of required software and hardware renders any knowledge of how to use digital platforms inconsequential.

These have been realized through the implementation of Internet based hypertexts, thereby making it accessible to scholars for a seamless exchange of knowledge. In the Indian context, the internet has not yet penetrated all rural areas, and hypertext-based implementation of digital archives is thus not vi-

able. Despite booming knowledge archives like Wikipedia, learning repositories like Google Scholar, and a 100% increase in the use of social media, namely Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, in rural India access still remains a pressing issue.

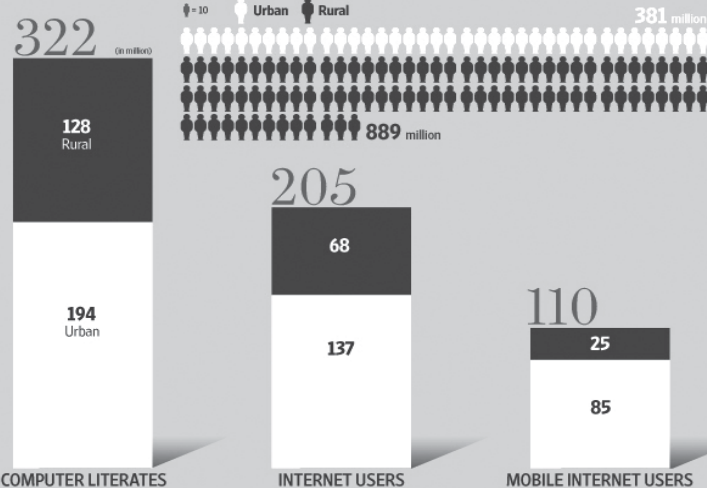
Nearly a billion users will be subscribing to mobile phones in the coming decade according to a survey in telecommunication regulatory reports provided by the Government of India. In contrast, the growth rate of Internet subscriptions in India is projected to be nearly half the growth of mobile phone subscribers. Despite the difficulty in access to computers and preference for content in local languages as opposed to English, mobile phone usage is rising and becoming the primary platform through which rural India accesses the Internet (in the case of smart phones). Apart from enabling voice

INDIA NOW HAS MORE THAN 200 MILLION INTERNET USERS

A report by the the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IMRB International has put India's Internet user base at 205 million, almost on par with that of the US. The user base, which doubled in the last three years, according to the report, is expected to reach 213 million by the end of 2013. The definition of active users in the IAMA study as those that access the Internet at least once a month should tone down the implicit optimism of the numbers though. The report says that communication continues to be the primary activity. That, along with social networking, is what three-quarters of the active user base engages in, though online transactions trail in popularity.

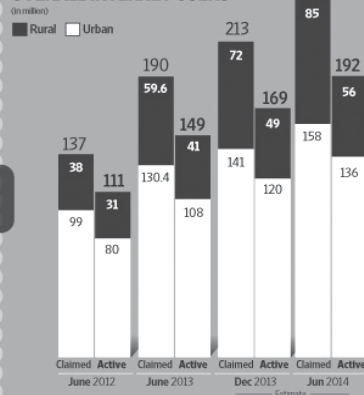
POPULATION

1270,000,000



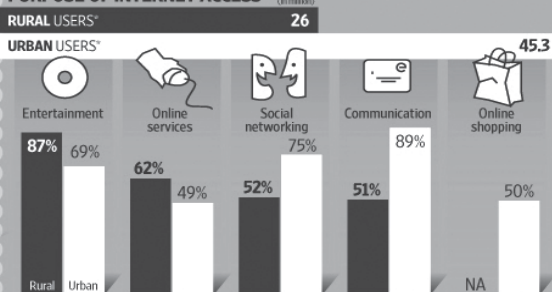
Compiled by Moulisshree Srivastava; Graphics: Ahmed Raza Khan/Mint

OVERALL INTERNET USERS



Claimed Internet users refer to not-so-frequent users of the Internet. Active Internet users access the Internet at least once a month.

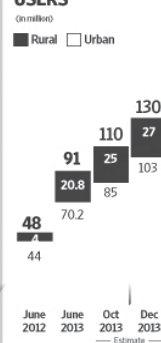
PURPOSE OF INTERNET ACCESS



*Rural base - 25.6 million active Internet users (rural), June 2013 - 7 states; *Urban base - active Internet users (urban), 2013 - 35 cities

Source: research by IAMA, IMRB International

MOBILE INTERNET USERS



communication, fourth generation mobile phones have multiple functionalities, specifically data storage in portable flash memory chips. In this context, one solution to the lack of Internet access can be provided through portable data transfer. Flash memory chips readily, available in mobile phones, enable convenient access despite the impracticality of hypertext-based learning in rural India's archives.

While many digital archives use DVDs and CD-ROMs for data storage, no research to date engages with alternative data storage and retrieval in rural India archives. For example, portable mediums that are light weight, reliable, and which provide high density data storage can be realized in extremely small chips, and can be designed to be

climate resistant. Such alternatives to digital archives that employ both flash and allied memory chips, which users can easily access exclusively through their mobile phones, eliminate dependence on Internet connection. State of the art memory technologies support novel technological trends in the Digital Humanities, not only in terms of the resources but also for efficient archival of them. This will make digital literacy in rural India feasible in the immediate future rather than relying on bandwidth sensitive internet connection.

We recognize that a move away from pervasive internet usage seems counterintuitive, but so is the combination of our disparate fields that can improve digital literacy in rural India. We believe


this research, made possible by the transdisciplinary collaboration between STEM and HSS fields at the Indian Institute of Technology, can enable digital literacy in the remotest parts of India and eventually other poor and marginalized regions around the globe. Until the proper infrastructure is in place to achieve digital democracy in India, we should support the spread of other pedagogical technologies that could easily then be adapted to Internet platforms when the infrastructure permits. In our vision, learning can and should occur without excessive dependence on the Internet.

For example, Avinanda Nath, a junior research collaborator, is studying digital transfer of popular animated films like the Disney

version of Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book" to flash drives. In her account, this animated film acts as a pedagogical tool on a number of levels: 1) it engages a classic work of literature in a filmic medium that would appeal to children; 2) it embodies the ethics and morals of which Kipling's work is famous for and which society attempts to instill in children at an early age; 3) advanced readings of this film for adolescents (versus children) interrogates the cartoonic representations and supports advanced studies of representation, stereotypes, and portrayal of rural India; and 4) the screening of the film against, for example, a white wall on any building makes possible a wide and varied audience, as well as a portable, transferable, and thus accessible medium of instruction. Other such Internet-less media that can be stored on mobiles and flash drives include Power Point presentations, downloaded lectures, and lessons available on the Internet, like MOOCS, and user-friendly translation software.

Without dependence on the Internet, such "innovative" technology can be swiftly implemented in, for example, the five rural villages recently designated to IITR under the Government of India's Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (Uplift Rural India) program. This grassroots effort provides technological resources to rural, impoverished communities.

While the current Digital India drive paves the long-term path forward, we offer these suggestions as immediate solutions that will continue to uphold India's global reputation in ideas, innovation, and education. Our hope is that further research that brings together our disparate fields in the service of digital democracy will improve the lives of disenfranchised Indians

around the globe, including the diasporic communities living in New York and served by The City University of New York. 



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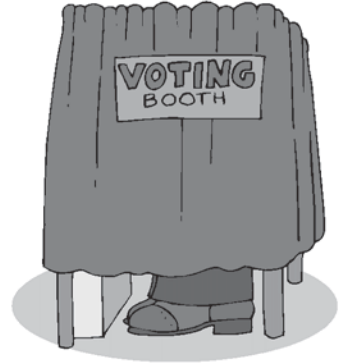
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Reforms

to Sexual Harassment Policies on Campus

Cases Still

Underreported

Cecilia María Salvi and Liza Shapiro

Governor Cuomo signed the “Enough is Enough” bill into law on 7 July, 2015. It strengthens current college sexual harassment and violence policies by requiring campuses to adopt a uniform definition of affirmative consent and establish an amnesty policy for students under the influence of drugs or alcohol who report instances of sexual or gender harassment or assault. It also increases training for law enforcement officers. Both the bill and the mandated proposed amendments to the CUNY Board of Trustees’ bylaws (article XV), which are set to go before the Board on 1 October, resulted from increased attention from the federal government and campus groups fighting against the “rape culture” prevalent on campuses across the nation.

Last year, the Board revised and updated its Policy on Sexual Misconduct. And this past May, the Uni-

versity Student Senate (USS) passed a resolution in support of the university’s efforts to protect students from discrimination in higher education. This was the first time the organization took a stand on this issue. The resolution called for USS members and the School of Public Health to conduct participatory research on the nature and extent of on-campus harassment, impelled by the desire to “foster a safe learning environment for students, faculty, administrators, and staff and promote transparency in disciplinary processes.”

We applaud these initiatives, particularly in light of the sobering survey, “AAU Campus Survey On Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct,” released by the Association of American Universities on 21 September. Administered across twenty-seven universities nationwide, the survey attempted to “assess the incidence,

prevalence, and characteristics of incidents of sexual assault and misconduct.” Its findings revealed that on average, twenty percent of undergraduate female students and five percent of undergraduate male students experienced sexual harassment or assault.

Note that only nineteen percent of eligible students responded to the survey. This low rate of response casts the survey’s findings in an even more significant light when compared to the estimated rate of those who experience sexual misconduct or assault. The most common reason for not reporting incidents of sexual assault and sexual misconduct is that it is not considered serious enough. Other reasons allude to shame and concern that the reporting process is emotionally strenuous. Neither should it be ignored that many victims “did not think anything would be done

about it.” These varied reasons also explain, in part, why overall rates of reporting to campus officials and law enforcement or others were low—ranging from five percent to twenty-eight percent, depending on the specific type of behavior.

The following quotes represent the definitions the Board expects to adopt into its Policy on Sexual Misconduct:

“Sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, such as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, graphic and electronic communications or physical conduct that is sufficiently serious to adversely affect an individual’s participation in employment, education or other CUNY activities.

Gender-based harassment is unwelcome conduct of a nonsexual nature based on an individual’s actual or perceived sex, including

conduct based on gender identity, gender expression, and nonconformity with gender stereotypes that is sufficiently serious to adversely affect an individual’s participation in employment, education or other CUNY activities.

Sexual violence is an umbrella term that includes: (1) sexual activity without affirmative consent, such as sexual assault, rape/attempted rape, and forcible touching/fondling; (2) dating, domestic and intimate partner violence; (3) stalking/cyberstalking (“stalking”) as defined in this policy.”

Some of the proposed changes to the Board’s bylaws that generally aim to provide complainants with the same opportunities as respondents in cases involving the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct are as follows (the authors have replaced the gendered pronouns he and she found in the proposed changes with the gender neutral their):

- ▼ Both the complainant and respondent can request an advisor to accompany them throughout the proceedings.
- ▼ If the respondent withdraws from the university before the hearing concludes, their transcript will read “withdrew with conduct charges pending.” If the respondent does not appear, notification of the findings will be placed in their records if the proceedings continue in absentia.
- ▼ The respondent can admit to charges and accept the penalty. The complainant must be notified and may appeal. (This section is completely new).
- ▼ No open hearings will be held in cases involving “allegations of sexual assault, stalking, or other forms of sexual violence.”
- ▼ The prior mental or sexual history of both the complainant and respondent is not admissible (except between the parties). Prior findings of violence or sexual assault are admissible during the penalty stage of the hearing, and either party can make an impact statement. (This section is completely new).
- ▼ In general, it becomes more difficult for a respondent to remove notations of code of conduct violations from their transcripts. Acts which are deemed reportable by the Clery Act will remain on transcripts.

While this bill and the proposed Board changes are an improvement in helping survivors, they still do not go far enough in changing the climate that make gender-based harassment, stalking, sexual harass-

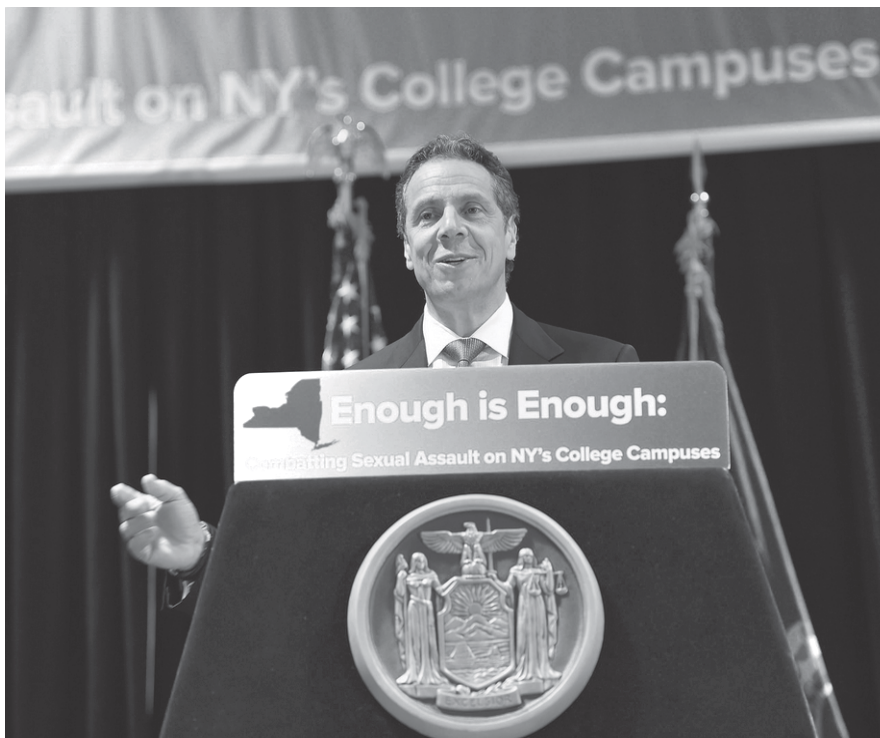


Photo courtesy of the New York Post

“harassment and sexual violence are rooted in patriarchy, misogyny, and homo and transphobia. You cannot simply legislate that away.”

ment, assault, and rape possible in the first place. Additionally, the study found that students identifying as transgender, genderqueer, or non-conforming reported the highest rates of sexual assault and misconduct. This raises awareness that while the proposed changes and new focus on legislation are certainly positive, more can be done to address and acknowledge the violence that transgender and non-gender conforming people face on campus.

The governor and Board of Trustees might think a legal response is adequate. But gender harassment

and sexual violence are rooted in patriarchy, misogyny, and homo and transphobia. You cannot simply legislate that away. It is only due to the tireless efforts of on-campus activists and organizations to draw attention to the pervasive nature of the problem, of the survivors who testify despite repercussions, and of the researchers who repeatedly demonstrate that on-campus violence is real that rape culture and gender-based harassment are being recognized. And these efforts must continue.

We know how easily sexual assault, rape, and gender-based harassment go underreported and thus disregarded—or, like the recent case of the Owen Labrie rape trial, how easily perpetrators can twist the story to create “reasonable” doubt. As officers of the Doctoral Student Council (DSC), we aim to raise awareness of these proposed bylaw changes for the Graduate Center community as both students and faculty within the CUNY system. We hope to make this information as accessible as possible so that it can be shared in our classrooms to publicize the available resources, and also to open up a discussion about how to make campuses free of sexual and gender-based harassment a real possibility.



For more information:

The on campus Title IX coordinator at the Graduate Center is Edith Rivera, who can be reached at erivera@gc.cuny.edu or 212-817-7410.

And from the NYC government website: “To report a sexual assault on a New York college campus to the State Police, call the dedicated 24-hour hotline at 1-844-845-7269. In an emergency, call 911.

For confidential resources, call the New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline at 1-800-942-6906. In New York City, call 1-800-621-HOPE (4673) or dial 311.”

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FERPA does not apply to prospective students, so it cannot be used to limit students' participation on admissions committees.



Speak-Out!

Stop Racist Terror!

CUNY Internationalist Marxist Club

"A year since Ferguson, racist terror continues," declared the call for a Speak-Out Against Racist Repression. CUNY Internationalists organized the protest outside Hunter College on 2 September. Approximately 80 students and workers participated in the resistance against the ongoing repression that led to Sandra Bland's death in police custody. Pulled over by a police officer in Prairie View, Texas, the African American education worker and activist refused to bend to intimidation. Video footage showed the fate Bland suffered from being violently arrested by police. And what happened during her confinement and three days later opened the national conversation about whether Bland actually hung herself in the holding cell. Authorities attempted to pass it off as suicide. But Bland's family denounced the attempted cover-up by considering

Bland's recent excitement in getting a new job at her alma mater as well as her well-known activism against police brutality. Given this background, the Speak-Out Against Racist Repression had to consider that a year since Ferguson, racist terror continues. Having stopped and jailed Sandra Bland for "driving while black," lynch-law terror cut short her life on 13 July, 2015.

Participants in the Hunter Speak-Out held placards and joined in chants like "From Ferguson to New York, Stop Racist Terror" and "Sandra Bland, Michael Brown – Shut the Whole System Down." Signs featured names and faces of Bland and others targeted by racist repression and police violence. Among them stood Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Rekia Boyd, Samuel DuBose, and Amadou Diallo. Other posters showed faces and names of transgender women, mainly Afri-

can-American and Latina, who have been murdered this year. They included London Chanel, Taja Gabrielle DeJesus, and Ashton O'Hara.

Placards declared solidarity with the abducted teachers and college students of Ayotzinapa, Mexico; supported the defense of immigrant rights in the face of Donald Trump's hate campaign and Barack Obama's record-level deportations; and voiced opposition to Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist politicians. Internationalist speakers called for building a revolutionary workers party, linking this to appeals to "uproot racism" and achieve women's liberation through socialist revolution.

Students, immigrant workers, and adjunct professors spoke with fervor. One new Club member said:

"The thing that scares me the most is that it's coming from the NYPD, from people we're told are

there to protect us. But they're not, they're against us, and they kill us every single day. And we have to watch them kill us on YouTube and on Facebook every single day, and there's no justice! Hearing [Eric Garner] say 'I can't breathe' eleven times, and still nothing. You all watch them die. No justice."

When she ended her speech with "Only Revolution Can Bring Justice!" – a chant the Internationalist Club brought to recent protests – the crowd took up the call. An electric feeling filled the air.

Parents of the forty-three abducted Ayotzinapa students sent a special statement to the rally. Police and army troops "disappeared" their sons in the state of Guerrero on the night of 26 September 2014. The parents, who had just addressed a mass meeting on their struggle organized by the Grupo Internacionalista at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, sent "greetings to the struggle of the teachers, students and workers of CUNY...in their fight against the privatization of education and against the racist murders orchestrated by the same bourgeoisie that, at the international level, carried out [these] attacks. From Ferguson to Ayotzinapa, it's the same struggle!"

At the Speak-Out, an immigrant worker from Mexico connected the message of internationalism to the recent seventy-fifth anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination in Mexico City: "Trotsky told us that the revolution must be international, because the capitalist system extends its claws internationally. In the country I come from, the oppressed people are living on the border with that monster. They have a wall against us, but we must build a bridge uniting the working class of all countries to defeat imperialism and the 'national' bourgeoisie." That

is the only way to eradicate racism and all forms of oppression, he said.

Workers from the taxi and food industries (including the Hunter cafeteria) participated in the Speak-Out, together with low-paid adjuncts and others who spoke about the need to link labor struggles to the fight against racism. Several speakers demarcated the contrast between revolutionary class politics and liberal "identity politics." They emphasized the importance of mobilizing the enormous potential power of the working class in the fight against oppression. As an example, they referred to this year's May Day when the dock workers union (ILWU Local 10) shut down the port of Oakland, California, and marched on City Hall to protest police terror, and union activists marched in Portland, Oregon, in the "Labor Against Racist Police Murder" contingent.

Many speakers at the Hunter protest addressed the inseparable connection between capitalism and racism in the United States. A rally organizer emphasized that racial oppression is "fundamental to the nature of this capitalist state, born in the blood of black slaves and the genocide of native peoples."

"That is its legacy in the United States of America: human lives in exchange for profit. The police were not created to protect human lives, but to enforce this ruthless equation, to act as the armed fist of the capitalist state. The origins of modern-day police forces lie in the slave patrols of the South. The first uniformed police force was established in 1783 in Charleston, South Carolina to control the local slave population."

In his classic *State and Revolution*, she noted, Lenin defines the state as an organ of class rule that "legalizes and perpetuates oppression." She stressed: "We can't afford

"[Capitalism's] legacy in the United States of America: human lives in exchange for profit."

to indulge in illusions of pressuring capitalist politicians to the left"; any real fight against poverty, war and racism means breaking from "subjugation to the Democratic Party," whether its candidate be Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. "We need a revolution. That's the only way we're going to end this racist violence." @

We have

Representation!



USS delegate, Cecilia Salvi now serves as the student member on the Board of Trustees Fiscal Affairs Committee.

PUSHBACK
against fee and tuition increases



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST

*Dear President
Robinson &
Provost
Lennihan,*

From Naomi Podber

I briefly met with President Robinson during his open office hours this past fall, and he suggested that I write to both of you with my concerns about the sudden change in disbursement of the Dean K. Harrison Awards that students were surprised with last spring. As a white student who has been lucky enough to find a yearly funding package for each year that I have been a student at the Graduate Center, I have no personal stake in the disbursement of this particular award. I simply observed the hardships being faced by many colleagues who were affected by the changes and wanted to speak up, because I believe that the changes made were in direct conflict with the Graduate Center's goal of "retain[ing] the best and most diverse students," as stated in Section 4.2.A of the draft of the Periodic Review Report for MSCHE, which was sent out to the Graduate

Center community last week. Again, I do not want to be disrespectful and am incredibly grateful for the support I have received at the Graduate Center, but I believe that this particular change sent a problematic message to students that needs to be brought to the attention of the administration.

Though student funding at the Graduate Center is becoming stronger every year, as the administration works on giving incoming students stronger and longer-term funding plans, professors on the admissions committees here have always had the difficult job of recruiting strong students into their programs with very limited funding. As a result, students in earlier cohorts generally have very differential funding, based on what-

ever funding the professors of the program have been able to cobble together for them. I believe that when many incoming students of color were let into the program, the program faculty assumed they could rely on these students being able to access yearly Harrison Awards, and since faculty assumed this would be a consistent funding source, it gave them the latitude to disburse other funding opportunities to other incoming students.

When the funding structure was changed with very little advance warning, students who had come to rely on this substantial sum each semester as their main source of Graduate Center funding (often the only source of funding they got from the Graduate Center) were left to

scramble and apply for money that they had already factored into their finances for the coming school year, especially after many had already declined other jobs and scholarships in expectation of getting a Harrison Award. Many students in my cohort and adjacent cohorts proceeded to halt their important end-of-semester research and coursework to take the time to apply for the Harrison Award, only to be told after they were rejected that the award had been given to only Level III students and that they were never really in the running for it in the first place. Level I students were not even able to re-apply for the award and were also completely cut off from a source of funding that they had been relying on.

I believe that this

last-second move (at least, the students that it affected were informed at the last second) was highly problematic. One, it pulled the Graduate Center's main stream of support for minority students out from under them, thus abandoning, causing severe stress to, and jeopardizing the academic trajectories of the very students who the Graduate Center should be supporting (and claims to be supporting) in its efforts to become more diverse. Again, many students had already declined other jobs and scholarships by this time of year, specifically because they had expected to receive the Harrison Award, and the situation has had long-term effects on students who were already struggling to find consistent sources of income and funding. In addition (I am embarrassed to mention it but the analogy is glaring), the idea of suddenly pulling the resources specifically from minority students and making them compete for an inadequate number of funding packages can-

not help but remind a member of our current popular culture of the theme of the *Hunger Games*.

I would like the administration to think carefully about the message that this change sent to the many Level I, II, and possibly III students who found out in an email that they were no longer going to be able to rely on Harrison money for the coming school year. As a supplement, I am including anonymized testimony I received months ago in an informal email from

a colleague who was affected by this change, followed by a follow-up email sent last week in which the student explains that the fact that no information about Harrison has yet been sent out this year may well mean that the student must take a leave of absence next semester. I can personally attest that this is only one of many, many similar stories from Graduate Center students.

Sincerely,

Naomi Podber

Anonymized email:


I don't even know where to start...

The first thing was how last minute everything was. We were told about the change when the deadline was less than two weeks away. Then the deadline was extended but this wasn't communicated until there were less than two weeks left AGAIN. So, I had to scramble to get my application materials together. Then, I made myself crazy getting the application in, only to be told that we didn't qualify anyway. Basically, it felt as if we were being told, "your time doesn't matter to us, kid." I'm not sure I'm conveying how stressful that was. When you're working multiple jobs, time is tight.

Getting the Harrison fellowship in the past meant that I had tuition covered. I haven't had a Grad anything or a teaching fellowship to depend on. I had to find my own teaching jobs (and still do) to cover tuition. If, for some reason, the available courses don't fit with my schedule, then I can't teach. So, having the Harrison money at least let me have the peace of mind that my tuition would be covered, and then I knew I could

always work at side jobs to support myself (as opposed to working side jobs to support myself and also pay \$3000 in tuition, which is just not possible).

From the email we got from the administration, it seems like they decided to give more money to fewer students to avoid the bottleneck that happens when students are ABD. The thing is, I'm not close to being ABD yet, because I've gotten little to no funding over the years, and it has slowed my progress. It's an endless hustle.

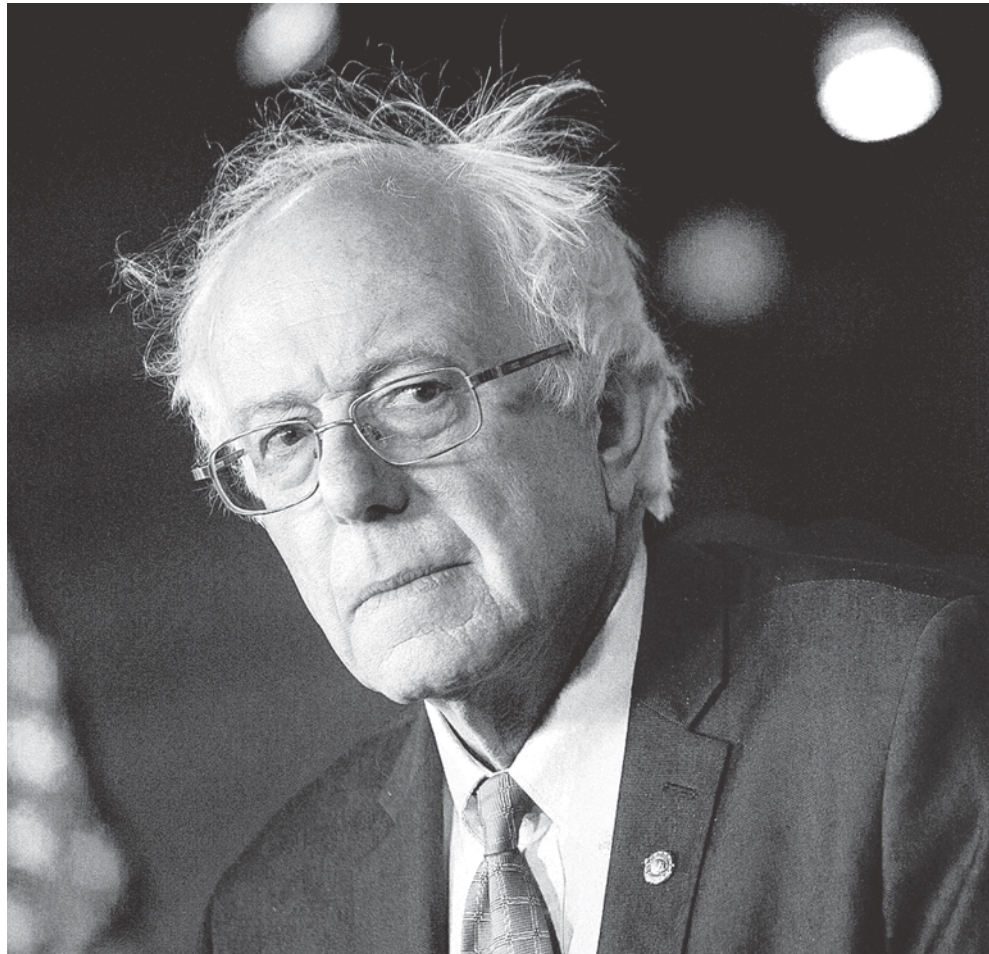
Another thing is that I had received an email from [the head of my department] letting me know about the upcoming deadline. So, people like [the head of the department] may have assumed that I had possibilities for funding coming my way (meaning that I would not need departmental funding) when in fact that was not going to happen. 

See the follow-up email online

Bernie Sanders:

Gordon Barnes

Some months ago, I was at a bar in New York with an acquaintance of mine. While smoking with him outside, he gestured to one of his friends (a man I had never met before) and said something to the effect of, "Hey, Norman, you should chat with Gordon, he is a communist too!" In that brief moment before Norman and I began talking, I was imbued with this sense of giddy anticipation that I imagine most leftists feel when meeting someone cut from a similar cloth. What would Norman be? I wondered. Did Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, or any variety of hard-left politics influence him? As Norman approached, he said— "So Bernie Sanders, right?!" He stated it with such exuberance, and with the implicit assumption that I, as a "communist," would of course support Sanders. Almost instinctively, I blurted out, "Fuck that imperialist pig, he is a Democrat and a capitalist, ain't no way I am supporting him," or a phrase which at least encapsulated that sentiment. Over the course of the evening Norman, who identified politically as an anarchist, despite then working for a Democratic Party operation in Connecticut, explained the supports Sanders for being the lesser of two evils.



Capitalist pig

Sander's Record

Now that the race for the US presidency heats up and the Republican Party is in the full throes of its rather magnificent political theater, demagoguery, and its otherwise ridiculously backwards politics, it is quite clear that Sanders is the lesser of two evils. He is also preferable to Hillary Clinton and any of the mainstream bourgeoisie candidates. But being the lesser of two evils does not make one "progressive," "radical," or "socialist," the last label is, of course, a favorite of Sanders and his supporters (democratic-socialist more specifically). Sanders remains, as I said to Norman, an imperialist and a capitalist. It is disheartening to see how many leftists – in organized groups and parties as well as individually – fawn over this man, gushing now that a self-avowed socialist has a somewhat realistic shot at the US presidency. It is a sign of "progress" that a "socialist" can feasibly win the presidency of the United States in this day and age, just as it was "socially progressive" that a black man was elected president in 2008. But like Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders' identity is not what is going to disrupt or change the status quo. If we recall, many on the Left had similar notions about Obama's election being some sort of panacea for American societal ills. Obviously it wasn't the case then, and it isn't the case now, even if Sanders is more "progressive" than Obama is.

For all intents and purposes, Sanders is a Democrat. He endorsed both of Barack Obama's campaigns in 2008 and 2012, and he

caucused with the Democrats and is a part of their committees in congress. His primary campaign advisor, Ted Devine, served Democratic presidential nominees Al Gore and John Kerry. Rest assured, Sanders is a Democrat through and through. He is in no shape or form a socialist, at least not one that categorically disavows capitalism. He is what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels termed a "bourgeoisie socialist." Simply put, on the domestic front, he wants to attack the so-called "one percent" in an effort to raise the most people into the level of the bourgeoisie, or at least into a class position which easily maintains petty-bourgeoisie consciousness. This is, of course, untenable and impossible under capitalism.

Furthermore, Sanders is as bellicose an imperialist as they come. Aside from abstaining in the 1991 Gulf War vote, Sanders has voted in the affirmative for nearly every military action overseas during his tenure as a senator. Highlights include his endorsing the US-led intervention in Somalia in 1991 and the NATO bombing campaign in the former Yugoslavia in 1999, voting for open-ended Authorization for the Use of Military Force, various votes for military appropriations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his unwavering support of Obama's drone warfare in Yemen, Pakistan, and Libya. Granted, he doesn't want "boots on the ground," but rest assured that if Sanders becomes Commander-in-Chief, the belligerent international policies of the United States would merely continue unabated.

Sanders is also quite amenable

to the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee and the right-wing Likud government of Israel, offering staunch support to Israel's murderous assault on the Palestinian population. He mobilizes the specter of "Islamic terrorism," whilst simultaneously supporting and encouraging Saudi Arabia (simply a different rendition of Islamic terrorism if we consider Alain Badiou) to become more active alongside the US war efforts in the Middle East. He supported the PATRIOT Act extension in 2006 and voted for legislation making fourteen provisions of the act permanent, and sponsored so-called "roving wiretaps" conducted by the FBI. The list goes on and on. Sanders' voting record really is a litany of grotesque positions and measures of suppression and coercion, both "at home" and abroad. And his politics are reflective of this, to the point that him being the sort of messianic figure certain groups and individuals have made him out to be is nothing short of myopic.

The US Left and Sanders

When Sanders officially announced his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in May 2015, he stated, "We need a political revolution in this country involving millions of people who are prepared to stand up and say, 'enough is enough,' and I want to help lead that effort." Sure, this country needs a political revolution. But a political revolution is not sufficient to supplant dominant social relations endemic to the capitalist economy. This country, as most

in socialist drag.

others do, needs a social revolution, which would also necessitate the former. Sanders has no intention of altering social reality beyond some trite “tax the rich” schemes. If we recall, Donald Trump recently advocated a similar sort of “progressive” taxation. Bernie Sanders’ sole claim to any sort of radical or “socialist” politics is nothing of the sort. He is simply a Left-liberal, a social-democrat, one who wants to remedy a socio-economic system but has no viable solution to end oppression and social marginalization.

With some tapping into the obfuscating rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street, Sanders has been billed as the champion of middle-class America, and even at times as an advocate of the working-class. These are spurious claims; yes he is opposed to the superordinate elite, but these people are simply the top of the pyramid. They are a symptom, not the disease. The disease is capitalism; indeed, the disease is the pyramid. Sanders is not able, nor is he willing, to topple the pyramid. He just wants to make sure those in the upper echelons pay their rightful share. This, of course, will not happen. For one, the US President’s primary responsibility is that of Commander-in-Chief, or in other words, leading US military operations across the globe. The president’s power is attenuated domestically, with power being held in Congresses (both federal and at the state level). So for all that the president actually is and actually does, the US Left unfortunately has taken up his domestic challenge to corporate dynamism cause célèbre.

Occupy Wall Street was one of the first “radical” organizations to endorse Sanders’ campaign, which along with other organizations called for a political subordination to his “progressive” campaign. Even

an editorial in the Jacobin, a well-regarded socialist journal went so far as to critically support Sanders, while “being aware of [the campaigns] limits.” And other articles in the same publication are along similar lines, the most radical of which lament that Sanders is running as a Democrat, which is very lukewarm criticism indeed. The Communist Party USA, long time supporters of Left Democrats, claimed that Sanders gave socialist politics “respectability” and legitimacy. As if the precepts of revolutionary social change rest on the respectable and legitimate nature of the politics in question.

Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization, the two largest left-wing parties in the United States, opted to endorse Sanders. The former is the same party of Seattle City Council Member Kshama Sawant who capitulated to the Democratic Party in no short time, and openly endorsed Sanders as a candidate for president, even prior to his official announcement. Lamenting that he was running as a Democrat once the formal bid was made clear, SA posited that Sanders should run as an independent if he loses to Hillary Clinton. The ISO took a slightly different line, arguing that Sanders should have returned to Vermont to challenge the incumbent Democrat (with Sanders operating as an independent) in order to build a broad-based third party option to the Republicans and Democrats.

That the two largest “socialist” organizations in the country capitulated on the basic Marxian principle (they do claim to be Marxists after all) of abjuring class collaboration and tailed after Sanders is nauseating and uncontainable. Their proposed measures of “just having him run as an independent” are pure

fantasy. If Sanders loses, he will deliver his voters to Clinton, or whoever the Democratic nominee will be. The lack of critical insight into who and what Sanders represents (liberal elites and liberal “ameliorated” forms of capitalist enterprise to be clear), and what he politically stands for is detrimental to the Left in this country. It is precisely these sorts of opportunistic politics that lead to resounding political defeats, massacres, and at times, even the wholesale liquidation of revolutionary minded folks across the globe.

I am specifically referencing China in 1927, Spain in 1936, Germany in 1939, Indonesia in 1965, and Chile in 1973. Now, let it be clear, at this current historical juncture, the Left’s support of Sanders won’t lead to the murder of communists by the government or reactionary militias, nor will it lead to fascism. These politics, however, are of the same genealogy, and are so devoid of any strategic and tactical acumen that if the social balances were any

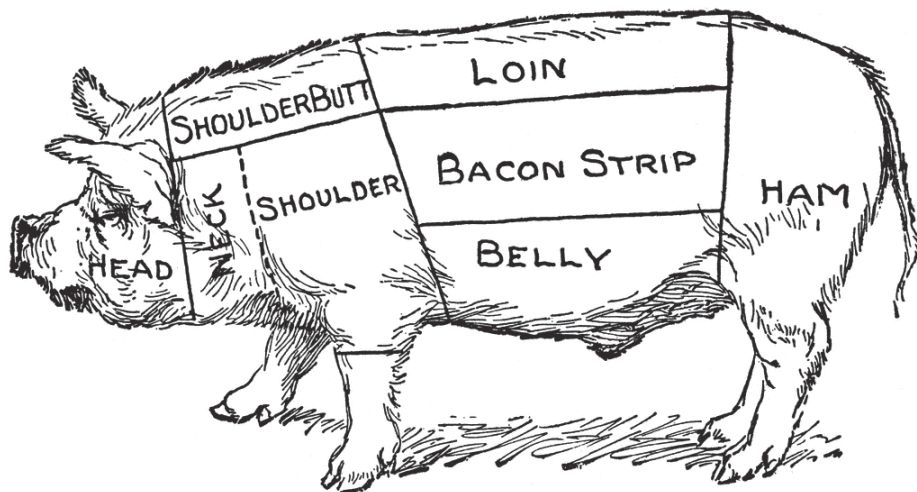
“Occupy Wall Street was one of the first ‘radical’ organizations to endorse Sanders’ campaign, which... called for political subordination to his ‘progressive’ campaign.”

different in this country, such could very well be the reality. The fulsome praise of Sanders by certain sectors of the Left impedes any real chance for substantive social reorganization. And while not necessarily dangerous at this point in time, such politics will invariably prove detrimental to radical social gains in the future.

There are left-wing organizations that have rightfully attempted to demonstrate the fallacious arguments and deceptive politics of Sanders, the Internationalist Group for one, as well as a few other Trotskyist organizations and anarchist groups. The most visible critical engagement with Sanders' campaign, however, has come from the Black Lives Matter Movement.

BLM and Sanders

On 8 August, three activists from the Seattle branch of Black Lives Matter made a heroic intervention at a Bernie Sanders event celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Social Security and Medicare. Incidentally, the SA propagandized the event as a great meeting amongst socialists. Sawant was present as well and she spoke before Sanders. Two of the activists, Marissa Johnson and Mara Jacqueline Willaford, took to the stage just as Sanders declared Seattle "the most progressive city in America." After a brief scuffle, some yelling, and Sanders informing Johnson that he would not engage with her "if that [was her] attitude," the BLM activists were allotted four and a half minutes to speak, a gesture in remembrance of the four and a half hours Michael Brown's corpse was left in the street after Darren Wilson murdered him (Brown died on 9 August). Johnson began her brief speech by contradicting Sanders'



portrayal of Seattle as a bastion of progressive forces, citing the genocide of indigenous peoples and the recent construction of a new prison. She also went on to discuss the (not so unsurprising) instances of police abuses, lack of social parity in the educational sphere, and the ongoing processes of gentrification. Johnson went on further to note that since Sanders was claiming to be a "grassroots" candidate (an apt description of his self-styled social-democratic politics), he should be in tune with the largest grassroots movement in the United States today, Black Lives Matter. During this portion of her speech, jeering and booing from the crowd intensified, particularly when she called for a moment of silence in remembrance of Brown. The event ended soon thereafter.

Sanders released a statement citing himself as the only candidate willing to "fight hard" against racism and for criminal justice reform. No statement could really be more nebulous. BLM activists also interrupted Sanders earlier in July at the Netroots Nation conference in Phoenix, Arizona. These political engagements by BLM activists are the only direct criticism that Sanders has received from the broad US Left. While the politics of BLM have many internal issues and flaws, as

they too (or at least sections of the movement) have openly capitulated to more "civil" engagement with the powers that be, namely the Democratic Party, the aforementioned engagements bring to the fore yet another problem with Sanders. He does not see an inherent problem with the racialized structure of capitalism. Really, the only concession given to BLM in the aftermath of these heroic interventions was that Sanders hired a Black woman as part of his "outreach" team. Simply put, it is an attempted method to stymie any dissent on the race question, and get Black folks, particularly young Blacks, in lockstep with his campaign.

Johnson and Willaford's intervention, as well as others, were good in the sense that they publicly demonstrated the open hostility towards BLM by liberals and purported leftists and socialists. The intervention(s), however, are problematic in another light. While the activists chastised Sanders, as they rightfully should have, there remained the inkling that he should, if he wants to be truly progressive, engage with BLM. This is a dangerous tactic, and while not necessarily in the vein of class collaboration (BLM isn't a class-based organization, though it is increasingly petty-bourgeoisie), it is one that could

potentially lead to the subservience of BLM to elements within, or associated with, the Democratic Party. Really, the only viable option for dealing with the phenomenon of Bernie Sanders as a socialist candidate is complete divestment and unrelenting criticism. He offers no hope to BLM to end the spate of police killings, as this is a social issue and will not be resolved with some tepid “political revolution.” The precarious existence for large portions of Afro-Americans and other marginalized groups for that matter will not be ameliorated by ticking a box for Sanders come 8 November, 2016.


Against Sanders, for What?

Eugene V. Debs, he is not. Though I have seen some compare Sanders to Debs, what an assault on the character and legacy of the latter. Sanders wants to moonlight as a socialist, and that is fine so long as organizations on the Left pay him no mind and offer him no support (critical support is an inordinate amount of political backing for a capitalist war hawk). Much of the incipient desire to support Sanders amongst elements on the Left in this country is that the notional value of liberal democracy still holds sway. This needs to be shed immediately. Republican democracy is simply the dictatorship of capital, and being so consumed and subsumed into it makes it exceedingly difficult to dismantle it.

How then are we to bring about a more egalitarian, just, and less oppressive world then, if not through voting for the lesser evils such as Sanders and whatever dregs come to the fore in his wake? If bourgeoisie democracy is a dead end (and it is), what way forward? Re-

ally, the only sound answer is to mobilize the oppressed to directly confront the extant power structures in this country. There needs to be more Baltimores, more port shutdowns, and teacher and transit worker strikes. The working class, in conjunction with sympathetic sectors of the middle-class as well as lumpenized people, are the only group(s) that can bring about any modicum of socialism. Through these class struggles, the attendant and interwoven struggles around race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, and etcetera will be waged. It is capitalism that allows the division of labor to exist on such arbitrary terms, and offers no solution to the problems of marginalization, cultural ostracization, and social segmentation except for some piecemeal reforms pushed by people like Bernie Sanders.

Much of the US Left is correct in calling for an alternative mass party to challenge the Republican and Democratic stranglehold on politics in the country. That confrontation, however, cannot be led by social-democrats and bourgeoisie social-

ists. It must be led by the rank and file. Its leadership must be its cadre. Moreover, the challenge to the two party monopoly in this country isn't sufficiently waged at the ballot box. This is something ephemeral, and really not all that important to the material reality of the world we inhabit. What is germane is the amount of social power we (I use “we” as a broad based grouping of oppressed peoples and those elements of more privileged layers that support them) have at our disposal to force the hands of those in power. Only when the collective power of the working poor and oppressed of this country is wielded in such a way as to be precise, uncompromising, unequivocal, and direct, will there be chances of comprehensive social and economic transformation, and the inherent cultural transmutation which would likely follow. Sanders cannot lead anything transformative beyond higher taxes on the super-elite. This is not a social change, this is a placating tool implemented to prevent what is necessary – expropriation, redistribution, and a wholesale reorganization of our collective productive capacities for need rather than profit. It is not enough to attack neoliberal forms of socio-economic or political organization as Sanders alludes “we” must do in order to have a better country or world. Neoliberalism is the symptom, capitalism is the disease, and we need to excise the disease from our collective body and mind without the help of those that parasitically benefit from its very existence. 

“Much of the incipient desire to support Sanders... is that the notional value of liberal democracy still holds sway. This needs to be shed immediately. ”

“Democracy Rising”

Fighting Austerity in Greece

Chloe Wyma

Oxi—the Greek word for no—still covered Athens in the form of graffiti as hundreds of intellectuals and activists convened on 16 July for the Democracy Rising world conference. The defiant slogan urged Greek voters to reject another round of austerity measures Europe’s financial establishment demanded. On 5 July, Greek voters—in step with their left-wing coalition government Syriza—overwhelmingly voted against the program in a referendum. A week later, Europe’s financial technocracy strangled Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras into accepting a €86 billion bailout in exchange for an immiserating program of spending cuts, tax hikes, union crackdowns, pension cuts, legislation repeals, and fire-sale privatization of national assets. The night before the conference, protests erupted when the Greek Parliament passed the first set of bailout measures with twenty-one percent of Syriza MPs voting against it. Tsipras purged his cabinet of rebels the day after. Since then, he relied on support from opposition

parties to pass another round of bailout reforms in the parliament and blocked a bid from dissenters to end bailout negotiations and return to a national currency.

Given these circumstances, the conference’s optimistic title took on a grimly ironic character. The memorandum imposes an economic dictatorship on a popularly elected government. It demonstrates that the European project—currently determined by zombie obedience to neoliberal market logic and vindictive austerity policies—is incompatible not only with the social justice policy of a left government but with democracy itself. That is the conclusion, if there is one at all, to be drawn from Democracy Rising, which took place over four days at the University of Athens’ School of Economics and Policy, the same building students occupied on 21 February, 1973, kicking off the Polytechnic uprising that brought down Greece’s military junta months later.

Considering Greece’s role in influ-

encing the future of radical politics and the renewed impetus on the left to seek political alignments, Democracy Rising understandably attracted tremendous attention. Organized in partnership with the University of Athens by the Global Center of Advanced Studies, a new graduate school under the presidency of noted scholar, Alain Badiou, the conference reflected its host institution’s aspirations to reconcile activism and intellectual production. Against the backdrop of a thoroughly postmodern political situation where no means yes, Democracy Rising forced an encounter between the theory-oriented metapolitics of leftist academics and the debates from Syriza insiders negotiating a labyrinth of urgent and complex questions. Did the capitulators avert an economic emergency with dire humanitarian consequences? Or did they betray popular mandate by acquiescing to the same policies Greek voters—with Syriza’s cheer-leading—rejected just days before? How badly does Syriza’s genuflec-

tion dampen hopes for a greater European Left? Would exiting the Eurozone free Greece from debt vassalage or plunge the country deeper into bankruptcy?

Democracy Rising didn't produce definitive answers but a collective sense of battered hope and delicate solidarity. This reflects the confusion of a divided Greek left as it tries to regroup. The historical exigencies of the Eurozone crisis transformed a forum for theory and philosophy into a contentious and occasionally explosive site of realpolitik, leveling the ground between the ivory tower and the sausage factory of parliamentary democracy. After a long day at work, a weary but determined speaker of the Hellenic Parliament addressed the conference on its first day. Zoi Konstantopoulou says, "These are very difficult times for those of us who believed there was a limit to this anti-democratic, anti-European, anti-human policy."

Konstantopoulou is one of Tsipras's most vocal opponents within Syriza's Left Platform, the muscle behind the Greek Debt Truth Commission—which, with the help of political scientist Eric Touissant, published a report in June declaring Greece's debt "illegal, odious and unsustainable." It should be noted too that Konstantopoulou has a rather unlikely ally in the IMF, which, after breaking its own rules to back Greece's first two untenable bailouts, now refuses to finance another deal unless Greece's creditors offer significant debt relief. In his welcoming address, Greek Minister of Education Aristides Baltas defended Tsipras' surrender. If he hadn't compromised, he said, bank closures would have prevented ships from delivering drinking water to the Greek islands. He argued that even with Schäuble & Co. gripping Greece's purse strings, Syriza could

still help working people by assisting the country's growing grassroots organizations, social movements, and solidarity networks. In response, Costas Douzinas, professor of law at the University of London, urged his comrades to "critically support" the Syriza government.

On the other hand, British-Pakistani activist and intellectual Tariq Ali called Tsipras' capitulation a betrayal of the Greek people, underwritten by a fetishization of the Euro currency and a "fatal trust" in the EU, which he likened to a dysfunctional family headed by a German patriarch "schooling in the old disciplinary ways of Prussia." He further stated that he didn't think the Syriza government could survive longer after that. But he reversed his sharpest knives to address the hypocrisy of Europe's financial elites: "these jokers who teach lessons to the Greek people

like Juncker, who runs a Ruritanian duchy called Luxemburg which is the biggest tax evasion center in Europe."

The battle over Syriza escalated on the second day of the conference when economist Costas Lapavistas, a Member of Parliament and delegate of Syriza's Left Platform, delivered a combative speech calling the bailout "a disastrous capitulation" to the Eurozone's "neocolonial" and "recessionary" program. Syriza, he argued, had made a strategic error in betting on the seductive but ungovernable platform to pave the way for socialism in Greece while remaining within a monetary union "that crystalizes and encapsulates class relations." He emphasized that Greece cannot undergo change while benefitting from the bailout. He proposed that Greece should withdraw its "consent to this



agreement and redesign a radical program that is consistent with our values, our aims, and what we told to the Greek people."

Lapavistas laid out an exit strategy that includes defaulting on the national debt, nationalization of the banks, and the conversion of all prices and obligations to the new currency at a rate of 1:1. He expects devaluation to settle at fifteen to twenty percent. He explained that the plan would create a difficult recession initially, but he expects positive rates of growth to appear after twelve to eighteen months as the dormant Greek productive sector regains control of the domestic market. Pandemonium erupted in the lecture hall in response to his speech—so too did applause and obscenities in almost equal measure.

Lapavistas's plan, countered Douzinas, "could be the longest suicide note in the history of the left". Lapavistas's projections are contestable, but his plan was the most concrete alternative to the austerity doctrine that emerged in the conference. On 31 July, Tspiras admitted he charged former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis with drafting a contingency plan to exit the Euro, but claimed it was only an emergency measure. While the prospect of leaving the Euro seems increasingly distant, a revolt within Syriza is likely to lead to new elections in September or October and, with them, a renewed possibility of a so-called "Grexit."

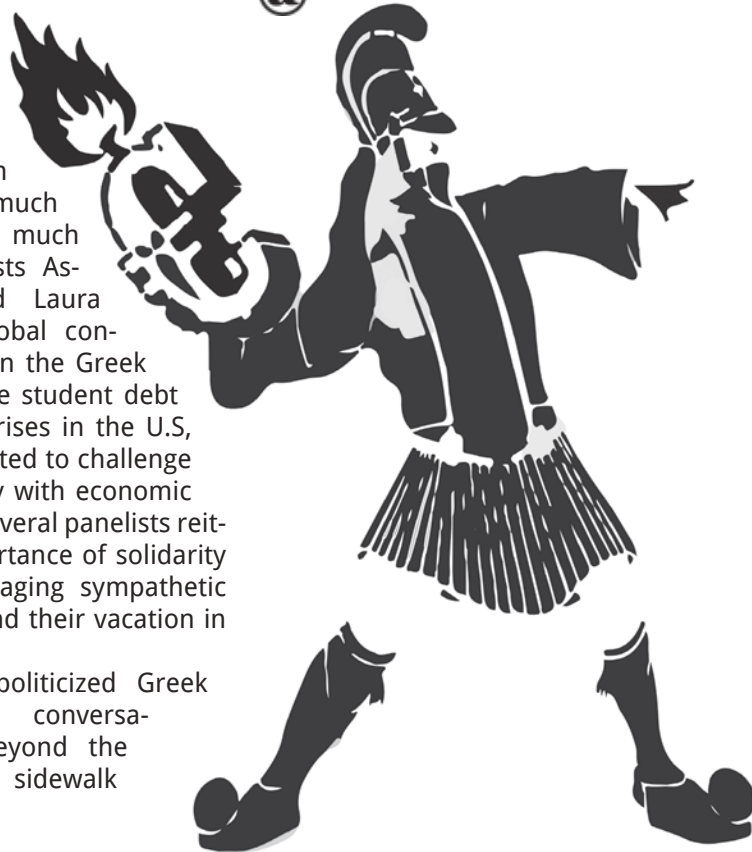
On Sunday, Stelios Elliniadis of Syriza's Central Committee spoke candidly to organizers from other European left parties including Germany's Die Linke, Ireland's Sinn Féin, and Spain's Podemos. He implored them to learn from Syriza's mistakes. He said the party lacked a serious exit strategy and a plan for

staying in the Eurozone and governing within its iron cage. "We failed to have a deeper understanding of the will of the people," he stated, "The leading group in the Syriza government was surprised and, I should say, scared by the result." This post-Oxi moment is a time of introspection and self-criticism, but also one of solidarity, a notion that will become increasingly significant whether Greece exits or continues to struggle under the dead hand of Eurozone policy. Leo Panitch, a professor of political economy at York University, criticized armchair quarterbacking from those outside Greece and urged Syriza to expand international solidarity networks. Catarina Principe, a Portuguese activist and member of Portugal's Bloco de Esquerda, and Eoin O Broin from Sinn Féin maintained Euroskepticism while also criticizing inflammatory and divisive rhetoric against Syriza's leadership.

"The EU is showing the cracks in the European project," Principe said, "They can only accept so much democracy, so much equality." Activists Astra Taylor and Laura Hanna drew global connections between the Greek situation and the student debt and mortgage crises in the U.S., urging the indebted to challenge creditor morality with economic disobedience. Several panelists reiterated the importance of solidarity tourism, encouraging sympathetic travelers to spend their vacation in Greece.

In a highly politicized Greek society, these conversations spilled beyond the university. At a sidewalk

café in the leftist neighborhood of Exarcheia, journalists and activists dissected Syriza's recent failures and weighed the pros and cons of a post-Euro Greece. "We mourn together. We don't sleep at night," said Mihalis Panayiotakis, a journalist and member of Syriza's digital policy committee. He maintains hope that exiting the Euro may offer a way out of peonage and austerity. "People 'want' to stay in the Eurozone for the same reasons shopkeepers 'want' to remain under some mobsters' protection racket," he said, "It's not because of hope, it's because of fear." "This is the first time someone tried to articulate an alternative to global capitalism," said journalist Matthaïos Tsimitakis. "We failed. So what? There's a clear class root to the referendum. The rich voted for 'yes.' The poor voted for 'no.' Maybe people have changed. Maybe it's not the end."



(Mis)Understanding GANG VIOLENCE in El Salvador

Denise Rivera

Fear remains one of the most powerful forces to influence humans to flee or endure hostility. The influence of fear can be seen in any terrible act of violence, or even in the mere utterance of such words as “gangster” or “terrorist.” So what happens when the two words come together? When thinking about Al Capone, the word “terrorist” seems to be the last word that comes to mind. Yet, the word “terrorist” too has evolved into a different meaning. On 24 August 2015, the Corte Suprema de Justicia (Supreme Court) of El Salvador formally declared both supporters and members of the notorious gang, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), as terrorists. The verdict was in response to the high murder rates and social instability that had been terrorizing citizens, many of whom cornered into conceding to MS-13’s extortionist demands. And this past summer, El

Salvador had officially been ranked as having the highest murder rate in the world without being involved in a war.

Historically, El Salvador has not been a stranger to bloodshed. It was plagued by a civil war from 1979 to 1992—a fight between the conservative Salvadorian military government forces known as La Fuerza Armada (Armed Forces), and the leftist guerrilla forces that would eventually create the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) political party. The Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992 officially ended the civil war but achieved little in establishing peace. Despite the terms of this peace agreement to reduce military size, demobilize both the Armed Forces and the guerrilla army, create a new police force, permit more political freedoms, provide more land reform policies for rural work-

ers, and implement more beneficial social programs, it failed to resolve the socio-economic inequality that remained prevalent among the majority of Salvadorians.

During the civil war, many Salvadorians fled and sought asylum in the United States, the most popular destination being Los Angeles, California. Due to existing segregation amongst Mexicans and African-Americans, and with both creating their own gangs to establish control over certain neighborhoods, MS-13 was formed to protect Salvadorians from other rival gangs. Eventually, MS-13 members themselves got involved in other criminal activities that would lead the United States to implement tougher deportation policies to deal with the rampant gang violence on its soil. The unresolved socio-economic inequality in El Salvador, coupled with the huge influx of deported MS-13 members,

paved the way for years of political instability in El Salvador. Moreover, it didn't help matters that the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) party targeted the MS-13 as the root of many social concerns that predated their arrival.

MS-13's criminal activities range from car theft and extortion from business owners and workers to kidnappings and drug trafficking. It heavily recruits Salvadorian youth—a strategy that reflects the lack of educational and vocational opportunities for teenagers from low-income families. In October 2012, the United States Department of Treasury officially classified MS-13 as the first gang to function as a transnational criminal organization. The presence of Mara Salvatrucha is global, having members from the West Coast and the East Coast of the United States, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, and even Spain. Although it does not have as strong a global presence as its rival, the 18th Street Gang is another organization notorious for its violent acts in El Salvador. In 2003, former Salvadorian President Francisco Flores Perez implemented a measure called Plan Mano Dura (Iron Fist). It gave the police authorities the power to imprison any person suspected of being a gang member without any evidence. While this led to increased incarceration, it was also compounded by a reciprocal increase in gang violence.

When Mauricio Funes came into office in 2009, optimism and hope returned to many Salvadorians. Funes was the first FMLN party candidate to win the presidency. He promised to create better programs to assist in reducing poverty but he also authorized the army to collaborate with the police to find an effective solution to gang violence. This concerned many Salvadorians, as it



was reminiscent of the government operations during the civil war when death squads were employed to kill those who supported the leftist guerrilla forces. What shocked El Salvador and the rest of the world was when MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang declared a peaceful truce in March 2012. Monsignor Fabio Colindres, head chaplain of the Armed Forces of El Salvador (FAES) and the National Civil Police (PNC),

and Raul Mijango, former FMLN congressman and guerrilla member, conducted this negotiation. In return, gang leaders lived in better prison conditions and gained more privileges such as the right to family visits. The news sparked controversy among Salvadorians who were not only suspicious of the clandestine nature of the negotiations but distrustful of the commitment of gang members, known to be un-



Preside Mauricio Funes. Photo courtesy of El Financiero

predictable and hostile towards innocent civilians. Nevertheless, when the truce was announced, the murder rate did start to decline gradually. Yet, by the end of 2013, the FMLN government withdrew its support due to public pressure and media reports of gang members being transferred to low security prisons, along with accusations of increased extortion and drug trade activity. The current Salvadorian President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, when inaugurated into office in January 2014, he formally declared the end of the truce, thus endorsing the refusal of the governing party to negotiate with gang members. Cerén further announced an initiative called El Salvador Seguro (Safe El Salvador), a \$2 billion USD plan intended to incite institutional reform through violence prevention programs, provide education and training opportunities, build parks and sports facilities, etcetera. Although this initiative sounds promising, it does not significantly alleviate the many problems Salvadorians face.


The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provides significant financial aid to Central American countries with the objective of preventing violence. Yet this aid cannot supplement programs that assist or work with

active gang members. This has affected the availability of sufficient rehabilitation and support programs needed to rehabilitate gang members and introduce them to alternative means of livelihood. The lack of sufficient working relationships between gang members and rehabilitative professionals widens the misunderstanding about gang members' intentions. This has perpetuated the stigma that gang members face from the media, political parties, and citizens. One of their demands, for instance, is that the government invest in poor neighborhoods, repair roads, provide health clinics, schools and loans to start businesses, and reform the police force.

Reports of murdered police officials and bus drivers targeted for extortion and assassination, and the government's desperate attempts to keep the peace through harsher law enforcement measures make the Safe El Salvador plan a distant illusion. Bus drivers have gone on strike, demanding better security measures even as many individuals continue to use private trucks and military vehicles in order to get to their destinations safely. The National Forensics Institute reported that El Salvador has seen 4,246 murders since the beginning of this year, an average of nearly twenty murders per day. To remedy the predicament El Salvadorians face, the government gave the police force unrestrained power to use fatal tactics against gang members without facing legal repercussions.

El Salvador's Supreme Court defined terrorism as organized and systematic exercise of violence. The classification of MS-13 gang members as terrorists was designed to issue harsher prison sentences while decreasing the high homi-

cide rate in the nation. What is not sufficiently addressed is that the prevalence of MS-13 reveals the failures of the 1992 peace accords to effectively implement social reforms and policies that would enable Salvadorians to successfully transition from a war-torn country into a peaceful society. Today, the social and political climate in El Salvador mirrors the civil war days of twenty-three years ago. In fact, on 22 June 2015, the United States Department of State urged traveling U.S. citizens to remain alert of their surroundings while bearing in mind that El Salvador lacks the resources necessary to investigate and further prosecute criminal cases.

Salvadorian gang members have been portrayed as both perpetrators and victims of this current conflict. The public showed them no empathy after their classification as terrorists. Yet the label itself seems to be evolving with time. What seems to be forgotten is that during the civil war, the leftist guerrillas were considered terrorists, although they sought governmental reform and voiced opinions against a socio-economic system that simply failed to address the urgent needs of the people. Salvadorians became gang members to survive in a world that showed little opportunity and care for them. While it is imperative to recognize the immense hardship and cruelty that constitutes their everyday, it cannot condone the various counts of violence that these gang members stand guilty of. To label MS-13 gang members as terrorists will no doubt incite a new conversation and international response regarding how the other neighboring countries may contain this transnational criminal organization and break the cycle of violence. 

“What seems forgotten is that during the civil war, the leftist guerrillas were considered terrorists...”

An Archive of a Revolution

Review of Stanley Nelson, Jr.'s *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*

Gordon Barnes

The images in Stanley Nelson Jr.'s recent documentary, *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, are vatic scenes that immediately bring to mind the recent uprisings in Ferguson and Baltimore. The sole exception is that the people fighting against the police were armed, not with improvised incendiary devices or stones, but rather with firearms. We see repurposed US Army APC's from the war in Indo-China and police units armed with assault rifles, chemical weapons, and flak jackets. Not so different is our current historical moment when the military hardware used against working and oppressed people in Afghanistan and Iraq (amongst other locations in the Middle East and Horn of Africa) are brought to bear on those same groups "at home."

While Nelson's film is by no means a clarion call directly referencing the ongoing tensions between the state (embodied by the police) and the exploited, oppressed layers of this society (personified, more often than not, by Black folks), it

is particularly compelling given the current state of affairs in this country. Through series of interviews with former Black Panthers, people who were on the fringes of the organization, police officers, FBI agents, as well as noted historians and cultural critics, *Black Panthers* demonstrates the power of ideas in politics. Furthermore, it offers a cautionary tale regarding a method of struggle for social transformation – the method of armed self-defense – and the internal chaos which contributed to the eventual demise of the Black Panthers.

The film's narrative begins in the early 1960s, when Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, along with some other men, began to notice and subsequently protest the ill treatment of Afro-American communities in the Bay Area, California. The object of their protests, no doubt, was the police. Armed with the rights guaranteed under the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution, these men initiated a campaign of sorts, to monitor the

police in the course of their duties, all whilst possessing loaded firearms. We see moving images of the early Panthers confronting police abuses and debating state officials in courthouses, all the while, with arms – with the tacit threat of self-defense.

The film's narrative shifts when the Panthers were demonstrating against the 1967 passage of the Mulford Act. Signed by then California governor Ronald Reagan, the Act prohibited the individuals from carrying loaded firearms in public. The legislation was of course cooked up specifically as a way to nip the embryonic political formation of the Panthers in the bud. The documentary then depicts a scene where Ronald Reagan was entertaining some children while the Panthers held a demonstration in a park across the street. Once the news media noticed the presence of the Black Panthers, they rushed past Reagan and his event to speak with the Panthers. According to Nelson, it was from this point on that

the Panthers began to gain recognition for their political program beyond the confines of California.

Nelson takes us on a journey, showed through archival footage (from both “official” sources and from the Panthers themselves), demonstrating the rapid growth and influence of the Black Panther Party between the late 1960s and 1970s. With such a meteoric rise in cultural and political capital, Black Panther chapters began to crop up across the United States. And in addition to the importance placed on wielding firearms, *Black Panthers* also interrogates the development of the children’s food programs, and to a lesser extent, their well-known medical clinics, which provided free medical services to members of the communities in which they operated.

This emergent political and cultural impetus, much of which occurred while Huey Newton was incarcerated for allegedly killing a cop, lead to two things, according to Nelson. Firstly, the development of a cult of personality around Huey Newton, and secondly, a large, untested, untrained, and inevitably politically diffused cadre. *Black Panthers* sets these issues as a framework through which one can comprehend the dissolution of the organization due to internal tensions. However, prior to delving into the deformation of the Black Panther Party, Nelson’s documentary examines the development of various elements of the party.

The creation of its international wing, led by Eldridge and Kathleen

Cleaver (after they fled to Algeria in the aftermath of an abortive attempt at armed engagement with the police, which left a young Black Panther, Bobby Hutton, shot dead in the street – at the time unarmed and with his hands raised above his head) was presented as a major facet of the Black Panthers’ political development. Similarly featured was the growth of the Chicago chapter of the Black Panthers, led by the charismatic Fred Hampton. We see images of Hampton and members of his Black Panthers chapter meeting with White “rednecks” and workers in an effort to combat police oppression and social subjugation.

It is from this point in Nelson’s



Top image: Movie poster courtesy of PBS

Bottom : Archive Photo used in promotional materials for “Black Panthers”

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Black Panthers that we begin to see how the rampant external assault on the organization, in conjunction with deep political and social frictions internally, consigned the Panthers to dissolution. The external assault came in the form of the FBI's COINTELPRO operations, a disproportionate amount of which was directed at the Black Panthers. The most notorious operation was the joint FBI-Chicago PD raid on a Black Panthers headquarters where they summarily executed Fred Hampton and others in a predawn raid. In addition to COINTELPRO at the federal level, the city of Los Angeles developed SWAT teams due to the prevalence and increasing social-political power wielded by the Panthers. These developments along with internal frictions lead to the ultimate demise of the organization. It is at this point that the film obfuscates and elides quite a few issues to help us understand how and why the Panthers dissolved in such spectacular fashion.


The sexism in the party is only briefly mentioned explicitly in the film, even though it was rampant within the organization. One of the interviewees even went so far as to say that initially (when the Panthers first formed) they were watching the cops as well as the "neighborhood girls." The problem of gendered divisions of labor was "remedied" by giving women the gun, and having men work in the daycare centers and food distribution programs. This of course was not a panacea, but a stop-gap in order to maintain portions of the female cadre. Huey

Newton's sexism and abuse of his partner, Gwen Fontaine, only appear as an addendum towards the end of the film. The internal misogynistic and chauvinistic character of the Panthers is not suitably dealt with in the film, though we get nuggets of what it would have been like for women in the organization.

On the political front, the film fails to critically engage the problem of Maoism and Fanonian thought as some of the ideological foundations for the organization. The Maoist sentiment is tacitly displayed throughout the film, seen in the slogans of "people's war," "all power to the people," "the revolution has come, it's time to pick up the gun," and "off the pigs." The Fanonian aspect of the party's recruiting is seen in the emphasis on engaging with lumpenized men as the base of the organization. The social power wielded by working class people is largely ignored, with some rare exceptions. Nelson's *Black Panthers* fails to interrogate these as origins of the dissolution, and rests the blame squarely on the aforementioned COINTELPRO operations and the specific conflicts between Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver in the late 1970s and early 1980s – a friction often stoked by FBI informants and plants.

Granted, the film does show some of the early differences between what would become the "Cleaver faction," or the section of the organization devoted to revolutionary struggle and change, and the "Newton faction," or the section committed to quasi-social work and

engagement with the extant juridical framework to an extent that diluted the revolutionary message of the Black Panthers. Both sides, in their embryonic forms while Newton was in prison (1967), and in their calcified forms during the frictions of the 1970s, had good ideas as well as poor ones, as the documentary makes clear. However, the factional issue was not so much to do with the personalities of Cleaver and Newton themselves (as the film makes it appear) as it did with the internal political differences in the organization embodied by the two.

Despite some analytic shortcomings and excising some important information, Nelson's *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* is a beautiful film, and worth seeing for anyone interested in the history of Afro-American struggle in the United States. Additionally, it is fairly significant for those of us reckoning with the problems of race, policing, gender, social power, and the utilities of violence in social movements. Nelson's film is mandatory viewing for those engaged in struggles against the social relations wrought by capitalism, and very much so in this post-Ferguson moment. *Black Panthers*, while not a direct call to action, offers enough insight into the struggle(s) for Black liberation to foment discussion about the future of resistance as the contradictions and negative externalities of capitalism (currently of the neo-liberal flavor in the USA) are exacerbated and continue to adversely affect large swaths of oppressed peoples in this county. 

Un-Queering the Drag Queen

Review of Mathew Lopez's *The Legend of Georgia McBride*

Sarah Lucie

It's a post-RuPaul's *Drag Race* world. Never has this been performed in such stark detail than in Matthew Lopez's play, *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, which opened on 20 August at the Lucille Lortel Theatre as the first of MCC Theater's 2015-2016 season. This cotton-candy comedy tells the story of a heterosexual man finding his "true voice" in the form of his new drag persona, the Carrie Underwood-belting, cowboy boot-wearing Georgia McBride. While the topic may suggest a discussion of gender and sexuality, the play is ultimately diversionary froth that shies away from asking any of the big questions.

Casey, performed by Dave Thomas as Brown as a charming mix of eager optimism and naïveté, works as an Elvis impersonator but is having trouble paying the rent. His wife Jo complains that they've bounced the rent check yet again, because

Casey splurged on nothing more than a Papa John's pizza. The stakes are raised when Jo announces her pregnancy and Casey is demoted to bartender, losing his performance gig to a pair of drag queens brought in to give the bar a new life. Casey's unlikely break occurs unexpectedly—Rexy is just too drunk to go on for her roller-skating Edith Piaf number, so Tracy, the business-minded diva, convinces Casey to throw on a dress and take the stage. The song is in French, so who cares if he knows the lyrics? The performance is a disaster, and yet, Casey is easily convinced to don a dress again and again, and with the help of Tracy, develops a sassy drag persona of his own.

The main theme of the play is a simple and familiar one: to thine own self be true. In this case, the newly found self is a heterosexual White man who turns out to be un-

usually gifted at drag performance. Yet, there's a troubling undercurrent beneath the play's glitzy drag exterior. While the play is filled with an amorphous, light-hearted hope, matters are too simplified and sentimentalized to partake in the truly utopic, forward-thinking force rumbling beneath much queer performance. Indeed, does this production reference or respect the history of drag culture that it calls upon?

In many ways, the play seems to be devoid of any roots in the real drag community, but rather, living in an alternate reality. The play is set in Florida's panhandle, and the bar is a stereotypical dive. Lit-up PBR advertisements decorate the bar's drab interior. It seems highly unrealistic that two drag performers would be brought into such a setting, especially one without an established queer community and fan base, under the assumption

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that they would bring in more revenue. The change of clientele is at least alluded to within the play, as the bar runs out of vodka and the bar owner learns how to make a crass joke.

But it's a false picture of the drag community if drag performance is equated to money. Indeed, money is a large draw for Casey as well. After a night of performances, Casey returns home to Jo elated, handing over enough dollar bills for overdue rent, groceries, and future baby onesies all at once. According to the world of the play, one amateur drag performance leads to immediate fame and fortune (or at least fortune), bypassing any sense of emotional turmoil, practice of the craft, or working from the bottom up. It's as if Casey became the winner of a reality competition overnight.

Drag is relatively easy for Casey, not just as a genre of performance but also in the emotional and moral sense. Another topic portrayed in stark black and white within the play is Casey's gender and sexuality. He is a heterosexual male, living a normative lifestyle with a wife and babies on the way, and the play portrays this information as a clear and undeniable fact. When Jo finally comes to learn of Casey's new career, what troubles her most are his consistent lies.


Never does she voice a concern over Casey's sexuality, nor does Casey feel compelled to defend it. What's more, Casey is portrayed as the heroic breadwinner providing for his family. Perhaps there's a utopic gesture in the suggestion

that Casey's gender and sexuality do not need to be a topic. But that thought is just a generous, hopeful musing. It does need to be a topic. The only reason it is not a topic in this play is because he is safely heterosexual.

A moment of solace arrives in a monologue delivered by Remy, played by Keith Nobbs. Remy gives Casey a personal history lesson, insisting that she did not choose drag, but drag chose her. It is a lifestyle that cannot be put on and taken off at will for a paycheck. What's more, it's an identity that has put Remy in danger, as she describes being beaten as a sixteen-year-old in the parking lot of a bar. Thanks to Remy, drag performance's legacy as "a raised fist inside a sequined glove" at least has a cameo. If only the cameo was given a bit more lip service.

While *The Legend of Georgia McBride* claims "drag is not for sissies," the play itself is far from brave, couching glimmers of hope or insurgence in a mass of heteronormativity. Casey and Jo move forward with their relationship, and moments such as Casey romantically applying lip gloss to Jo's lips suggest a sliding gender scale, but the topic of gender is never breached. The audience is encouraged to whole-heartedly root for a drag queen, but the drag queen is a heterosexual male trying his best to be a father. Off-Broadway audiences are perhaps introduced to the joy that is drag performance, but this drag performance is a cleaned up version ready for a Disney movie,

where the White heterosexual male is the main character and the more accurate drag performers are sassy sidekicks.

The Legend of Georgia McBride is a fun show and perhaps therein lies the danger. It's an easy, false, all glitter and no gore portrait of drag that ends with a heteronormative bow, dodging the more complex stories that linger beneath the surface. This trend of whitewashing queer culture is all too prevalent (the upcoming film *Stonewall* is too obvious to not be referenced). No, "drag is not for sissies." But this Off-Broadway portrayal of drag is. 

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The Dignity of Clarity

Review of Todd May's *Nonviolent Resistance: a Philosophical Introduction*

Tristan Husby

While at a peace conference in 2013, I heard an antiwar activist express dissatisfaction with an ethics course he had once taken at a community college. Enrolling in the class hoping to find some resources to advance his peace work, he was surprised when the professor announced that the guiding thread of the class would be the examination of how different thinkers responded to the problem of justifying murder. The activist left the class cynical of the utility of philosophy in understanding nonviolence. Hopefully that man will get his hands on Todd May's book. Although May does not present a moral defense of nonviolence, he does undertake the difficult task of explaining philosophically why nonviolence works and what kind of moral value nonviolent action has. May also sets himself the additional challenge of presenting all of his arguments in clear and

crisp prose that, for the most part, lacks philosophical jargon.

Those who are familiar with May's other work will expect such a style from him. Although a serious reader of thinkers often mocked for their writing style, (May's previous books include titles such as *Reconsidering Difference: Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, and Deleuze* and *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault*), May himself puts a high value on his work's accessibility to lay-readers. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that he currently writes for The Stone, the *New York Times*' philosophy section. However, May is no mere exegete of the poststructuralist prophets: his arguments about how nonviolent action articulates the values of dignity and equality are very much his own work.

These philosophical arguments are needed because, as May points out, there is currently a dearth of philosophy on nonviolence. This lacuna is curious, since in the past forty years there has been a rise of journals and academic departments dedicated to Peace Studies, an interdisciplinary field that makes use of methods from the social sciences to research such issues as nonviolence, social movements and the establishment of peace. May frequently references this research, both to establish key definitions, such as what exactly is violence, as well as for case studies of successful and unsuccessful nonviolent campaigns. The emphasis on campaigns is purposeful; while May is interested in how nonviolence intersects with the ethics and morality of relationships between individuals, this book is focused on the philosophy of the politics of nonviolence.

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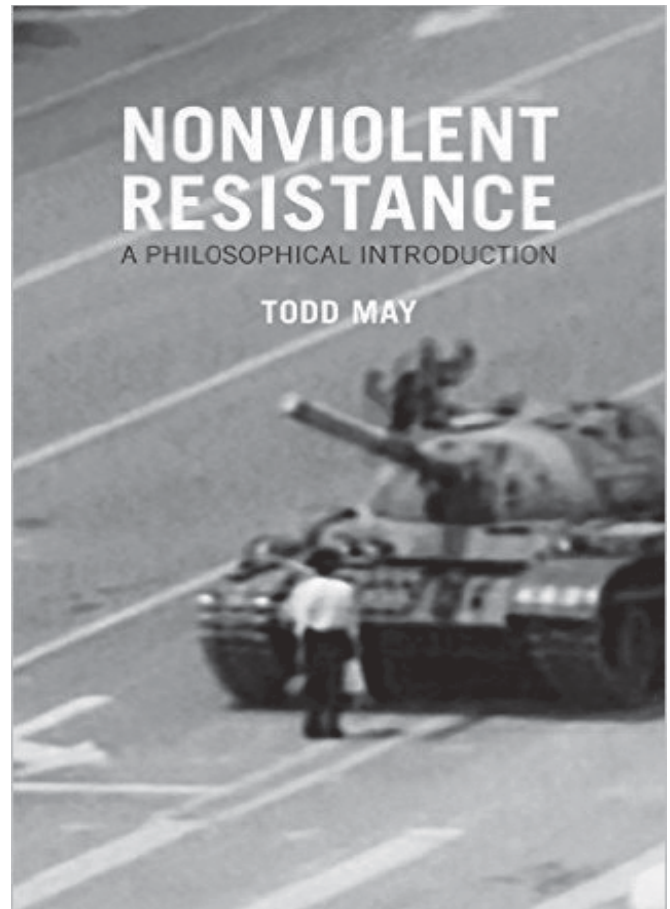
May signals, but does not state, this political orientation in Chapter One. The book opens with an overview of the Singing Revolution, that is, the Estonian resistance to the USSR. He then moves onto the Filipino struggle to oust the dictator Marcos, the Egyptian struggle to oust the dictator Mubarak, and concludes with Occupy Wall Street's struggle against economic inequality in the United States. Unfortunately, narrative history is not May's forte. Rather than serving as an effective hook to spur me to wonder about the power of nonviolent action, I was confused as to where all the philosophy was that May had promised me in the preface. But what this opening does do is shift to the beginning of his book case studies which he reuses as evidence in his later philosophical arguments on nonviolence.

In Chapter Two, May turns to the problem of the definition of nonviolence. Being a logical person, he begins with the question of what nonviolence is negating, namely, violence. Since attempting to define violence in a manner that would satisfy philosophers would require a whole book unto itself, May wisely steers a different course. He admits that the word "violence" performs so many functions that an inclusive definition reaches beyond the book's scope even as he affirms that

it is only with a clear conception of political violence that we understand what it is that nonviolence rejects. Given May's commitment to clear writing, it is perhaps not surprising that Chapter Two is the longest in the book: he tackles questions such as the intentionality of violence, property destruction, the difference between violence and coercion, violence towards animals and the usefulness of terms such as psychological and structural violence. He also does the reader the service of seeking to use historical rather than hypothetical examples as frequently as possible, a stylistic choice which helps break up the abstract writing about definitions. May eschews easy answers to the examples that he poses, sometimes defending the morality of violence in a number of cases and attacking overly broad definitions of violence by Peace Studies scholars.

In Chapter Three, May sets him-

self the impressive goal of proving that "Nonviolence is often a better means not only in its moral aspect but also in its political consequences." Since this position is a combination of philosophy and political science, May engages with a range of thinkers and scholars in both of those fields. The beginning of the chapter includes an overview of Gandhi's thought on nonviolence, which May shows is the result of Gandhi combining his religious views with his political experience.



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But while respectful, May points to examples in the case studies from Chapter One to show that nonviolent campaigns can succeed in ways not predicted by Gandhi's theories. In doing so he leans rather heavily on the recent comparative work of political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. In their 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, Chenoweth and Stephan compare hundreds of nonviolent and violent campaigns for national liberation, regime changes and succession, and conclude that in those particular types of campaigns, nonviolent movements were more likely to succeed than violent ones. While summarizing this literature is important to support his political claims about the efficiency of nonviolence, I found myself wishing that May had taken the time to analyze Chenoweth and Stephan's term 'civil resistance'. In Chapter Three, May performs a thoughtful and delightful analysis of the slogan "We are the ninety-nine percent" and how it connects to the tactics of the Occupy Wall Street movement. May is clearly aware of the power of words and how words can shape and direct political action. What then are the consequences of Chenoweth and Stephan describing nonviolence as 'civil resistance'?

Chapters Four and Five are on the two values that May identifies as nonviolence enacting: dignity and equality. May notes that that these values are frequently discussed as belonging to different spheres, dignity to ethics and equality to political philosophy, but as someone

who takes poststructuralism seriously, he refuses to let this division restrain his philosophizing. He harvests from an array of thinkers, not just philosophers such as Kant and Rancière but also the intellectual historian Michael Rosen, in order to philosophize dignity and equality in a way that is, in his words, from "the bottom-up". This approach allows him to reflect on issues such as why nonviolent action can be effective when its practitioners only choose nonviolence out of consequentialist calculations. In doing so, May presents a number of persuasive arguments about how the power of nonviolence is connected to how nonviolent actors start from the assumption of their own dignity rather than having to earn it by pleasing their oppressors. But May's best writing is reserved for his arguments about equality and nonviolence, which are so graceful and subtle that I won't try to summarize them here. Instead, simply know that in Chapter Five, May uses Rancière's thoughts on democracy to politicize Kant's categorical imperative before finishing by noting that Gandhi was already saying the same thing, if you were to just read him from the proper angle.

In Chapter Six, May concludes his book by drawing lessons from Occupy Wall Street for future struggles against neoliberalism. On the one hand, this framing very much makes nonviolence a question about future struggles rather than past ones. On the other hand, since May does not engage with the question of neoliberalism earlier, in this

concluding chapter, he hurriedly introduces new ideas, specifically what he means by neoliberalism and how it conflicts with the values of dignity and equality that he discusses in Chapters Four and Five. To be clear, May's arguments about the immorality of neoliberalism are compelling, and while he ultimately stands by the assertion that nonviolence offers the most effective tools to confront this unjust system, he is also forthright about how uniting to confront an economic system will require innovation rather than romantic imitations of previous struggles. May's final rallying cry makes clear that while the book is framed as introductory, it is nonetheless not for everyone. May writes for those who are willing to endure the friction of attempting to make the world a more equal and dignified place for all. 



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Embodying Blackness

Review of Ta-Nehisi's *Between the World And Me*

Rhone Fraser

In *Between the World And Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes to his son in an attempt to answer the question of how “one should live within a black body...within a country lost in the Dream.” What Coates describes as “the Dream” is the United States. White supremacist capitalist vision of the country and the world. “It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways...smells like peppermint but tastes like Strawberry shortcake,” a vision that appears tranquil and serene yet requires “looting and violence.” This “Dream” is one that Coates himself says he “wanted to escape into” but couldn’t because “the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies.” He later tells his son, “the Dream is the enemy of all art, courageous thinking, and honest writing.”

This notion of “the Dream” is

an elaboration of a point made by James Baldwin in his letter to his nephew published in his 1963 work, *The Fire Next Time*, on which Coates seems to base his prose letter. Baldwin wrote that “the Negroes of this country...are very well placed indeed to precipitate chaos and ring down the curtain on the American dream.” But throughout his address to his son, Coates has a slightly different message. Coates makes remarkably relevant applications of Baldwin’s 1963 message about the Dream to the pressing issues of 2015, specifically the murders of unarmed Black men. Coates notably heeds Baldwin’s 1963 message to understand the murders of Black men such as Michael Brown and Jordan Davis at the hands of White men. He tells his son that he heard him crying in his room after learning there was no indictment for the murder of Michael Brown:

“I came in five minutes after, and I didn’t hug you, and I didn’t comfort you, because I thought it would be wrong to comfort you. I did not tell you that it would be okay, because I have never believed it would be okay. What I told you is what your grandparents tried to tell me: that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it...the question of how one should live within a black body...is the question of my life, and the pursuit of that question, I have found, ultimately answers itself.”

Coates spends the entire book explaining exactly what “the pursuit of that question” means. He also comes into his own understanding about why his parents raised him the way they did. He tells his son that his father physically disciplined him harshly. He was beaten, Coates writes, “as if someone might steal

[him] away, because that is exactly what was happening all around [them] Everyone had lost a child, somehow, to the streets, to jail, to drugs, to guns. Later, [he] would hear it in Dad's voice 'Either I can beat him, or the police.'"

He further writes, "[My father] beat me for letting another boy steal from me. Two years later, he beat me for threatening my ninth-grade teacher. Not being violent enough could cost me my body. Being too violent could cost me my body." The "pursuit" includes understanding the rationale behind his father's parenting and questioning the logic behind "the Dream." It involves indi-

vidual study apart from the conventional narratives taught by school classroom which was "a jail of other people's interests." It entails challenging the romantic notion that all famous Black historical figures were perfectly moral: "being Black did not immunize us from history's logic or the lure of the dream."

He provides as an example, the case of Queen Nzinga who successfully fended off Portuguese colonizers for centuries, but who, as closer scrutiny revealed, made human seats out of her servants, and if he was alive in that time, he too would probably have been turned into a seat. He tells his son about how his time at Howard aided the

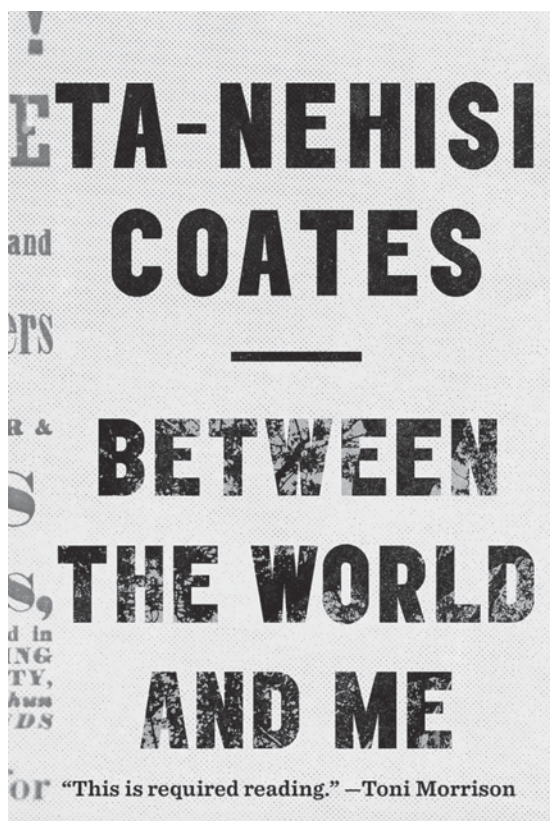
"pursuit" to be in control of his body: "the pursuit of knowing was freedom to me, the right to declare your own curiosities and follow them through all manner of books. I was made for the library, not the classroom...I felt myself in motion, still directed toward the total possession of my body, but by some other route which I could not before then have imagined."

Ultimately, Coates tells his son, "my reclamation would be accomplished, like Malcolm's through books, through my own study and exploration." This included not only reading but, for Coates, taking assiduous notes on what one read, "I would

open the books and read, while filling my composition books with notes on my reading, new vocabulary words, and sentences of my own invention." He tells his son about his grandfather Paul Coates, a former librarian at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center of Howard University which is home to rare book collections by and about people of African descent, including the Paul & Eslanda Robeson Collection.

Coates spends the second part of this book describing how his own study and exploration helped him unearth the details of the death of his colleague at Howard University, Prince Jones, who was murdered one month after Coates' son, Samori, was born, and three months after he was pulled over by cops and let go. Not only by reading articles, but Coates' own personal exploration of the collections at the Moorland and his experience of conducting a very candid interview with the mother of Prince Jones, Dr. Mabel Jones, in the third part of this book, also advanced his pursuit. He also details what it means for a free thinking Black man, who actively rejects Western patriarchy and homophobia, to not have control of one's body. It means contortion. The need to "contort his body to address the block, contort again to be taken seriously by colleagues and contort again so as not to give the police a reason."

Most significant in this book's second part is Coates' apology for yelling at a White woman who pushed his then five-year-old son as he was leaving a movie theater. As he de-



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scribes it, a White man came to her defense, which Coates called “his attempt to rescue the damsel from the beast.” The White man said, “I could have you arrested!” Coates replied saying he did not care, and came home shaken from the incident. He, however, interprets this exchange with “regret,” saying, “more than my shame I feel about my own actual violence, my greatest regret was that in seeking to defend you I was, in fact, endangering you.” From this exchange, he tells his son, Samori, “you are human and you will make mistakes.” However, Coates further remarks, “you are called to struggle, not because it assures you victory but because it assures you an honorable and sane life.”

He said he named his son Samori after Samori Toure, “who struggled against French colonizers for the right to his own black body. He died in captivity but the profits of that struggle and others like it are ours, even when the object of that struggle, as is so often true, escapes our grasp.” That is, even if the object of, say, racially desegregated hospitals escaped the grasp of Howard legend Dr. Charles Drew; or if the object of racially integrated public schools did not escape the grasp of Howard legend Justice Thurgood Marshall, Coates tells his son, “I have always wanted you to attack every day of your brief bright life in struggle.”

What Coates means here is clearly a struggle against hegemony: a counterhegemonic struggle that sees a new world through the lens of Black Struggle that ultimately is

not based on valuing property in direct proportion to its distance from Black people. “‘Black-on-Black crime’ is jargon, violence to language, which vanishes the men who engineered the covenants, who fixed the loans, who planned the projects, who built the streets and sold red ink by the barrel.” The section ends with Coates introducing his son to the mother of Jordan Davis who says to him that his life matters, and with his trip to Europe, where he said, “I had never felt myself so far outside someone else’s dream. Now I felt the deeper weight of my generational chains—my body confined, by history and policy, to certain zones.” He apologizes for the “generational chains” he tried to clasp onto his son’s wrists, in terms of not displaying affection to him and not wanting his son to make new friends.

The third section is most significant in his underscoring the importance of his son to struggle, and the overall context of this struggle with industrialists like the Rockefellers and their white supremacist world. This is where his message diverts from Baldwin’s 1963 letter to his nephew. Where Baldwin writes “we cannot be free until they [the racist industrialists] are free,” Coates writes, “do not pin your struggle on their conversion. The Dreamers will have to learn to struggle themselves, to understand that the field for their Dream, the stage where they have painted themselves white, is the deathbed of us all.”

Where Baldwin writes “you must accept them with love...We,

with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it,” Coates writes, “I do not believe that we can stop them, Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves. And still you must struggle.” A logical question Samori could later pose in response to the expectation that he should struggle as a Black man is—how? The answer to that, like those that Coates’ parents provided, is neither final nor direct. It is related to the answer of how to live within a Black body: pursuit of self-knowledge.

However, Baldwin and Coates disagree about the ability of the younger generations in their time to affect real social change. Baldwin wrote that “the Negroes of this country may never be able to rise to power, but they are very well placed indeed to precipitate chaos and ring down the curtain on the American dream.” Coates is more skeptical. He wants to be part of the deconstruction of the American dream, most likely because he has a son. But as a father, Coates does not want to lose his son to this deconstruction. He tells his son to not give his body “to Birmingham sheriffs nor to the insidious gravity of the streets,” and seems more skeptical about the ability of Black men to affect social change: “you are powerless before the great crime of history that brought the ghettos to us.”

Baldwin did not think Negroes powerless at all, and his work essentially anticipated the later rebellions, like those of Watts, Newark

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and Detroit in 1965, against White supremacist capitalism. Decades later, Coates has the added burden of confronting the potential loss of his own son to the revolution that would destroy the Dream. Even as he teaches his son to struggle, he preaches caution. What conflicts will Coates' work anticipate?

The entire book becomes a searing spiritual, historical, and psychological journey where the reader feels increasing sympathy for the speaker's attempt to tell his son exactly how a Black man can live in his body in the United States. The reader hopes that the speaker's son, and Black boys like him, will not be the next randomly selected Black body that the Dream-as-parasite chooses to beat, imprison, murder, and claim in order to remain living. The reader cannot help throughout this journey to root for the father in an attempt to build a strong path of communication despite the random violence of the Dream.

Like a good historical film, in the lines of Philippe Niang's 2012 film,

Toussaint L'Ouverture, Coates' book should be a supplement to an understanding of history, not a substitute for it. Pursuit of knowledge should also reveal the crucial ingredient to "the struggle" ignored in Coates' piece but assumed in Baldwin's letter, which is the importance of organizational bodies. All the influential people Coates tells his son about belonged to organizations with counterhegemonic causes or "objects." Individual names, like Malcolm X, were listed, but their organizations they belonged to, like the Organization of Afro-American Unity, were absent in Coates' text. Baldwin spent pages talking about the Nation of Islam and why it appealed to Malcolm X and the masses.

To his credit, Coates writes that "Black people have not—probably no people have ever—liberated themselves strictly through their own efforts." However, he could have given clearer examples of what an individual struggle means in the context of an organization

struggling for a greater object. He names Kwame Ture without naming his time in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) nor his All-African Peoples' Revolutionary Party. Ture, in his autobiography, tells the story of a pair of malicious boys who threw rocks at passing groups of ducks, cows, and dogs, but never at a hornets' nest. Why not, he asks. Because they're organized. Discussing these organizations would have aided his cause of showing what it is like to live within a Black body. It means shedding the identity of the so-called "objective" journalist who, whether working for liberal or conservative papers, ultimately serves the interests of industrialists. It is not the pursuit of individual study alone that advances struggle; it is the pursuit of struggle itself within an organizational body. Coates' work is a necessary beginning template for struggle. 



**MONEY FOR
CULTURAL EVENTS,
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DEVELOPMENT,
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DSC Grants:

The deadline for the next round of grant applications is October 16th 2015.

See cunyds.org/grants for more information.

More grant opportunities for student-organized events may be available, contact your USS delegate, Cecilia Salvi (uss@cunyds.org) for more information.





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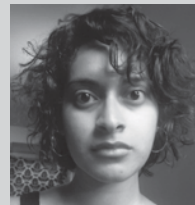
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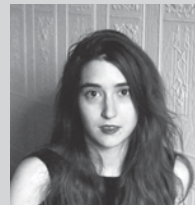
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Blood-Thirsty Mosquitoes Join Macaulay College

Teaching “American Civilization and the Futures of Blood Harvesting”

NEW YORK — A swarm of blood-thirsty mosquitoes has been hired as a 2015-2016 visiting faculty member with the Macaulay Honors College of the City University of New York.

A spokesperson for the swarm of blood-thirsty mosquitoes told press that the mosquitoes had received several lucrative, blood-rich offers from high-profile schools including Yale, Cornell, and Georgetown. The swarm, however, chose CUNY for its historical commitments to diversity and educational accessibility, as well as its hospitality toward the blood-sucking insects.

In a joint-statement, Ann Kirschner, Dean of Macaulay Honors, and CUNY Chancellor James B. Milliken called the hiring “a boon” for a CUNY system seeking to raise its profile in an increasingly competitive public education environment: “We see this as an opportunity for students to finally engage with real mosquitoes without the paternalistic intervention

of know-it-all, liberal elitist professors.”

Anticipating the potential controversy in hiring a swarm of blood-thirsty mosquitoes, the statement preemptively defended the choice: “Regardless of their agenda to liberate humans of inconvenient and potentially harmful excess blood, not a person in the world is unaware of the massive social influence of mosquitoes. Our students will have a unique opportunity to learn about the impending blood harvest firsthand from a distinguished swarm with extraordinary experience and expertise in international blood management, sucking technology, and lingering near an ear while making a high-pitched whine.”

Still, not everyone has greeted the mosquitoes with open veins.

Shortly after the initial press release, J.K. Trotter of *Gawker* reported that CUNY has offered the swarm of mosquitoes a \$200,000 base salary to teach only

one course per semester. In a system currently plagued by austerity-induced budget shortfalls, some faculty and students have seen this move as ideologically motivated and fiscally irresponsible.

On his website, Corey Robin, professor of political science at Brooklyn College, called the decision “more of the same from the current CUNY administration.” He continued, “CUNY Central has been pursuing a pro-swarm, anti-blood agenda for years now in an effort to court publicity. But a move like this, with its hefty price-tag, takes precious resources — not least of all blood — away from students who need it the most.”

Sources close to the swarm have claimed that the mosquitoes are prepared to decline the \$200,000 salary if enrolled students voluntarily submit one pint of blood each to United Mosquitoes for Famine Relief, an organization committed to ending the ravenous blood-hunger of mosquitoes globally.

Macaulay students themselves are divided on the issue of the swarm’s hire. Matt Johnson, a Macaulay Honors freshman, said of the swarm, “I will probably try to enroll in their class. I have always been taught that college is about a diversity of perspectives, and how can you get more diverse than a class that’s team-taught by a swarm? If we aren’t willing to hear them out or take a few welts, then what’s the point of intellectual freedom? We shouldn’t be coddling students.”

Other Macaulay students like sophomore Cora Jiménez, expressed doubts: “Mosquitoes always like me in particular. I don’t know why. I am always very proactive with spray. I’ve tried citronella candles. Nothing works. My bites really swell up, too. I don’t want to be coddled, but if I were to take the class, I would expect at least trigger warnings from the swarm if we are going to discuss biting.”