

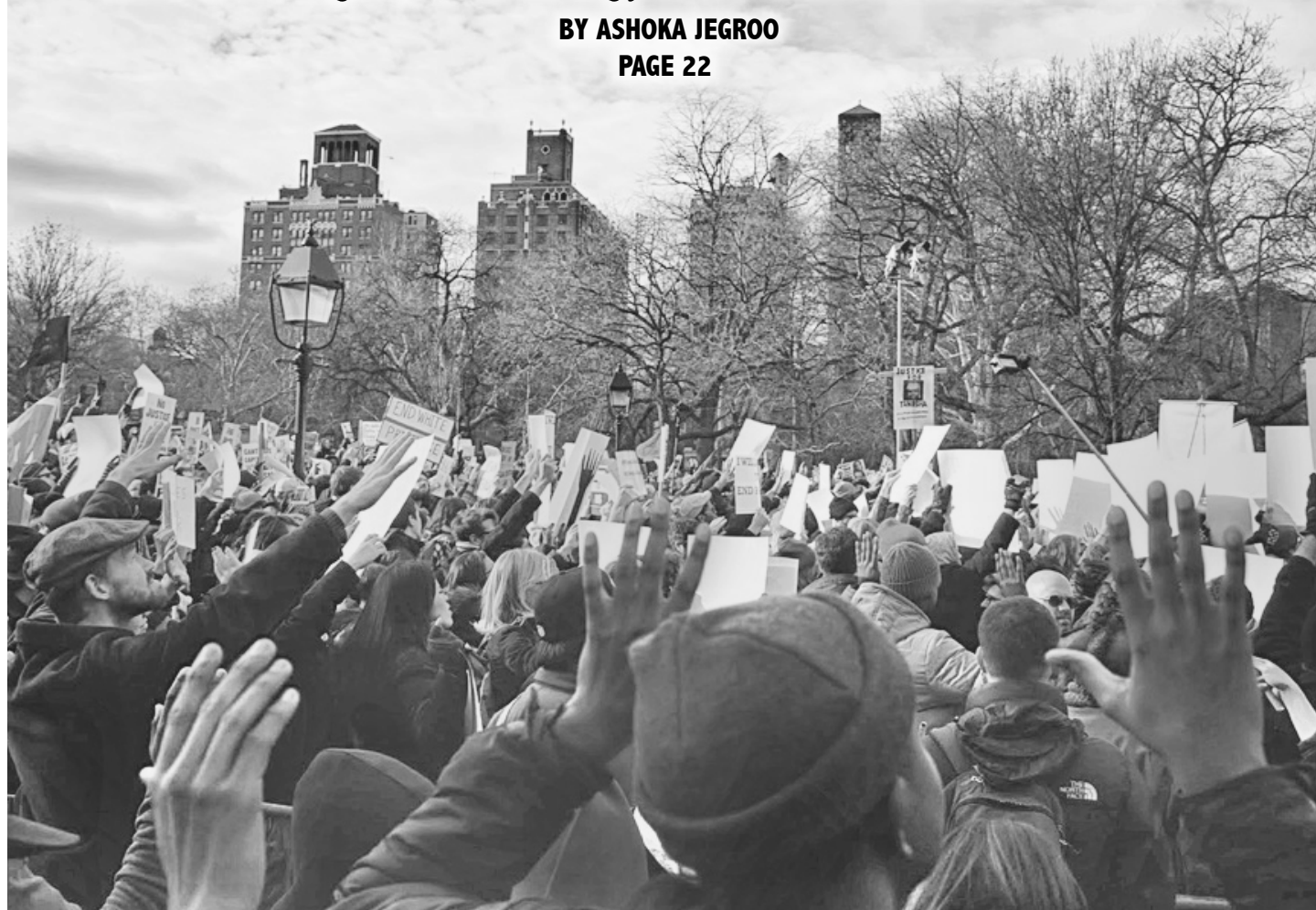


# Revolution and Reform

Tactics, Strategies, and Ideology in the BlackLivesMatter Movement

BY ASHOKA JEGROO

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**Democracy in the Academy: Ideas, Past and Present** p.28

**Atheism: What It Means to Not Believe** p. 34

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# Real Problems, New Governance, and Terrible Solutions

LAST AUGUST, THE AMERICAN Council of Trustees and Alumni, or ACTA, released a report entitled *Governance for a New Era: A Blueprint for Higher Education Trustees*. The sixteen-page document highlights perceived problems within higher education in the United States. Some of these points are valid, such as the rising price of tuition, the student debt crisis, and systemic issues of ineffective university governance. Despite some of the problems that are discussed in the document, the proposed solutions and remedies are rather myopic. Before delving into the conclusions and suggestions of the report, it is important to remember that three of the twenty-two drafters of this manifesto are associated with the City University of New York. Benno Schmidt, the chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees served as the Chairperson for the *Project on Governance for a New Era*. Matthew Goldstein, the former CUNY Chancellor, and Robert David Johnson, Professor of History at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, were integral in drafting this document as well.

As fiduciaries with the legal responsibility to negotiate between public will (the taxpayers), faculty, administrative, and student needs and aspirations, university trustees should be individuals that advocate for the continual transformation of higher education. Unfortunately, ACTA and this so-called blueprint serve to calcify the already overwhelming power of university trustees. If one reads through the document, it is clear that its authors feel as though trustees have lost their way, so to speak, for a variety of reasons no doubt but importantly, for them, one of the prime reasons being a loss of control over the university. This ostensible loss of power is why ACTA desires that trustees “have the last word when it comes to guarding the central values of American higher education.” What of the faculty, the staff, the students, and for a public university, the public? Of course ACTA offers provisions for these groups’ voice to be heard, but in the end, what the *Project on Governance for a New Era* actually advocates for is increased bureaucratization, a lessening of participatory practices, and the reification of neoliberal practices within the university.

A telling snippet from Schmidt’s introduction in the report demonstrates exactly what “new governance,” or as written in the report, “university governance for the twenty-

first century” would look like. He writes: “Trustees who come from a variety of professions and present a variety of viewpoints, can provide a broad perspective on preparation for citizenship, career, and lifelong learning that a tenured professor, properly focused on his own department and an expert in his own discipline, cannot easily offer.” What this means is less people on boards of trustees who are involved in education. It is somewhat opaque as to where this “variety” will come from, but it seems sound enough to infer that they will be recruited from the world of big business and high politics once one reads the document. The second problem with this statement is that it assumes that the professoriate is truly stuck in the proverbial ivory tower and cannot offer as valuable input regarding questions of an educational and university organization. And clearly, the abstracted professor in Schmidt’s example is a man, because, why would a woman (or person of any gender for that matter) ever be a professor?

The main text of the report begins with a discussion of “articulating the mission” of a given university. This is important indeed, but why, specifically at a public university, should this be left to some aloof fiduciaries? It shouldn’t, in fact the mission of a university should mirror the goals, aspirations, as well as wants of the given community it serves. So in the case of CUNY, the mission should reflect these things as they relate to faculty (including contingent faculty), staff, students, and the general public. One of the few positive points in this section is the call to ensure that academics come first and athletics are a sure second, yet they go on to say in relation to the National Collegiate Athletic Association “trustees cannot and should not expect participants in this multibillion dollar industry to police themselves.” A confounding statement for sure, as ACTA is advocating for university fiduciaries to be the lords and stewards of higher education, with no checks on their power except from within.

The subsequent section, deals with the protection of academic freedoms. Citing the 1915 Declaration of Principles by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the report calls for “the freedom of the teacher to teach and the freedom of the student to learn.” It goes on to intimate that universities (actually trustees and admin-

istrators) have done an adequate job with the former but that faculty “jealous of their own academic freedom” have diminished student freedoms. So the remedy to this for ACTA is to ensure that trustees have ultimate authority to safeguard academic freedoms. The protection of academic freedoms is a quandary, but it should not fall to an increasingly corporatized body with allegiances to forces outside of the university. Again, the best scheme to prevent the abrogation of academic freedom is one in which multiple people associated with the university (students, staff, and faculty), in conjunction with the public, develop a program independent of arbitrary designations of what is appropriate and how one can dissent, something that ACTA thinks boards of trustees must have a right to do if they are to protect the standards of the university.

In addition to this fraught thinking around academic freedom, the report promotes “maintain[ing] institutional neutrality” and advances the idea that “trustees should adopt policies that maintain institutional neutrality and distance from political fashion and pressures.” Fundamentally, what ACTA is saying is that individuals and groups within the university can well be political (of course only if they conform to the standards that “define boundaries of appropriate and responsible dissent”), but that the institution must remain apolitical. This is a facile rendering of how individual and group dynamics eventually dictate the orientation of an institution. The university, no matter how outwardly or officially neutral, is a political institution that is in constant negotiation with broader society and has internal fissures as well. The report quotes the Kalven Committee of the University of Chicago, surmising that “the university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself a critic.” It is hard to think of any apolitical educational institution in the United States. Universities usually take actions that are inherently political, not just because they are made up of individual humans and groups, but also because the university as an institution has opted for a specific type of program. Take the history of the University of Pennsylvania for example. The decision, as a university, as a corporatized body, to expand into Southwest Philadelphia throughout the 1970’s was a political act, with political and social ramifications for the people that were displaced. Similar processes happen today, Temple University (also in Philadelphia) and the University of Chicago in the process of displacing people are engaging in a political process regardless of if they maintain an official line of “political neutrality.”

Furthermore, to be apolitical is still very much indeed a form of politics. Quite possibly one of the worse forms as it is a politics that divests itself from reality, harkening back to fictitious “good old days” when the university was

purely a venue for intellectual development and pursuits. Of course the university is, and should be such an institution, but it is also inherently political and continuously engages in political projects well beyond the brief example cited above. Simply put, the university is not devoid of politics. Indeed the university never was, from its institutional founding in Western Europe between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries to its contemporary manifestations the world over, it remains a highly political institution. For a more thorough explanation of why the university, as an institution, cannot be depoliticized see the editorial in Vol. 26 Fall no. 2.

Section three of ACTA’s report centers on creating and implementing an educational strategy. It begins by stating that “faculty should have the first word when it comes to curriculum” but that in the final analysis, trustees, above all else, “establish the expectations for outcomes.” This is merely a way of saying that faculty may develop course materials as they see fit, but boards of trustees have the right to remodel, remold, or outright scrap what would be viewed as unsatisfactory (based upon the inclinations of a given board). Curriculum should really be developed through ongoing discussions, primarily between faculty and students, and to a lesser extent, the broader community. In addition to this call for permanent command over educational expectations, the ACTA report seemingly wants to quantify the level a given university operates on. This would apparently been done through some sort of standardized rubric that registers a litany of gradable areas. There does not seem to be any sort of standardized consequence for universities that failed to pass this assessment, though we can surmise that it would be directly linked to funding, particularly for state schools.

Sections four, five, and six deal with “transparency in performance and results,” the presidential selection process and trustee selection and education respectively. Like the three previous sections, these too point to very real problems within university governance and culture. Nevertheless, there are severe deficiencies in the proposal to remedy the purported issues.


Rudy H. Fichtenbaum, Professor of Economics at Wright State University and President of the AAUP recently offered a laconic reply to ACTA’s report. Despite its brevity and reformist agenda, it is an important piece of writing aimed at counteracting ACTA’s covert neoliberal agenda. Pointing out that most university presidents operate more like Corporate Executive Officers than anything else and that trustees are generally business leaders, Fichtenbaum justly and accurately lambasts ACTA for fighting the corporatization of the university with an increasingly corporate and neoliberal agenda, a process that “would certainly intensify and perpetuate the problem.” One of the most salient features



of his critique is to distinguish between price and cost, the former being what students (or their parents) pay to attend and the latter the operating budget of a given institution. In reading ACTA's project, it is clear that cost is what they are truly concerned about, not price, the end goal is to economize, become efficient, and maximize profit. Education is a clear second. Fichtenbaum concludes his scathing review of ACTA's plan by writing that "real reform...will come only as part of a broader social movement that challenges the existing inequality in our society."

Fichtenbaum offers a valid critique that should be read by anyone who reads ACTA's platform. And when one does, it will be laid bare that ACTA did not consider remedying the issues of the growing reliance upon contingent faculty (if anything they want to overhaul the tenure process), racial and gender divides, the high propensity of sexual assault and rape on campus, or the overwhelming drive to divert resources to the so-called STEM fields (which have even bigger issues of diversity than most others).

The road to a real remedy for the woes of increasingly neoliberal higher education in the United States is simple. Abolish the board of trustees. There is no reason for them to exist except to (quite politically) direct the orientation of the university, not as fiduciaries negotiating between parties, but

as individuals beholden to certain interests. The university should be run and organized collectively by its constituents, the faculty, students, and the public that the institution serves. Administration should follow the aforementioned groups and not lead or dictate. The trustees need not exist, and a university president should be elected through more democratic measures than a council of fifteen or so business folks and professional administrators. The struggle to abolish the board of trustees must coincide with the struggle for open admissions and an end the extremely hierarchical organization of higher education. This struggle must also coincide with broader social processes, particularly at public universities, so that the academy is part and parcel to the progressive transformation of society, not merely the home of observers. 

ACTA's full report can be viewed here: [http://www.goacta.org/publications/governance\\_for\\_a\\_new\\_era](http://www.goacta.org/publications/governance_for_a_new_era).

The AAUP's response can be seen here: <http://www.aaup.org/article/president-governance-new-era#.VOzRtXZ2VGE>

On 10 March at 7 p.m., the CUNY Board of Trustees Chairman, Benno Schmidt, will be speaking on the ACTA report, followed by a question and answer session at the Yale Club in New York City.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Responses to 'In Support of Violence'

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME of the responses to Gordon Barnes' editorial "In Support of Violence" in the previous issue of the *Advocate*.

• • •

Tell that fool that some of us lackeys and apologists for the state can't wait until he picks up a gun to challenge this nation. See what happens, Gordo. We are WAY more heavily armed than you. Say, what's that red dot on your forehead? —Jimmy Jam Boogie

• • •

I think violence against stupid, half-retarded, African Negroid monkeys is 100 percent justified, due to the fact that idiot stupid diseased African monkeys commit the vast majority of violent crime in North America, despite being a small minority of the

population. It is 100 percent justified to enact violence against African chimpanzees like the ones you have writing here, and I hope it happens soon!

—Anonymous

• • •

I have to say I'm not impressed with Mr. Barnes. What would he say if it was the police putting a fatwa on, say, Black college students? And why is he calling for violence from behind a desk? Isn't he an edgy Black man? Does he think that educated minority men should call for violence rather than leading the charge himself? What coward does that? Shouldn't he lead by example? Maybe sack-up and show his mettle?

And that CUNY allows such violent rhetoric to spill forth from

the campus paper is pretty startling considering that most liberal colleges espouse non-violence. And am I mistaken in believing that a gang-banger assaulting a police officer in his car and trying to steal that officer's firearm to kill him with it is grounds for lethal force?

If one single person is responsible for this heated discourse it is Dorian Johnson, the young Black male who lied to police as well as the grand jury when he claimed Michael Brown had his hands up when shot. Why do liberals, and Black males in particular, think that such liars that instigate violence should be forgiven? Lives, Black and White, were decimated by the riots in Ferguson thanks to his lies but he gets a pass based on his skin

color? If a White person lies about a Black person there is no end to the retribution but Johnson gets a pass? Funny, I guess Black Privilege allows for assaulting police, lying to officers and courts, ruining lives, etc. Just one more thing, Gordon be a man and do your own dirty work, sport!

—Joe Hutton

• • •

Great idea. Hope you are the first causality. There is no doubt about it, affirmative action has put idiots like yourself in positions of influence and that will be the undoing of years of the lessening of racial tensions. You people screwed the pooch this time, congratulations.

—DC Lovell

• • •

Ghandi and MLK: I believe you have an overstatement in saying violence is necessary for true change. Two people that have impressed millions and made change are these two men. Your legacy of hate and violence does not impress anyone nor make lasting change nor does ISIS.

I am twice your age and people that made change are not Al Sharpton as there is no level of real respect for him across all lines but Rosa Parks and MLK there is and will always be. The lady who helped me grow up in my home told me Jesse Jackson was an opportunist and her friends felt he is a fraud. She had pictures of MLK and JFK hanging in her home. I loved her like my own mother and learned from her to treat others with the respect I want myself. You missed that message...why not focus your energy on helping youth be the best they can be and volunteer to be a big brother....it is obvious our youth need it.

—Julia Dodd

• • •

Police save lives. They saved more black lives than white lives with stop and frisk, since the policy reduced violent crime which affects blacks more than whites. Did you know that

a black is 89 times more likely to kill a white than the reverse? Did you know that police kill more whites than blacks? This despite the fact that blacks are more likely to be the perpetrator of violent crime.

You say you support the right to self-defense yet you claim Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin and that Darrell Wilson murdered Michael Brown. Zimmerman defended himself from a thug who sucker punched him and was on top of him, beating him. Trayvon was not unarmed; he had two arms and he was using them to beat Zimmerman. No punch thrown by Trayvon, no shot fired by Zimmerman. Remember, they both had the right to be on the sidewalk where Trayvon assaulted Zimmerman. Zimmerman proved in court that it was a case of self-defense.

Michael Brown, like Trayvon, had consumed marijuana before attacking someone. He too was a thug. According to black witnesses, Brown struck the officer and fought to get his gun (2 felonies, at least) and ran off after two shots were fired in the patrol car during that struggle. When Wilson went after him, Brown made the fatal decision to “bull rush” the officer. The officer fired repeatedly until the threat ended. This according to black witnesses. So, why call for violence against police and use these as examples?

Eric Garner died because he was so morbidly obese and suffered from asthma and heart conditions. It was reported he could not walk a block without having to rest. I have no doubt that when he said he could not breathe, it was due to his medical conditions combined with the needless exertion caused by his resisting arrest. I believe this because his larynx was not damaged, according to the autopsy, and you cannot repeatedly say you can't breathe if you cannot breathe because you are being choked. He could not absorb enough oxygen during the

struggle he caused, due to his asthma.

Having said all of that, hopefully it will be you on the front lines leading the violent protests that you advocate, rather than huddled in your state subsidized office, writing more hate speech. —Allyn Skelton (Spring, TX)

• • •

I'm slow reading the news, so I just saw your recent editorial and the subsequent hoopla. I have mixed feelings about your editorial. First of all, I think it takes a lot of courage to write and publish these ideas. So I want to commend you on your bravery. Second, I'm not sure I agree with you on the historical record. You wrote in a comment that “violence... is the only way in which to effectuate any sort of lasting and substantial change.”

Is it really the ONLY way? I'm not an historian, but my understanding is that non-violent protest has been effective, to a certain degree, in certain times, and in certain places. And I also have the impression that violence and non-violence, as a kind of dialectic, can push things forward (e.g. King was effective only because he had foils who were violent). Should nonviolence really be ruled out entirely as ineffective? Third, I'm concerned that threats of violent protest might confirm the mainstream perception that police violence is justified. I'm worried that you're giving license to public policy-makers to militarize the police even further? Anyway, it's a provocative piece. Happy New Year.

—Allen Strouse

• • •

For someone who appears to be spending his whole life getting educated, you are one DUMB motherfucker. Maybe you need to get a job (your first?) and see what the real world is like. It's people like you who give spooks a bad name. Peace out nigger!

—David Clayton (Charlotte, NC) 🇺🇸

# Obama Lauds CUNY, CUNY Stiffs Faculty

## *CUNY as a Model for Obama's America's College Promise*

"TWO YEARS OF COLLEGE students will become as free and universal as high school is today," declared Obama on 9 January, when announcing his "America's College Promise," a plan to "bring down to zero" the tuition cost for community college students around the nation.

According to the plan, students would be required to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA, be enrolled at least half-time, make steady progress toward their degree, and participating colleges would have to ensure that credits are transferable to four-year colleges or have effective job training programs. Anne Friedman, PSC vice president for community colleges, said that, "for CUNY community college students... the fact that students wouldn't be forced to study full-time can alleviate pressure to work excessive hours," which can actually result in improved retention and graduation rates.

A White House fact sheet detailing the plan singles out CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) as an effective way to improve student performance and boost rates of degree completion. The ASAP initiative waives tuition, helps pay for books and transit and increases resources for academic advising and other supportive services. In fact, according to CUNY Chancellor James Milliken, "in 2014, ASAP produced a three year graduation rate of 57 percent, over triple the rate of urban community colleges nationwide."



## *The PSC Continues the Push for Action on a New Contract*

MORE THAN 9,000 CUNY faculty and staff have signed a PSC petition urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio to take immediate action to enable a fair settlement of the labor contract at CUNY. PSC President Barbara Bowen called on the CUNY Board of Trustees to make an offer by the end of the fall semester, but CUNY management failed to produce one.

CUNY salaries have fallen further and further behind the cost of living in New York City, Joyce Solomon Moorman, associate professor of music at BMCC, said at hearing that took place on 24 November, in which union members also spoke in support of other priority contract demands, including a reduced teaching load to allow more time for scholarship and assisting individual students, basic job security for adjunct faculty, and a system of professional advancement for Higher Education Officer-series employees (each demand can be seen here: <http://www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/>

[january-2015/new-contract-faculty-and-staff-speak-out](#)).

At a bargaining session that took place on 12 December, Barbara Bowen said that the 27-hour teaching load at CUNY's community colleges is untenable. "We need to change the mindset that nothing can be done about teaching load," Bowen said. She cited CUNY's well-regarded ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) initiative as "a blueprint" for the benefits of faculty having more time to spend with students and graduation rates more than doubling. "With this contract we have an opportunity to do something for all CUNY students," she concluded. "If faculty workload is made more reasonable, students will benefit." The PSC is still waiting for an economic offer to settle down the new contract.

## *News from President Robinson's Office*

- ▶ A proposal for a M.A. in Women's and Gender Studies was approved early in February.
- ▶ Over \$9.7 million USD in grant funding was awarded to GC faculty,

Above: President Obama discussing America's College Promise.

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students, and staff between July and December 2014.

- ▶ The Graduate Center was awarded a grant to establish a National Language Resource Center (LRC)—one of just 15 nationwide.
- ▶ The Advanced Research Collaborative (ARC) welcomed seven new Distinguished Fellows, four of whom come from sister campuses within CUNY, and three from universities across the United States and Europe. They will conduct research and collaborate with fifteen student fellows.
- ▶ The Futures Initiative, a far-reaching project led by Cathy Davidson, will be developing new methods of teaching and research.
- ▶ The yearlong Seminar on Public Engagement and Collaborative Research, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, begun this semester at the Center for the Humanities, and it seeks to explore how the humanities can function in public life outside of academia.

## **How's CUNYfirst Going?**

CUNY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) staff say that measures have been taken to make CUNYfirst more stable, and they expect that spring term will get off to a smoother start. If the system crashes, as it did last semester, users have the option to use a new system called MyInfo (explained below), which will be able to provide certain basic information even when CUNYfirst is down.

In a September email to senior CUNY administrators, Associate Vice Chancellor Brian Cohen promised action to prevent problems such as CUNYFirst faced in fall 2014 from recurring in the future, and identified an upgrade to the latest version, as one of three key tasks. The new version is still being tuned. CUNY decided to postpone the upgrade of the system in order to conduct more testing prior to deployment. As another measure to be able to face possible problems, CIS (CUNY Information Services) has been developing a separate system

that would continue to operate even if CUNYfirst is down. The new system, MyInfo, and it will provide students and employees with access to a limited set of information on a “read only” basis, such as lists of the classes they are signed up for, and where those classes are supposed to meet.

## **A Collaborative Syllabus in Response to Recent Racial Injustices**

THE KILLINGS OF ERIC Garner and Michael Brown brought increased attention to racial justice and police conduct issues to college classrooms. With the idea that racism should become a fundamental topic of analysis in the CUNY classrooms, the Mentoring Future Faculty of Color Project at The Graduate Center helped organize an event on “Teaching Black Lives Matter” at the end of the fall semester.

As a result of the discussions sustained there, CUNY faculty, graduate students, and staff have begun creating a collaborative syllabus, which is accessible here: <http://bit.ly/1wJJKWZ>). 📄



# The Africana Studies Group Statement on the Ferguson and Eric Garner Grand Jury Decisions

ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 9 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old Black student, was shot multiple times and killed by Police Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. After more than three months of protests and marches demanding justice, the St. Louis County Prosecutor announced that Officer Wilson would not be indicted on any charges.

On Thursday, July 17 2014, Eric Garner, an unarmed, asthmatic father of six, was strangled by Police Officer Daniel Pantaleo in Staten Island, New York for allegedly selling loose cigarettes. A video of the incident was recorded by a private citizen and widely circulated in mainstream news outlets and on social media. On Wednesday, December 3 2014 we learned that a Staten Island grand jury would not indict Officer Pantaleo, either.

We, the members of the Africana Studies Group, along with the many individuals and organizations that have supported us, write this statement in solidarity with the families of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the people of Ferguson, Missouri, and the too numerous others who have lost loved ones due to police brutality. The continual legitimization of police brutality, which disproportionately affects Black and Latino people, must come to an end.

The Africana Studies Group at the CUNY Graduate Center has long provided physical and intellectual spaces for Black and Latino students struggling against structural racism, racist epistemologies, and racial violence. The creation of the Africana Studies Certificate as a means of countering anti-Black pedagogies is just one example of this commitment. We must dig deeper and do more. As the Graduate Center seeks to position itself as the premier institution for postgraduate education in the city and the nation, we ask that the university administration make the choice to stand on the right side of history and commit to working against anti-Black violence and oppression in action and in word.

Our call to action is clear. Membership in the academy does not shield us from the pain, terror and violence of police brutality, nor should it. As students at the Graduate Center, our commitment to the liberation and empowerment of Black and Latino people across the city of New York and the African diaspora runs deep. Black and Latino students at the Graduate Center reside and conduct research in New York communities that suffer racial, economic and police oppression. We also teach Black and Latino students who come from these communities.

They are our family, our friends and our neighbors. Black and Latino graduate students must constantly navigate multiple intersections of oppression, especially in light of the fact that we comprise a marginal percentage of the student body at the Graduate Center and in most of the CUNY departments in which we teach. For many of us, it is the very knowledge of this constant struggle against oppression that draws us to postgraduate education.

We are a part of the beloved community. Indeed, our intimate knowledge of the struggle against racial, economic and police oppression makes us acutely aware of the ways in which the Graduate Center is obligated to not only issue a statement condemning the aforementioned grand jury decisions, but to become actively and politically engaged in issues that impact its Black and Latino graduate student body and faculty.

The City University of New York is legally mandated to serve the people of New York. The Graduate Center must stand with CUNY's Black and Latino students, who comprise over 50 percent of CUNY's student body, and who must mourn the state-sanctioned killings of members of their community on a local and national level every 28 hours.

We call on the Graduate Center to make a statement that supports the activist legacy of Black and Latino student organizations like the Africana Studies Group and to stand with Black and Latino communities battling state-sanctioned violence, racist repression and police brutality.

We ask that this statement unequivocally condemn all anti-Black violence, including but not limited to the murders of Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, and Shantel Davis.

We demand an increase in the number of Black and Latino faculty members whose scholarship demonstrates a commitment to Black and Brown liberation and who are themselves committed to community activism and the mentorship of Black and Latino students. We seek a forceful affirmation of the power of education to counter racist violence and anti-Black oppression.

We do this as your colleagues and allies in the struggle for social change.

In Solidarity,  
The Africana Studies Group  
Kristin Leigh Moriah  
Christine A. Pinnock

# From 'Demos' to 'Podemos'

**amy goodman with denis moynihan**

IN ANCIENT GREECE, THE birthplace of democracy, power derived from “demos,” the people. Well, the people of contemporary Greece have been reeling under austerity for five years, and have voted to put an end to it. In January, the anti-austerity Syriza Party was swept to power in national elections. Greece is a member of the so-called eurozone, the nations that joined together with a common currency back in 1999. Following the economic crash of 2009, the Greek economy was in shambles. In 2012, I interviewed economist and Syriza member Yanis Varoufakis, who is now Greece’s minister of finance, and is at the center of the current crisis in the eurozone.

“Greece is going through its Great Depression, something akin to what the United States went through in the 1930s,” he told me. “This is not just a change of government. It’s a social economy that has entered into a deep coma. It’s a country that is effectively verging to the status of a failed state.” In order to stabilize the Greek economy, a bailout package was proposed, delivered by three institutions reviled in Greece as “The Troika”: the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In exchange for the bailout of more than \$100 billion euros, Greece would have to impose strict austerity measures, including mass layoffs of public-sector workers and the sale of public resources, like government-owned port facilities.

For years, the main political parties in Greece accepted the demands of the Troika, repressing the resulting protests with police violence. The new party in power, “Syriza,” is an acronym meaning “Coalition of the Radical Left,” and Varoufakis, along with his colleague Alexis Tsipras as prime minister, wasted no time challenging the austerity measures.

Paul Mason, economics editor at Channel 4 News in the United Kingdom, has been doing some of the best reporting in English on the Greek crisis. On the “Democracy Now!” news hour, I asked him to explain austerity: “Austerity in Greece means something like a 50 percent measurable increase in male suicides. It means real wages fell by 25 percent in five years ... you’ve got the 300,000 families who can’t afford electricity.” Interviewed in *Der Spiegel*, Varoufakis called austerity “fiscal waterboarding.” Greeks, as well, have not forgotten that Germany, under the Nazis, brutally occupied their nation for four years during World War II. Syriza’s representative in the European Parliament, 92-year-

old Manolis Glezos, was imprisoned by the Nazis after he tore a swastika flag off of the Acropolis. “The German political class just can’t get their head around the idea,” Mason explained, “that a party has been elected that wants to do something so radically different, that they can’t do it without breaking the rules that the eurozone has been formed around. So it’s becoming cultural.”

Spain also has been wracked by the global recession, with 50 percent unemployment among young people. Bank foreclosures on homes are rampant, leaving people homeless but still required to pay the entire mortgage, leading to many suicides. In the midst of this financial ruin, a grass-roots movement grew, called by some “the Indignados,” the Indignant Ones. Thousands occupied a main square in Madrid, the Puerta del Sol, Gate of the Sun, demanding real democracy. Out of this grass-roots movement a political party was founded last May called “Podemos,” Spanish for “We Can.”

Pablo Iglesias, a 36-year-old former political-science professor, is the secretary-general of Podemos. He came to New York City this week. I asked him about the crisis in Spain, and what Podemos is doing about it: “My country has three big problems: inequality, unemployment and debt,” he explained. “After six years, the situation is worse than before. So, we think that in democracy, if something doesn’t work, you can change ... we want to organize another way to improve the situation.”

Two months after Podemos was formed, the party received 1.2 million votes and sent Iglesias and four other Podemos members to the European Parliament. One poll suggests Podemos could win the national election next November. If Podemos does win, Iglesias could well be Spain’s next prime minister. If elected, he promises to stop the evictions, restructure the debt and reform taxes, which, he says, burden the poor and middle class much more than the rich.

The future of Europe is in flux, as popular movements in Greece and Spain gain power and challenge traditional economic and political systems. The global economic crisis created enormous suffering for billions around the world. But it also created an opening, allowing people to reassess the rules under which they live and work, to challenge those in power, and to demonstrate that another world is possible. 🌍

Amy Goodman is the host of *Democracy Now!*, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,300 stations in North America. She is the co-author of “*The Silenced Majority*,” a *New York Times* best-seller.

# HELP WANTED AT THE GC ADVOCATE

## MANAGING EDITOR

THE GC ADVOCATE CURRENTLY seeks a new Managing Editor to join the Editorial Committee. The Managing Editor serves alongside the rest of the Editorial Committee in soliciting, selecting, and editing articles and developing editorial policy.

### Responsibilities:

1. Solicit and edit articles for forthcoming issues.
2. Draft “News-in-Brief” section for each issue.
3. Assist in the maintenance of the *GC Advocate* website.
4. Assist in budgeting and payroll management.
5. Contact publishers for review copies of books.
6. Assist in helping the *GC Advocate* maintain a digital presence.
7. Assist in the distribution of print issues.
8. Occasional transcriptions of interviews, conferences, and public lectures.
9. Be available, either in person or over email, during final layout process.
10. Help in advertising the new issues of the *GC Advocate*.

**Qualifications:** The Managing Editor must be a matriculated student at the Graduate Center, CUNY (preferably a PhD student in the social sciences or humanities who is at least level II). Previous experience in journalism, editing, or print media is not required, though it is helpful.

**Required Skills, Knowledge, and Labor:** Applicants for this position should have an advanced understanding of English grammar and syntax. Additional language skills are a bonus, but are non-requisite for the position. An intermediate to advanced understanding of Microsoft Word is necessary for this position as well. Applicants must be able to write quickly and cogently under pressure of deadlines and be able to edit articles that conform to the guidelines for contributions in addition to the production schedule. Total hours vary from issue to issue, with the bulk of the work done in the time between the contribution deadline and the production deadline; on average the Managing Editor should expect to work 15-20 hours per issue.

**Remuneration:** The Managing Editor is paid per issue at the rate of a Graduate Assistant B (GAB).

**Duration:** This position has a set term for the remainder of Vol. 26 (three remaining issues from February to May) with the option to continue during the next academic year.

**Contact:** To apply, please send a C.V. or Resume, along with a letter of interest, and a brief (no more than five pages) writing sample to [gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu). Also, please “cc” Gordon Barnes at [gbarnes@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gbarnes@gc.cuny.edu).

## LAYOUT EDITOR

THE GC ADVOCATE CURRENTLY seeks a new Layout Editor to join the Editorial Committee. The Layout Editor works with the rest of the Editorial Committee in preparing the content of each issue of the *Advocate*, and is responsible for the look and feel of the publication.

### Responsibilities:

1. Lay out the articles and other copy as provided by the other editors, applying the *Advocate* in-house styles.
2. Find and lay out appropriate, print-quality photography and graphics to illustrate articles as necessary, in consultation with the other editors.
3. Determine whether the copy and art as planned is over or under the necessary page count, and resolve the discrepancy in consultation with the other editors.
4. Prepare cover art using straight or composite photo artwork.
5. Assist the other editors in proofing the initial draft and providing callouts, captions, and missing headlines.
6. Finalize the *Advocate* and certify it ready for press.
7. Coordinate publication with the printer.
8. Prepare the content in the issue for reuse on the website.
9. Discuss and develop revisions to the layout concepts and style sheets in coordination with the other editors.

**Qualifications:** The Layout Editor must be a matriculated student at the Graduate Center, CUNY (preferably a PhD student). Previous experience in graphic design is necessary. Previous experience in journalism or print media is not required, though it is helpful.

**Required Skills, Knowledge, and Labor:** Applicants for this position should be familiar with and have practical experience applying basic principles of graphic design, and be conversant with InDesign and Photoshop. Total hours vary from issue to issue, with the bulk of the work done on two production nights, the latter being press night. On average the Layout Editor can expect to work 15-20 hours per issue.

**Remuneration:** The Layout Editor is paid per issue at the rate of a Graduate Assistant B (GAB).

**Duration:** This position becomes available with the Fall 2015 term.

**Contact:** To apply, please send a C.V. or Resume, along with a letter of interest, and samples of past work to [gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gcadvocate@gc.cuny.edu). Also, please “cc” Gordon Barnes at [gbarnes@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gbarnes@gc.cuny.edu).



# The End of Miss and Mister

## Gendered titles and political correctness

**jennifer polish**

**M**ISS AND MISTER ARE no longer acceptable titles in salutations when addressing students at The CUNY Graduate Center (GC). In an effort to ensure that the ethos of the GC's new preferred name policy is upheld consistently, Louise Lennihan, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President of this institution, has issued a memo to the GC community mandating the elimination of "Ms." and "Mr." in various forms of communication with students.

The preferred name policy—which a student can utilize by signing an extremely simple form at the Registrar's Office in order to have their preferred name recognized on course rosters, student IDs and email addresses—is meant to make it easier for students who are transgender or students who are genderqueer or gender non-conforming to have proper names respected across the university. In a climate in which attaining changes in legal gender documentation is extremely burdensome, even in relatively "easy" states like New York, this preferred name policy is extremely important for transgender students, whose legal name appearing on class rosters can easily force them to be outed to professors and, potentially, other students. This outing can and has resulted in awful consequences, ranging from humiliation to explicit and abusive maltreatment across the CUNY system. The preferred name policy prevents this specific kind of structural transphobia in everyday university matters, such as taking attendance on the first day of term.

In order to further this goal of ensuring that students are not outed and placed at risk by their documentation, the gendered greetings such as Ms., Mrs., and Mr. will no longer be acceptable in letters, bills or invoices, mailing labels, and "any other forms or reports" addressed from GC faculty and staff to students, according to the official memorandum, dated 16 January 2015. This memo provides a crucial piece of protection for transgender and gender non-conforming students, for whom the preferred name policy may have little impact if students can still be misgendered via an attachment of an incorrect title to their name. This

misgendering—particularly if it occurs prominently in a communiqué—may not only demean students and perpetuate structural disregard for respecting gender identity and expression, but it may also be seen by others and out trans students. The banning of Ms. and Mr. titles prevents this kind of misgendering and therefore greatly limits the risk of trans students non-consensually surrendering control of their identities.

The memo is not strident in its tone, however, and acknowledges any perceived inconveniences caused to cisgender (non-transgender) or gender-conforming people who might not understand the need for these changes. "I understand," Lennihan writes, "that this effort is a major undertaking, will present challenges, and will take time to implement." It is only a major undertaking, of course, for those who have the privilege of not having to navigate the terrain of the constant threats of outing and the violently detrimental impacts that misgendering can and does have on many people's lives.

With this in mind, however, the memo presents the GC community with several links to resources that offer context for the decision and firmly situate gender-inclusive language in scholarly affairs. All three links provided—like that to the website of the National Council of Teachers of English, for example—situate the gendering of titles like Ms. and Mr. as co-extensive with the sexist universalizing of the male pronouns he and him. While the latter choice—using he or him as a generic descriptor of people—is frequently bemoaned as misogynist in Grad Center classrooms whenever we read (usually) older texts by (usually) white men, it is likely newer for some people to adjust to being asked to refrain from using the gendered titles that most of us lived by throughout elementary and high school. Many of us were surely taught that using Ms. and Mr. as titles for someone was a form of respect. The memo from the Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President subtly reminds people that while these titles can be profoundly good and affirming for someone whose gender is being respected, the potential for misgendering



that these titles raise is powerful.

Despite the accommodating tone and almost apologetic affect of the resources part of the memo—which does not, it is important to note, include links to an explicit trans-advocacy website or resource listing—the GC has found itself the subject of much inflammatory critique over its nixing of Ms. and Mr. Indeed, Katherine Timpf of *The National Review* wrote about the new policy, under the headline “CUNY: Don’t Call Students ‘Mr., Mrs. or Ms.’ Because That’s Maybe Disrespectful,” with the subheading of, “Don’t do anything that someone could find offensive!” Let the games begin.

Many people who reacted negatively to the GC’s elimination of Ms. and Mr. made arguments similar to those glibly asserted in Timpf’s headline. Robby Soave of *reason.com* referred to the policy as “political correctness run amok” and cautioned against people who are “perpetually offended” having their “sensitivity codified.” This gendered framing of the issue transforms the discourse from one about student safety and respect, to one about vague, scare-tactic slippery slopes. Certainly, the recently popular debates about trigger warnings raise similar concerns about “over-sensitivity,” but the truly interesting analyses there are the ones that critique sensitivity as racialized into a sense of white fragility which cannot bear criticisms of one’s personal racisms. That is not the kind of analysis occurring here, however, not by any stretch of the imagination. To the contrary, by fixating on one aspect of the new policy and inflaming it beyond its context, critics of the elimination of Ms. and Mr. have hijacked the GC’s decision to somehow institutionally embrace trans students as fodder in the cannons deployed against “political correctness.”

Is this policy “politically correct,” however, or is referring to people by their preferred names a necessary component of creating a safe and respectful learning environment? If we are willing to accept this as a necessity, how can we refer with disdain to the elimination of Ms. and Mr. from salutations? Surely, respecting a student’s name finds its purpose defeated by students being misgendered and potentially outed by assumed titles. This is not about “political correctness run amok.” Blogger *macon d*, in his blog called “stuff white people do,” once referred to “political correctness” as an oft-deployed euphemism for racism. Indeed. Here, it is being wielded as a euphemism for transphobia and a strident unwillingness to use language in a way that will not risk


reinscribing violence on trans and gender non-conforming people.

Certainly, the battle against misgendering and potentially outing someone on a graduate school document is a small one in the overall scheme of resistance to the violence of the structural transphobia that rocks this country. Five—likely more, unreported—transgender women of color have been murdered in the past five weeks across the country, demonstrating that white mass media’s recent (and often fetishizing and essentializing) love affair with actress Laverne Cox and writer-activist Janet Mock have only gone so far in transforming structures that perpetuate violence against trans women of color in particular. This is not a negative commentary about Mock’s writing and activism—which is phenomenal—but rather about the white mass media that persistently frames her work through its own terms.

Perhaps this white, often cis male media framing is best demonstrated by the utterly privileged and horrendously disrespectful way that Piers Morgan treated Mock when she was on his show in 2014. Mock was accused of policing him with “political correctness,” and much worse when she called him out on his gross mischaracterization of her life and identity. Trying to shift the focus from Morgan’s loud, belligerent calls for her to “educate” him on how to be a better “ally,” Mock suggested that “we need to have a discussion about what gender is, and gender expectations in our culture.” Indeed.

Apparently, these kinds of discussions are not the kinds that mass media are truly interested in having, at least not unless people with various dominant identities can control the conversations.

When this control is threatened, it seems, those whose bodies and spirits bear the brunt of various structural oppressions are accused of policing oppressors with “politically correct” language. In contexts such as this, “political correctness” is framed as a weapon against “freedom.” But, one must ask—whose freedom? And to do what? This frivolous, privileged utilization of the rhetoric of “freedom” elides the ways that oppression renders so many people across this country “unfree.”

Certainly, the elimination of gendered titles from GC communiqués with students will not even make tangibly recognizable dents in the overall weapons of anti-trans oppression and transmisogynist violence. But if this minor tweak in language will extend respect and safety to trans and gender non-conforming students at The Graduate Center, is that not worth enduring the anger and scare-tactics of those who have the privilege to value their control over language and people more than they value people’s safety and lives? I’d like to think that’s not even a question. 

The banning of Ms. and Mr. titles greatly limits the risk of trans students non-consensually surrendering control of their identities.

# The Hidden Costs of Student Representation

## Fiscal mismanagement and the struggle for a new University Student Senate

**cecilia maria salvi**

SOMETIMES EVEN THE BEST of intentions are not good enough. Case in point: CUNY's University Student Senate (USS), the official student governance organization across the university system. Founded in 1972, its website states "the organization is charged with protecting the rights of the student body, furthering the cause of public higher education and promoting the general welfare of its student constituents and the University. The USS delegates are responsible for the representative governance of the 500,000 students of the 24 CUNY campuses." But this lofty ideal is far from reality. There have been accusations of vote tampering, lack of transparency, and—most alarmingly—fiscal mismanagement. An article in the New York Times describes how in 1992, CUNY's Board of Trustees voted to cancel the activity fees which fund the USS after an independent audit revealed \$85,000 USD in questionable spending, including limousine rentals by student leaders and the hiring of the then-USS Chairperson's sister as his assistant.

Although some policy changes were implemented to prevent further abuses, the question as to what extent these policies have been effective still lingers. Board of Trustees bylaws stipulate that "[c]ertified independent audits performed by a public auditing firm shall be conducted at least once each year" (Section 16.13e). After speaking with current USS Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs Donovan Borington, Dean of Student Affairs Christopher Rosa, and previous USS delegates from the Doctoral Students' Council (DSC), it is clear that before Fiscal Year 2014 an independent audit of the USS had not been conducted in at least a decade.

As Graduate Center students, we should all be informed about how our money (yes, it is ours) is being spent. Individually, the \$1.45 USD we each pay every semester in activ-

ity fees to the USS might seem an insignificant sum that cannot even buy a decent cup of coffee. But CUNY-wide, that amounts to over \$825,000 USD in fees collected for Fiscal Year 2015, with The Graduate Center contributing \$12,000 USD. That is why DSC representatives elected to the USS in previous years persisted in their calls for transparency and accountability across the board. In December 2014, DSC Co-Chair for Business Jennifer Prince and I wrote a letter to the USS Audit Committee asking that, among other issues, Graduate Center money be earmarked for an audit and that its findings be made public.

Although we are still awaiting an official reply, we were informed that the USS was (finally) audited for Fiscal Year 2014. Unfortunately, it was CUNY that paid for it (not with student fees), as part of a larger system-wide audit, even though the USS budgeted \$10,000 USD for one. Currently, the audit is being reviewed by CUNY for accuracy before it can be handed over to the USS Audit Committee, which is charged with preparing a response. Even more disappointing is that the audit does not include previous fiscal years. Comprising at least a ten-year period in which questionable expenditures were made, like \$300 USD for magazines in the USS office, or \$3,000 USD co-sponsorship of an international trip to Spain which the USS Chair at the time participated as recently as 2012 (for a list of these documents compiled by former DSC USS representative Chrissy Nadler, please visit <http://opencuny.org/uuss/>).

The USS has the potential to responsibly protect students' rights and advocate on our behalf. In September, the senate unanimously passed the "Resolution to Support Fossil Fuel Divestment." This past year, it was also instrumental in safeguarding students' right to remain silent during academic disciplinary hearings, and launched a successful campaign

that persuaded Board of Trustees members to reverse their initial decision. I work alongside a number of these dedicated representatives who take their commitment to the campuses they represent very seriously. So imagine what the USS could accomplish, and the projects it could carry out across the CUNY system, and the number of students that could benefit, were this issue of fiscal accountability resolved.

Given its history, one audit is not convincing enough to support the idea that USS leadership can adequately implement the policy changes that are needed to safeguard against future fiscal mismanagement. For this reasons the following ought to be implemented:

1. The USS should budget and pay for a yearly audit. It is incumbent on the current USS leadership to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to integrity, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. Saving the estimated \$14,000 USD to \$20,000 USD, an audit costs is a small price to pay to achieve this. Audits are part of the standard operating cost for any student government organization, as clearly outlined in the CUNY Office of Budget and Finance guidelines for college associations. It is not up to USS leadership to decide which operating costs are optional. Finally, paying for its own audit means it would go directly to the Audit Committee members instead of CUNY.
2. The Audit Committee and the Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs should make the results of the audit public in a timely manner via the USS website and via media services throughout CUNY. In compliance with Board of Trustees' Bylaws Section 16.13.b, the "student govern-

ments shall be responsible for the full disclosure to their constituents of all financial information with respect to student government fees," which includes the findings of an audit and Audit Committee's response.

3. In addition, the Audit Committee and Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs should outline a plan for an internal review of all financial documents during the decade-long audit gap. It should publicize all financial records, steering committee minutes, and the reports of previous Vice Chairs for Fiscal Affairs on its website. If the USS leadership really is interested in, to quote the Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs, placing "transparency at the core of our operation," it needs to bring to light the spending practices of previous administrations, and demonstrate its own fiscal accountability. Both carrying out an internal review and fully disclosing financial information would make it less likely that we will go another decade without an audit.

The USS has a new website, new leadership, and now a brand new audit. But the apparently old fiscal mismanagement cannot be swept under the rug. The USS's past history casts doubt on whether or not the current leadership will be able to push the organization in a direction that better advocates for student rights. There are now representatives who have shown commitment to creating a new USS. Let's make sure they follow through so that these good intentions become concrete actions. 🗣️

Cecilia Salvi is the Doctoral Students' Council representative to the United Student Senate. Please feel free to email her at [uss@cunydisc.org](mailto:uss@cunydisc.org) with any questions.

# WORKING ON YOUR FITNESS?

Yoga and Pilates class sessions for the remainder of the semester will begin on 17 March. Registration for these classes begins at **10:00** am on Thursday, 5 March in room **7301**. The schedule and pricing of classes will remain as currently set.



# Diplomacy Restored

## A happy reunion for Cuba and the United States?

**denise rivera**

ON 17 DECEMBER 2014, President Obama held a press conference in which he announced that the United States will initiate a renewed diplomatic relationship with Cuba, a country long considered a defiant, Communist regime, and an enemy of the United States. Through months and months of secret peace talks in Canada negotiated with both Cuba President Raúl Castro and Pope Francis, Obama confidently proclaimed “[the United States government] will end an outdated approach that for decades has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries.” This deal also included the reopening of a United States embassy and a political prisoner swap. This action will irrevocably leave a mark on the United States’ foreign policy.

One of the many interesting things about this revived rapprochement is the role that Pope Francis played in the negotiations between two states. Keep in mind that this powerful religious figure is in charge of the Vatican City, an independent and internationally recognized state. In the press conference, Obama thanked the Pope for contributing his efforts to establishing peace between two countries renowned for their animosity towards each other. Since his election to the papal office in 2013, Pope Francis has made huge efforts in attempting to restore people’s trust with the Catholic Church. Amid the resignation of former Pope Benedict XVI, the notorious financial scandals that plagued the Institute for the Works of Religion (the Vatican City bank), and the immense charges of sexual abuse levied on many prominent members of the clergy, these peace talks seemed to be the perfect opportunity for the Vatican City to reestablish itself as a reliable and responsible state for Catholics to trust again. It will be interesting to see if Barack Obama, or any future United States president, would partake in the advice of other religious leaders from different denominations in regards to conducting diplomatic issues.

It is not surprising that many members of the United States Congress were divided when the restored diplomatic

ties were announced. Senators Mark Rubio (R-FL) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ) were a few of the vocal politicians that frankly disapproved of this incentive. With Republicans in the majority, it appears that passing a bill to revoke the trade embargo on Cuba may not pass. This move may also be due to the heavy support and funding received from Cuban-Americans or just another bipartisan battle for the media to place high emphasis on, while no action takes course. Yet second-generation Cuban Americans (and even native Cubans) have displayed high support for this diplomatic move. Lifting the trade embargo on Cuba could permit the United States to have a bigger market in exporting goods such as rice and wheat. Another move that Obama seeks is to remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsor of Terrorism. Hopefully, this will not become another “Nelson Mandela mistake” (his name was actually placed and left upon the United States’ terrorist watch list until 2002). Although the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 placed a great fear upon Americans, keep in mind that it was our actions that opened Pandora’s Box when we unleashed the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. How can we define terrorism when we commit it ourselves?



Above: Cuban President Raúl Castro.



Obama mentioned that one of the positive outcomes of this renewed diplomacy would be the chance for Cuban-Americans to reconnect with their families that still reside in Cuba. Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1966, which permitted Cubans to seek asylum within the United States and apply for residency after one year passed (Cubans are the only Hispanic group that is not burdened with the challenges of immigration to the United States as other Latin Americans face). Obama used persuasive language when describing the perilous journey that Cubans make as they come with nothing “but the shirt on their back and hope in their hearts.” Although this quote does truthfully portray the plight of Cubans as they search for freedom and sanctuary, they seem to be the only group exempt from the animosity that other Hispanics face as they seek asylum from unstable Latin American countries due to the support that the United States gives (and has given) to many authoritarian regimes. Pinochet’s Chile, Noriega’s of Panama, and the Somoza family of Nicaragua are all prime examples. While the new diplomatic relations with Cuba may further promote peace and human rights freedom for Cubans, this has not been the case with other Latin American nations.

One of the demands that Cuban President Raúl Castro seeks for the United States to fulfill is to declare that the Guantánamo Bay military base be under Cuban state sovereignty. One of the alleged goals of the Obama administration is to close down this military base and release the prisoners to their home countries. However, we do not see much movement in the process of closing down this base. Furthermore, this territorial claim may drag on for a long time, just as Argentina’s dispute with Britain concerning sovereignty claims over Las Malvinas (the Falkland Islands). Castro also supports the idea of removing the trade embargo that the United States has imposed upon them and seeks to loosen the reins of Cuba’s state-controlled society while permitting Cubans to have more freedoms, such as travelling outside the country. He plans to step down as President in 2018, but nobody is certain that Castro will keep his word. At the same time, nobody is certain that the United States will keep its promise in mending its relationship with Cuba. On the third week of January 2015, American and Cuban diplomats held their first official talk in thirty-five years. Although this may be considered as a huge and historic stepping stone, this meeting was described as being very cautious and careful

with both parties attempting to avoid not upsetting one another.

This revived relationship between the United States and Cuba will definitely have a rippling effect upon the global stage. For Cuba, it may mean the commencement of new relations with multilateral institutions and new alliances with other nations. It will also test Cuba’s old alliances, such as Russia. For the United States, it may bring about the opportunity to explore new markets within a variety of fields such as communications, airlines, economic development, and etcetera. Americans may have the opportunity to be exposed to the culture of Cuba, such as cuisine, historical monuments, and of course the popular cigars. Cubans may have the opportunity to pursue an international career in reggaeton music or have professional careers in baseball outside of the country. This decision may also mean the beginning of a new approach to United States foreign policy. To some, this could signify that the United States may be open to work on attempting to restore diplomatic relations with other countries construed as problematic such as North Korea and Iran. To others, this could mean that Cuba may become yet another victim to the paternalistic behavior that the United States has been known to impose upon vulnerable nations. Only time will tell. ☺



# We Must Defend the Gains of the Revolution

## Notes on my travels in Cuba

**rhone fraser**

I HAD A POWERFUL experience in my travel to Cuba this past month, as part of the CODEPINK delegation, “to Cuba, With Love.” The theme of this whole visit was to show Cuba more love than its been getting from our country. The delegation made clear that they hope this trip would accomplish three goals: one to take Cuba off of the list of nations that the United States has defined as “terrorist” nations. Two, to lift the fifty plus year old trade embargo that former President Dwight D. Eisenhower imposed since 1959 because of their sovereign socialist revolution, led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, that ended the puppet dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Three, to close Guantanamo Bay prison, which the United States military has used for over one hundred years to torture extradited individuals, recently from mainly Arab countries. Guantanamo Bay prison is one of the last remaining bastions and symbols of the increasing police state that the United States is becoming.

On our first night we met with Kenya Serrano of the Cuban Institute of Friendship With the People. She said that the closing of Guantanamo would be an historic justice. She also talked about the character of the Cuban parliament since their revolution: 45 percent of those in the Cuban Parliament are women. Medea Benjamin noted that in the United States, not even 20 percent of Congress are women, and that we have a lot of work to do to get Cuba off of the state sponsors of terrorism list. Medea asked the President of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, what challenges between U.S.-Cuba relations exist from the Cuban perspective. Alarcon said that the United States government still has the same goals despite their announcement of wanting to establish diplomatic relations, but that they have other means of accomplishing their goals. This statement was an allusion to the efforts of think tanks like the National Endowment For Democracy that are currently spending mil-

lions of dollars to topple the government of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

Alarcon went on to say that we, people living in the United States, have to take on the challenge implicit in the decision to establish diplomatic relations. That we have to work at those decisions as civilized as possible. He said that Obama made an important decision to recognize the failure of the embargo. He said he decided to use his executive authority, like Eisenhower used his, to make the embargo more flexible. He also said that more could be done, not just to reopen an embassy, and send an ambassador, which requires consent and advice of the Senate. It is also important to eliminate the economic embargo and the travel ban. Alarcon noted, “it is clear that a majority of Americans do not want a confrontation with Cuba.” Then he defined what Cuban values in the twenty-first century are. He said that Cubans believe, in the majority, having access to healthcare and education is immensely important. Why should any state determine healthcare and education in any other country? He asks. He says that in the Cuban Constitution, healthcare is a human right, and that the United States continues to support countries that do not recognize the rights of women. Without naming such countries, Alarcon is referring here to Saudi Arabia, which as a theocracy boasts some of the most oppressive sexist laws, such as those laws that forbid women from driving and from serving in the government.

When the question and answer time came up, Kenya Serrano answered my question about whether the Cuban government recognizes same sex marriages. She said that the country does not yet recognize same sex marriages. In Cuba she said that such an idea is respected at an individual level, but not tolerated. In the United States, however, same sex marriage is welcomed in an increasing number of states. I spoke with several Cuban citizens about how public displays of affection are not tolerated. I also spoke with several

United States citizens about how LGBTQ rights are about much more than same sex marriage. It also includes a right to education and employment, which in most cases makes the right to marriage moot. I think that the right to marriage for many of us has to take a back seat to the rights to employment and healthcare that the nation routinely denies to not only “normalized” people of color but also LGBTQ individuals of color.

I was very impressed with the fact that Cuba, unlike the United States, has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world (4.43 deaths per 1000 births). Alarcon said quite powerfully at the end of this talk that Cuba is not for sale, and that the notion of a country being for sale is a neoliberal policy. Cuba will welcome foreign investors, but on Cuba’s terms and not on the terms of the foreign investor. This reminds me of how democratic socialism operated in Jamaica, compared to the revolution that was pursued in Cuba.

Alarcon said that the United States’ effort to improve diplomatic relations with Cuba might put Assata Shakur and other political dissidents in a more dangerous situation. This is especially true after watching the leaders of South American nations in Oliver Stone’s film *South of the Border* who suggest a very real threat of assassination in the wake of “more diplomatic” relations. Alarcon vowed to help defend Shakur from any increased threat to her life that this “improved” diplomacy might bring.

On 9 February, I visited the home of an LGBTQ rights activist in Havana and learned of Cuban life from an LGBTQ perspective that was more critical of the Cuban government. A recent article in the *Granma* newspaper featured an interview with Fidel Castro being asked about LGBTQ rights since the triumph of the revolution. The activist said that when Castro was challenged about the persecution that LGBTQ activists faced after the Cuban revolution, he admitted that the abuse of the LGBTQ community was not acceptable. But he also gave what these activists thought was a sorry excuse for an apology.

They described CENESEX (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) as a paradise that in reality does not exist. Activists explained to me that Cuba is still a homophobic country because of patriarchy and because of the machismo that was inherited since the Cuban revolution, seen in the images of Che, Fidel Castro, and Camilo Cienfuegos. While I read in Leslie Feinberg’s book *Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba* that individuals who want gender reassignment operations can have them paid for by the Cuban government, I learned from these activists that there are actually very few who can have these operations at CENESEX. Those seeking these operations have to go through a lot of red tape that ultimately denies access people who are not very close in some way to the people running CENESEX. In order to



get through this red tape, applicants for gender reassignment operations in Cuba have to be in line with the Cuban Communist Party, and be part of the system.

Meanwhile, later in the evening, a second, different group met at the home of an older psychologist who works for CENESEX. I learned from this psychologist that the country has come a long way in approving transgender operations. On the day we visited the activist group, we learned that a law was passed saying that LGBTQ individuals cannot assemble in certain places like Malecon (a major pedestrian path and attraction in Havana). In the home of a CENESEX employee, I read and learned about their human sexuality primer, called in English “puberty” that described the possibility of a same-sex relationships between men and women. There were some questions in this second group about whether this book in fact discussed the possibility of same sex relationships and before our second meeting was over, we in fact discovered that yes, this text which is available to all public schools in Cuba does in fact teach the possibility



of same sex relationships. That alone puts it light years ahead of the neighboring government in Jamaica, which in its brazen ignorance is obviously hostile to the idea of teaching its youth about the possibility of same sex relationships.

Some days later, we heard the director of CENESEX, Mariela Castro Espín. She said that a society of socialism is a society that lifts everyone, and that even though the Cuban revolution bought many important changes, “there is still generalized homophobia in society.” She acknowledged that sometimes the police mistreat citizens. I remember specifically meeting a young Afro-Cuban gay man who said that he knows he will be less likely to be harassed by the police compared to others because he has a Swedish passport. Like Serrano, Espín said that same sex weddings are not legal in Cuba, but that their process of socialist transformation in Cuba is not yet completed. I was personally impressed with the way that sexual education in Cuba teaches the imperialistic history to its citizens in a way to avoid it. It also teaches the history of gender roles. I am fondly reminded by Sarah Schulman’s book *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, which discusses the phenomenon of homonationalism (a term Schulman borrows from Jasbir Puar), which uses gay or queer identity to advance colonialism. Homo-nationalism is barely checked or critiqued in the United States much less challenged. I think Cuba guards itself from this mindless homo-nationalism by teaching the very important imperialistic nature of homophobia. In a formerly Spanish Catholic society I think homophobia will be very hard to eradicate, but even though the nation does not recognize same sex marriages, they have much more to teach the United States about how to meet the basic sexual healthcare and sex educational needs of its citizens. Castro Espín said that our sexual parts should be instruments not of power, but of emancipation. This reminded me of the film *Goodbye Uncle Tom* produced by two Italian filmmakers, Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, who in a deranged way were able to force their audience to, enjoy seeing men use their organs to rape or to use their sexual parts for instruments of power. It is a very disturbing experience but a very necessary one to understand the psychology of a rapist who thrives on imperialism.

The following day, I visited two schools. First, the San Alejandro School of the Arts and the second was an elementary school. The students at the former were taking an

entrance exam, however, we were able to visit some of the art galleries featuring the memorable work of some students. One of the pieces featured was by Marian Rodriguez who showed me the stone on which she sketched. My limited knowledge of visual art prevents me from sharing the type of art that this is.

I also appreciated visiting the elementary school and to hear a poem about Jose Marti by an eight year old young man. I was struck by the fact that each school has an administrator that is a member of the Cuban Communist Party and makes some effort to enforce some standard of learning throughout the country. This made me think of the public schools in the United States and how a quality education depends on the income of the parents and not the level of commitment of the child and parents. It seemed that a majority of the Cuban citizens had a deep awareness of their history and the importance of their revolution. The day we visited these schools we went to one of the many cooperatively owned businesses, a restaurant in Havana, El Jardin De Los Milagros. The government provides a tax cut from 13 percent to 29 percent to cooperatively owned businesses like these in order to encourage and economically stimulate them. The owner of this restaurant was a part of an agricultural cooperative with thirteen other co-owners. What if small business owners in the United States would form a cooperative and receive tax incentives? I had an

important conversation at this restaurant about the way that the Cuban government’s role for the Cuban people is a like a father protecting a child from the potentially dangerous (as it was called on this trip) “tsunami” of imperialism.

There were some serious critiques of the Cuban government that I heard, though in most cases, I either agreed or sympathized with the decisions the government took to defend the gains of the revolution. I think free market capitalism in theory might work, but in the United States, its coupling with mass incarceration and crippling austerity policies makes it extremely harmful and I think ultimately dangerous for countries like Cuba. In most cases what others call the repression of the Cuban government I would call a protective measure against the danger of Yankee imperialism.

Later in the afternoon we visited the Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina. We learned that this school has graduated 24,000 students from eighty-eight countries including the United States. The students go through a six-year program. The first three years are at a central location and the rest at other schools across the country. The first two years they are trained at the central location and during the third year, they leave to work in a hospital elsewhere in Cuba. At the end of

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their fourth year, they have to perform an exam. These doctors are trained to treat transmittable diseases like Measles. They have MRI machines, nuclear medicine, CTC scanners. We were given a tour of the school from its secretary. I had an important conversation with two medical school students about their time here. This routine reminds me of the role that American universities played for African intellectuals in improving the plight of their home countries. I am thinking specifically of Robert A. Hill's article in the book *Marcus Garvey And the Vision of Africa* edited by Amy Jacques Garvey and John Henrik Clarke. He talks about the role that colonial education for intellectuals like Marcus Garvey, (and Hubert Harrison, Kwame Nkrumah for that matter) can play in advancing the anticolonial struggle. These two men took the colonial education they learned and applied it to improving the plight of their home countries. Unfortunately because of the West's military superpower, anticolonial struggle has so far resulted in neocolonial leadership that still serves the interest of the West. It is clear that the Escuela Latinoamericana de Medica was interested in training doctors to serve their country, not to serve neocolonial, private capital interests. I had very interesting discussions with two medical school students about the helpful roles that Cuban doctors played in the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. There was some discussion in our casual conversations about the drugs made in Cuba that could help citizens in the United States if they were imported. One was a cancer "vacine" and another was a diabetes medication. CODEPINK members were able to talk with a representative from the State Department about whether these helpful drugs provided by Cuban medicine could be imported to the United States. The representative said no: "only privately owned goods could be imported into the United States." When asked for his rationale for this restriction, the representative, of replied that the United States' whole goal is to have the Cuban people wake up in the morning and not need anything from their government. Their policy is to promote the private sector. Jodie Evans of CODEPINK said that this kind of policy by the United States essentially creates inequality, which is exactly why Fidel Castro and Che Guevara led the socialist revolution that toppled the Fulgencio Batista in 1959 in the first place. This policy of not wanting the Cuban people to wake up in the morning and not need anything from their government is the red flag that Ricardo Alarcon warned us about in his 9 February talk to our delegation. It will take work to prevent the inequality that U.S. government "diplomacy" will create.

On the fourth day of the trip, I took a tour of Casablanca where I saw a monument of Jesus Christ done by Gilma Madera. I also attended a talk about the work of filmmaker Gloria Rolando, who directed and produced the film *Eyes of*

*the Rainbow* about Assata Shakur. At this talk, we saw two films she produced, that we later discussed. One was *Las Raíces De Mi Corazon (The Roots of My Heart)* about Sara Gomez, a fearless Afro-Cuban journalist who fought the demands of Western industry to study and present stories about Afro-Cubans. The other was *Los Hijos de Baragua* about the migration of a family from Jamaica to Cuba. We saw a third film on the 1912 massacre of Cuba's Partido Independiente de Color (PIDC). I asked her before we saw this film if she interviewed Aline Helg about her book *Our Rightful Share*, and Gloria told me that she did. I was absolutely mesmerized and inspired by the art of Gloria Rolando. Her film on Gomez reminded me of my dissertation, which focused on radical journalists like Pauline Hopkins who sought to study and uncover for her readers the radical histories of Toussaint L'Ouverture and John Brown. Rolando said that the Cuban revolution tried their best in many ways to abolish colonial oppression but the past of slavery is real.

A final powerful message of this trip was a sit-down with a powerful political refugee from the United States, Nehanda Abiodun. She sat down with us and explained how she became a political prisoner. Her mother was a Baptist integrationist and her father a revolutionary nationalist. She attended Columbia University and started working at a methadone clinic, the Lincoln-Detox Acupuncture Center that Mutulu Shakur founded. She said she later learned that methadone was more addictive than heroin. She said that she had to leave the methadone clinic she was working at when one of her clients was struggling with illicit drug addiction. Her superiors told her that if she did not raise her client methadone dosage, she would be fired. She refused, and was fired. She later said that former New York mayor, Ed Koch, closed the addiction clinic because he said it was "a breeding ground" for terrorists.

Eventually, because of her political beliefs and affiliations, she, like Mutulu Shakur, became targets of the COINTELPRO operation. By 1980, she was number three on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List. The government claimed she had stolen \$4.8 million USD over several years. When I asked her what she had in common with Assata Shakur, she said that they are both committed to the freedom of their people, that they are extremely comfortable in Cuba, and that they will do what they can to help their people.

When I asked her what the United States could learn from Cuba, she responded that the former could learn from Cuba how to be more humane. They know how to divide one egg among one million people instead of dividing over half of it to less than 0.1 percent of the people, like the United States has done with wealth. She said the Cubans have maintained a certain dignity and have not reneged on their principles of humanity. ☸

# Martins & Malcolms

## The moderates and militants of New York City's #BlackLivesMatter movement

ashoka jegroo

THERE IS A SCENE in Ava DuVernay's recently-released film *Selma* (see a review of the film on page 38) that delivered an especially timely message to everyone watching in the theater. In it, President Lyndon Johnson, while discussing Martin Luther King Jr.'s Civil Rights rabble-rousing, states very clearly that he prefers King as the face of the movement over one of those "militant Malcolm X types." In a later scene, as King wallows in jail, some of his associates on the outside receive word that Malcolm is on his way to Selma, Alabama. They anxiously argue with each other over what to do about Malcolm's arrival. One of them then exclaims that they don't want Malcolm ruining the work they've done in Selma by riling people up with that "by any means necessary" stuff. As illustrated in these scenes, division in a movement can come from the outside as well

as from the inside. A common tactic used against protest movements by the powerful is to divide them into moderates that can be compromised with and radicals who have to be de-legitimized or destroyed. But this division can also come from within a movement for purely personal or ideological reasons. And yet, in the end, the unity of these two factions was precisely what was needed to achieve change in the context of the Civil Rights movement.

Today, it is these lessons of the past generation that weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the current batch of freedom fighters.

Karl Marx remarked that "precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis," movements "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and



borrowed language.” Thus the present-day #BlackLivesMatter movement has put on the mask of the Civil Rights movement of the past. It has even inherited its old division between a pacifist and reformist wing and a more radical and militant wing. This movement, which I once saw referred to as “the Civil Rights movement of our time” by protesters in New York City, has, like the Civil Rights movement of the past, divided itself into Malcolms and Martins. And during my time participating in various actions in New York City over the past few months, I’ve seen firsthand how this intra-struggle conflict, encouraged both externally and within the movement, has outwardly manifested itself as differences in speech, thought, and action.

## Rhetoric

IT WAS THE BEGINNING of December, and New York City, still steaming with anger over the non-indictment of Mike Brown’s killer, had been lit aflame with rage after a grand jury refused to indict Daniel Pantaleo, the police officer who killed Eric Garner. As I marched through Manhattan’s streets with crowds of people chanting “Hands up! Don’t Shoot!” and “I Can’t Breathe!,” there was a moment in which the apparent unity of the protesters revealed itself as only superficial. A young white woman dressed in black chanted a slogan I had heard quite a few times from the more militant and radical protesters. Rather than “Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!,” she loudly yelled: “Arms up! Shoot back!” Suddenly, from behind her, a college-aged black man with Greek letters on his jacket chided her and advised her to “check her privilege” before screaming such a militant chant. The young white lady seemed confused about how to respond at first, but then, a young brown-skinned woman, also dressed in black, came to her defense. “Fuck you and your liberal bullshit!” she yelled in a thick Bronx accent before she proceeded to argue with the young man.

This wasn’t the first time I had seen chants and choice of rhetoric start arguments amongst protesters. And it definitely wasn’t the last time either. Language has become one of the main sources of conflict amongst New York City’s #BlackLivesMatter movement. And much like Democratic President Johnson did to the Civil Rights movement, Democratic mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio, has helped foster and promote division within the movement over the issue of rhetoric.

De Blasio, despite the protestations of the police, has, from the beginning, denounced any chant seen as too radical. At first, he claimed that chants comparing the New York Police Department to the Ku Klux Klan were limited to only a fringe of protesters. When he realized that such was not the case, he began taking a more hardline approach to certain groups of protesters and their chants. He alleged

that certain groups “have a long history of, unfortunately, allowing some of their members to say really inappropriate, reprehensible things about our police officers, things I think are actually quite sick—anything that suggests violence towards police.”

De Blasio claimed that these groups and their chants denigrated “any notion of calling for reform.” On Martin Luther King Day, of all days, de Blasio reiterated his position stating that “we see a few who spew hate. Who try to divide us. Who spew hate at the men and women who protect us, which only takes us backwards.” “If you’re saying something vicious and vile to a police officer, you’re not making change,” the Mayor stated. “You’re not moving us forward; you’re holding us back.” Like Johnson before him, those darn militant Malcolm X types have made things difficult for a white, respectable, and liberal mayor.

Along with the “NYPD, KKK” chants, the now-infamous chants for “dead cops” during the Millions March in New York City were also condemned as the work of a fringe by de Blasio. But the chants for dead cops merely illustrated an already-existing division within the movement.

During the Millions March, a group of protesters that I had marched with earlier that day broke away from the march’s permitted route. A group of about 100 protesters were recorded on video chanting: “What do we want? Dead cops! When do we want it? Now!” After the video went viral, the mayor along with many fellow protesters were quick to condemn the chant.

It was soon discovered that this group, as well as other members of the movement’s radical wing, had also used the #TurnUpTheAnger hashtag during the march. The Daily Beast later quoted me explaining how the hashtag was used by the radicals of the march. What they left out was my explanation of how calls and chants for dead cops were quite commonplace amongst radical protests in other countries. In the past, the Black Panther Party also had chants calling to “off the pigs.” And ironically, the Daily Beast noted that a chant to “off the pigs” was also used during the march without even realizing its origins. Buzzfeed later spoke to one of the protesters about the dead cops chant, and they said exactly what I had suspected and what I had seen at many of New York’s #BlackLivesMatter protests. Rhetoric was being used as a tool to distinguish radicals from moderates. “The larger march [...] had a liberal, reformist agenda. The people who wanted a broader transformation, they were gravitating toward whatever chants could express that,” the protester told Buzzfeed. “In that moment of outrage, the chant was the only way to express that we wanted to separate ourselves from people who just want to get a guy fired,” the protester said. Unlike the moderate wing, this protester and other radicals wanted “to see the police disbanded.”



## Theory

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE militants and moderates of New York's #BlackLivesMatter movement also go beyond mere words. Differences in analysis and ideology have also pitted protest factions against each other. People of various ideological backgrounds marched side-by-side at many of the protests I attended. Liberals, communists, black nationalists, socialists, social justice advocates, anarchists, anti-racism activists, and concerned-yet-apolitical citizens could all be seen together at these events. But generally, the main ideological split I observed was between reformists and the revolutionaries.

During the #BlackOutBlackFriday protests in front of Macy's in Herald Square, many of the organizers of that action were openly reformist and committed to a strict pacifist approach to struggle. There were signs exhorting "conscious consumerism," and one of the women on the bullhorn screamed in favor of "changes in policy." That day's protest, despite the shutdown of major roadways and bridges in the weeks beforehand, was also decidedly less confrontational with the police and much more willing to comply with police orders. Many of the protest's more radical and militant participants exhibited an overt frustration with the tame nature of the action as well as the calls for reform. Calls for "peaceful protest" and "policy change" were met with perplexed looks, groans, and eye-rolls from many who favored a more revolutionary analysis and who came to shut down some roads and take a more confrontational approach with the police.

The conflict between the reformists and the radicals became all too obvious and pronounced to me that day. It was clear that while many protesters wanted small policy changes, other protesters yearned for a more radical and aggressive movement. After all, as the popular chant said, "the whole damn system is guilty as hell!"

This conflict between reformists and revolutionaries also exhibited itself in discourse over whether the movement was fighting against police brutality or against the police as an institution.

During many of the protests I attended, I often heard people say that the protests were "anti-police brutality and not anti-police." Groups like Justice League NYC had demands that didn't seek to abolish the police, rather they wanted to merely reform current police protocol and have Pantaleo fired. Other protesters brought up the old, tired analogy of killer cops being just "a few bad apples," spoiling the large majority of "good cops."

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Al Sharpton, who, thanks to the media had become a big name in the movement's moderate faction, stated "We are not anti-police; we respect the police."

"We are for good policing," he continued. "Every time you question a police case does not make you any more anti-police than anytime a black is arrested makes you racist." But during many protests, right beneath the surface of reformist, "few bad apples" rhetoric, I'd often hear many people mumbling to each other that they were, in fact, anti-cop. Full stop. While many of those on the mics and bullhorns at larger protests were talking about making small changes to the current system, many other protesters were advocating disarming and dismantling the police, in addition to calling for the abolition of the prison system. And while many of these protesters were not featured on the news or didn't get their opinions included in the national debate, they were in the streets chanting and waving signs that read: "End the police," "Prison Abolition: Fuck the police!" and "Strong communities make police obsolete."

During an interview on MSNBC, Jose Martin, author of a Rolling Stone piece on "6 ideas for a cop-free world," was probably the first person to say openly on television that there are, in fact, many in the movement who are straight up anti-police. And I knew from what I had personally seen and heard that he was right. The divide between anti-brutality moderates and anti-police militants was very real despite what so-called leaders and organizers said.

## Praxis

ARISING OUT OF THE rhetorical and theoretical differences between the movement's Malcolms and Martins comes a predictable difference in what kind of protests and actions advance the struggle and make social change possible. Groups like Justice League NYC have called for and engaged in meetings with the political and cultural elites, specifically Bill de Blasio, in order to apparently bargain for their desired reforms. Along with an all-too-friendly relationship with the establishment, the moderate wing of New York's #BlackLivesMatter movement has organized permitted (by police) marches and actions. March marshals keep people from deviating from the permitted route, and protesters are prevented from doing anything seen as too confrontational.

Shutting down roads and bridges, disrupting business-as-usual, and property damage have been either discouraged or disavowed.

Once again, during #BlackOutBlackFriday, I saw an example of this conflict between the movement's two wings. After a few hours of rather-tame marching and chanting, organizers were trying to keep protesters outside of Macy's and on the sidewalk. Chants of "Fists up! Fight back!" were even discouraged at times. And then, a group of protesters had enough and, against the wishes of police and organizers, stormed into Macy's. Police followed and the occupation of Macy's was short-lived that day as protesters ran through the



store and out the exit. But the difference in protest tactics was clear. While some wanted to follow the rules and pose for the media's gaze, others, after experiencing their power to unsettle the status quo in the previous weeks, were there to engage in civil disobedience and disrupt business-as-usual.

The Millions March was also filled with instances of differing tactics used within the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In the first genuine act of protest of that day, a group of protesters reportedly threw trash on and broke the window of an NYPD vehicle. This group was, of course, later distanced from the other "largely peaceful" protesters who stayed within the barricades of the march and walked on the permitted route. Later, when large crowds of protesters disobeyed police orders after the Millions March and took over the Brooklyn Bridge, the march's organizers quickly distanced themselves from this act of civil disobedience as well as anything done after the permitted march was over. Then, when a few protesters were caught on video fighting police officers while attempting to de-arrest a fellow protester on the Brooklyn Bridge, they were quickly denounced by de Blasio as well as moderate groups and individuals within the movement. While members of the Peoples Power Assemblies and other more radical groups called for amnesty for those arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge, many of the more reformist groups were either silent or critical. Some militant protesters even accused the Justice League of helping the police catch those involved in the incident, an accusation which the Justice League denied.

After the Brooklyn Bridge was taken over, in a beautiful act of solidarity, a contingent of protesters, some using the #TurnUpTheAnger hashtag, marched, without permits, all the way to Brooklyn's Pink Houses, where Akai Gurley was killed by NYPD Officer Peter Liang. And yet, the march's organizers, in disavowing anything after the permitted march, also distanced themselves from this act. Yet again, I had witnessed the Martins and Malcolms of New York's #BlackLivesMatter movement divide themselves. While the Martins generally wanted to engage in non-confrontational and largely symbolic-yet-law-abiding actions, the Malcolms wanted to get their point across to police and the public by any means necessary. And these means proudly included de-arresting comrades, defending other protesters from police violence, occupying businesses, blocking roads and bridges, and marching against police orders.

## ***The Necessity of Solidarity***

DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES AND conflicts between the Malcolms and Martins, both these wings of the movement, like the Civil Rights movement of the past, ultimately need each other.

While the Martins complain about bad press or having their peaceful protests disrupted by outbursts of militancy, it is precisely the Malcolms who have created space for the Martins to have their peaceful protests. NYPD Commissioner William Bratton admitted as much when, in response to a question about his "hands off" approach to protests, he said that he'd "rather have what we're experiencing than having what Ferguson or Berkley are experiencing." They may not admit it, but it was radicals and militants burning and breaking things in Ferguson and Berkley who gave all of New York's protesters the ability to march in the streets without worrying about police violence or mass arrests. Just as was the case in Selma, the Martins were bequeathed the gift of legitimacy thanks to the efforts of those militant Malcolm X-types.

But the Malcolms also need the Martins. After two police officers were shot and killed in Brooklyn by Ismaaiyl Brinsley, the mood in New York City had changed and the momentum was on the side of the police. The radicals and militants had to go into hiding for a few days until the heat died down, but the protests nonetheless had to continue to keep New York's movement alive. Shortly after the two cops were shot, I attended a series of quiet, pacifistic, candlelight vigils and marches. These marches were effective in keeping the issues on peoples' minds and keeping the movement going. While they were not the most exciting protests, they performed an important function in the movement. They allowed anti-protest feelings in the wider public to subside while still allowing people to hit the streets and dissent. While the militants laid low, the moderates could continue protesting while being immune from accusations of insensitivity to the death of two cops. Then, gradually, as the momentum switched back to the side of the protesters, the radicals and militants could come back out and do what they did best.

Each wing of the movement essentially helped create space for the other to operate. And this is why the Martins and Malcolms, despite their differences in speech, thought, and actions ultimately need each other. The differences between the Martins and the Malcolms, though substantial, will only allow their common enemy to divide and conquer them as the powerful have often done to past movements. If they're smart, the moderates and militants won't allow themselves to be hoodwinked by this old trick. Instead, their unity lets them pull some tricks of their own. This solidarity between Martins and Malcolms allows the protesters to pull the old good-cop/bad-cop routine on the police and politicians themselves. And if they keep it up, the police and politicians will definitely soon crack and, hopefully, the "whole damn system" will be publicly declared "guilty as hell." 🗳️



# A Necessary Conversation

The question of the police in the United States

**talisa feliciano**

**W**HY DO WE NEED to be policed? I pose this question, time and again, to numerous types of people. From fellow students in the academy to individuals left on the margins of society, and to those that are invested in the democratic process as a means to justice. The utility and necessity of the police is often a dismissed question. Whenever a discussion turns to the idea of abolishment of armed police forces, the response is often that it simply would not work. True, it would not work as things are. It would not work as long as there is an adherence to mainstream values of individualism, expansion, capitalism, and a lack of critical knowledge concerning the history of the State. In order to grasp the institution of the police, one must think of why police forces in the United States came into being and for what reasons.

The mainstream history of the United States dictates that we, its citizenry, were pre-determinatively destined for the white supremacist hetero-patriarchal society it has become. We placate ourselves with parades honoring the continual genocide of indigenous people, and manufacture history textbooks spinning narratives of chattel slavery's necessity. Chattel slavery was never merely forced labor, but the

active creation of an underclass. It meant the destruction of subjecthood, of consciousness, and it is responsible for the active transformation of people into objects to be bought, bred, sold, and disposed of. This is what capitalism required to flourish. It is what nourishes capitalism now, as this slave legacy persists to this day. After the formal abolition of chattel slavery in the United States, those propertied, those maintaining power, and those invested in the spread of their governmental structure looked to maintain their power. As students we are taught this as if it were natural. We are always fed the fictive narrative “if it were the other way around scenario.” The truth is that people who understood that they had been objectified in order to labor for a wealth they would never see would want many things, including vengeance, peace, wealth, and ultimately, sovereignty. Yet, those people invested in the capitalist and racist power structure recognized that if they did not offer some type of citizenship to previously enslaved peoples, their power would be in jeopardy. So, citizenship was offered, but at a price. This citizenship acknowledges the right to settler genocide as something that is at the core of being a citizen of the United States.

This closer relationship between slavery, capitalism,



and the emergence of the United States as a State is not mentioned in textbooks. Instead, we digest an uncritically white supremacist hetero-patriarchal reading of history that merely reflects the ideology of our political, economic, and social structures. This ideology is maintained under threat of death via armed police forces. We are so invested in systems of white supremacist hetero-patriarchy that the questioning of the utility of armed police forces is often ignored. I am baffled by the amount of people who actually believe that the existence of armed police forces has anything to do with safety or protection. The police force has much more to do with perpetuating an economy of fear. It is fear of the Other, of the unknown, of those who transgress norms, of dark-

ness, that policemen, smiling boyishly (and despite gender I do mean boyishly), are quick to throw on bullet proof vests and don semi-automatic weapons in order to terrorize unarmed citizens. Their primary utility is to uphold the inherited structures of white supremacist hetero-patriarchy.

This is why it is crucial that the dual genocidal/chattel slave nature of the United States be continually present in our psyches. As students and budding academics, our work is to understand exactly what the implications of these facts are. Our work should point to the ways in which sexism, racism, and classism intersect and are located in the institutions that make up our society. The State works to maintain the wealthy, the propertied, and the privileged, but there are infinitely more of us than them, and so the threat of violent death is embodied in police forces. It is through the inception of armed police forces that this nation is able to maintain the State and, therefore, the wealthy, propertied, and privileged. This is how power works, upheld through the active creation of underclasses. Oppression takes form in multiple ways, it exists differently along the bodies of the marginalized. And so the question remains, if we are devoted to change, why is it that abolishing armed police forces is too radical a move? Why are we afraid of being radical?

It has to do with the fact that it is not enough to merely call for the eradication of an institution of armed police forces. While some of us may want to abolish police forces, we must remember that they act as buffers for the social realities that our society rejects: the poor, the elderly, the mentally ill, the unemployed, young people, etcetera. The purpose of the police is to criminalize these types of people because the State refuses them full citizenship. They are byproducts of capitalism with no use for generating wealth other than being in prison. Prison is the exemplar of modern day slavery. Therefore, we cannot begin the conversation of abolition—a conversation we need—without simultaneously talking about the ways white supremacist hetero-patriarchal capitalism is embedded in the fibers of our society.

There are multiple mechanisms in place that uphold the system. One of them is a form of disciplinarian silencing that occurs when people are seriously trying to propose radical ideas. Recently, Gordon Barnes wrote an editorial for the *GC Advocate* entitled “In Support of Violence,” in which he called for armed self-defense. I believe he was trying to start a conversation. Is that not the purpose of academia? Are we not trained to discuss, to agree, and most importantly to dissent? If not, what is the point? Instead of being taken seriously, the *New York Post* published a condemnation against him. What is worse is that certain individuals on behalf of CUNY condemned his views as well. No one took the time to take his argument seriously, and this indicates the depths into which the system of oppression limits our freedom of speech. I would like to engage in his conversation. As students and scholars we should be engaging in his arguments and not biting into the propaganda presented before us. The willingness to condemn merely indicates the lack of political imagination for social change. It betrays a certain complicity with the white supremacist hetero-patriarchal capitalist state.

It seems that it is easy to accept the active arming of civilian police forces with military grade weapons, but that a call for armed and organized self-defense is viewed to be too extreme. It is important to remember the context into which these statements are being made. In the context of militarized responses to peaceful protests over the unjust murders of youth, an argument for organized and armed self-defense against a murderous and oppressive State is not an extreme view. It is a response to oppression, an active one that seeks to reinforce the value of life for communities of people. I am asking that people engage these ideas on their own terms, without name calling and without wrongfully accusing people of adherence to abstract ideologies. Engaging in ideas, whether we label them radical or not, should never be dismissed as criminal, because this is what we do as academics. So, let us have this necessary conversation. ☪



# Beyond the Neoliberal University

## Lessons from Mondragon University and 1930s CUNY

**alexander kolokotronis**

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IS APPROACHING a critical juncture. In the United States, universities are tailoring curricula to the needs of capitalist economy. They are leaning down instructional labor and adding administrative staff. One finds an effort to both minimize the amount of tenure positions as well as strenuously maximize the amount of work performed. With the former, one finds greater pressure being placed upon adjuncts. To the latter, one feels the ramped up pressure to publish, as well as facing the command to teach more classes, with more students. Increasingly bureaucratized, the university has equally been a site of neoliberal experimentation and power. Yet, in a little known book titled *The Struggle for Academic Democracy* (a book that is worthy of reprint) by Abraham Edel, we find a historical example of an alternative.

### **Democratization of CUNY**

A PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, Edel was not merely an observer—he was a participant. Edel was chairman of the Educational Policies Committee of the New York College Teachers Union. In the late 1930s this body proved to have significant institutional teeth both internally and externally. Internal to what is now City University of New York (CUNY), it “formulated the central program for the reorganization of governance.” External to CUNY, it impressed the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to the point of the latter, setting up a national Committee on Democracy in Higher Education for the purposes of expanding this program beyond New York City. Yet, what was this program based on and how does it run counter to what typically characterizes the university? How can it run counter to both neoliberalism as simply a university project and neoliberalism as a broader societal project?

The first question can be answered with two words: participatory democracy. In defining participatory democ-

racy we may refer to Dimitrios Roussopoulos and C. George Benello. In the introduction to their book *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, they define participatory democracy as a “decision-making process... whereby people propose, discuss, decide, plan and implement those decisions that affect their lives.” This means that people have direct control over policymaking.

In the case of what is now CUNY, in May 1937 the Educational Policies Committee asserted that “the task of democratizing departments and faculties should be one of the major of endeavors of the College Section next fall since this alone will check many current abuses.” Even before the wider academic “revolution” took place, experiments were proliferating across the university system. Faculties formed committees that were required to report back to departmental assemblies, and the appointment of someone “to an important post...was discussed and voted upon by the whole.” Among the pre-revolutionary experiments was the registrar’s office at City College. According to Edel, “they held regular meetings and set up committees to deal with planning and distribution of work, personnel, adjustment of members.” In short, participatory democratic organization was to be carried out among both instructional and non-instructional offices and groupings.

With the founding of Queens College, the union once again spearheaded an effort to democratize campus organization. Writing to President Paul Klapper on 3 June, 1937, the union insisted that “the faculty be the ultimate source of all authority on matters of policy within the college. That, accordingly, it be empowered to set up and elect any committees it may think best, and that all committees be responsible to it.” Such a proposal did not merely concern participation, but actual governance. At Queens College this meant including “all members of the teaching staff, together with all others on the staff who have educational relations or guidance contact with students.” Departments increasingly



moved away from presidential control, as departmental heads were elected directly by faculty.

## Not Far Enough

OF COURSE, TO THOSE familiar with departmental organization in CUNY much of this does not appear radical. In fact, in some instances, it may come across as incredibly status quo. Many of the elements of faculty democracy—as well as joint student-faculty bodies—are a legacy of this revolution in CUNY, which attempted to almost completely move away from top-down control.

However, present-day CUNY hardly feels participatory in the sense of governance being carried out from the bottom-up. One finds this feeling at both the level of staff and student body. For student government elections voter participation is disconcertingly low. At Queens College it is the rule—and not the exception—for students to run away from campaigners at election time. In fact, most students will joke about running away from those that try to quickly pressure them into voting for them. Typical voter outreach consists of candidates aggressively thrusting laptops in the faces of voting students in hopes of attaining a vote. Most often students will simply sidestep the solicitation by stating “I already voted,” especially if they have no plans on actually doing so. Student voters should not be blamed for this. The cynicism is justified: rarely do student political organizations actually offer a concrete program beyond throwing parties.

## Mondragon University

THE MONDRAGON MODEL PRESENTS an alternative. Based in Basque country in Northern Spain, Mondragon is the largest worker cooperative in the world with over 80,000 worker-owners. In Mondragon, workers have ownership, voice, and a vote. As such, Mondragon’s worker cooperative model constitutes what might otherwise be called “democratic-employee ownership.” Truer to its decentralized nature, Mondragon is a cooperative of cooperatives, inasmuch as it is composed of 110 separate cooperatives.

Mondragon also runs its own university. In a 29 August 2013 article for *Times Higher Education*, David Matthews notes Mondragon University is “jointly owned by its academic and administrative staff.” In part, the university also serves as “the training arm of a wider network of interlock-

ing cooperatives.” Even the university itself is a cooperative of cooperatives, as each of the branches constitute a cooperative within themselves. Yet, Mondragon University faces its own set of problems as it must contend with issues that are typical of any private university, including cost-management. Nonetheless, students at Mondragon note the familial nature of pedagogical and social life. Others have also explicitly cited Mondragon University as an alternative



to the neoliberal university (which encourages the pacification of students and faculty alike).

## Is There An Alternative?

WHILE CUNY IS FAR more progressive relative to other universities throughout the United States, this has not prevented the onslaught of neoliberal inroads. Such examples range from “private-public” partnerships (a euphemism for private contracting and subcontracting, and privatization of services) to the marginalization of adjuncts, which compose approximately 65 percent of the staff.

Neither CUNY’s past nor Mondragon’s present may be completely applicable, but they do point to potential policy and programmatic turns. This involves deepening democracy and reorienting what is viewed as progressive and truly socially concerned economic development. For the latter, one may find alternatives here in the United States. This can be found on both the level of curriculum commitments and community partnerships. For example, UMass Amherst houses the “Cooperative Enterprise Collaborative,” wherein students are educated in cooperative economics and theory. The Collaborative also is in partnership with various cooperative organizations, such as The Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives (VAWC). In Ohio, we find the “Cleveland Model.” Here, a nexus of institutions such as (but not limited to) Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Clinic, and the municipal government utilize their procurement

power to help build worker cooperatives in the local area. The idea is not for residents to become compliant workers, but to exercise their full agency as producers through democratic-employee ownership. Though there are criticisms of the Cleveland Model, the takeaway from this is that workers' self-management is a constitutive part of building community wealth, or rather, simply building community.

On the student level, we are also finding changes. Student Organization for Democratic Alternatives (SODA) is a fairly new political student group, launching its inaugural chapters at both Queens College and Hunter College. Despite only being formed in April, it is increasingly connecting CUNY students and staff to opportunities for democratic-employee ownership through its expanding partnerships with worker cooperative incubators. In fact, CUNY students themselves have started a marketing worker cooperative called KALUK. Given CUNY's increasing emphasis on facilitating enterprise and business ownership, members of SODA feel CUNY could better serve its community purpose by facilitating the creation of worker cooperatives, whether by way of education or direct assistance. SODA has other goals on its agenda, and this includes bringing participatory budgeting (PB) to, at minimum, student governance across CUNY. PB is a participatory democratic decision-making process in which constituents directly decide on how to allocate a budget. Rather than representatives or bureaucrats deciding on how and where funds should be allocated, constituents

generate their own proposals to address needs in their community. Members of SODA feel PB can be utilized to both enhance students' power to address immediate needs, as well as serve as an institutional mechanism for building student political organization. PB is not only operating in twenty-four city council districts here in NYC, but is also in place at Brooklyn College.

To return to the issue of cooperatives, why all this talk about collegiate connections to cooperatives? This speaks to the heart of what we mean by the neoliberal model. Should the university filter its funds, capital, intellectual resources, and student body into capitalist enterprises, or should the university help facilitate the rise of workers' self-management? For many students, college experience involves a confrontation with difference, with heterogeneity. There is no reason universities can't also serve a role in presenting political and economic alternatives to students as well. Engagement with difference should not be limited to variety of individuals we meet, or the variety of fields we encounter. Engagement with difference should also extend to concrete institutional alternatives and arrangements that we ourselves could play a part in building. Moving beyond the neoliberal university model involves constructing self-governance on campus, and facilitating community self-governance and workers' self-management off-campus. Yet, these are only pieces to what is likely to be a long struggle for something new. ☹

## MIND GAMES ANSWERS

Check out the puzzle column on our Back Page.

### Solution #3:

difference of the two digits are sufficiently significant so that after reversing and subtraction we will be likely to get as big of a difference as 63. With this in mind, we can perform some quick calculations and arrive at the following possibility:

Grandson's age: 29

Katherine's age: 92

Age Difference: 63 ( $= 7 \times 9$ )

Thus the oldest age for Katherine

is 92.

### Solution #2:

$123 + 456 + 78 + 9 = 666$

$1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 567 + 89 = 666$

$1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 + 567 + 89 = 666$

$1 + 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 + 67 \times 8 + 9 = 666$

$1 \times 23 + 4 + 567 + 8 \times 9 = 666$

**Solution #1:** Following the hint, one can find the first possibility:  
 Grandson's age: 07  
 Katherine's age: 70  
 Age Difference: 63 ( $= 7 \times 9$ )  
 The task becomes easier once the age difference is calculated since we know that the grandson cannot be older than  $100 - 63 = 37$ .  
 We wish to calculate the oldest Katherine can be, so it is a good idea to decrement the grandson's from 37 rather than continue incrementing it from 7.  
 Considering that 63 is a large difference in the range between 1 and 100, we need to find a two-digit number for the grandson's age in which the

We have exactly three digits in each number between 200 and 300. The distinct positions that the two occurrences of 2 can take in these numbers are as follows where X represents an unspecified digit in these templates. 2X2 22X  
 In each template, the unspecified digit X can be replaced with any digit from 0 to 9, which means 10 possibilities per template. However, we need to consider 222 which can result from both templates. Therefore, the total number is  $2 \times 10 - 1$  which is equal to 19.

# A Multitude of Climates

## Life and its effects on environmental systems

**greg olmschenk**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN involvement in it has long been a driving force of political talking points. While atmospheric measurements show continual increases in carbon dioxide and global average temperatures continue to go up, a debate rages on about how much of this is caused by the human species and how much of an impact it will have on our environment. Considering this, it's interesting and useful to look at the dramatic changes in climate that have happened on Earth throughout its existence. As it turns out, humans aren't the first species to have a major, sudden effect on the climate. Other life has abruptly shifted the contents of the atmosphere, and not without momentous impact on the creatures alive at the time. We'll actually begin not on Earth itself, but on its neighboring planets, Venus and Mars. When trying to understand how things work it's best to have multiple samples. These two planets each have a climate that used to be much more like Earth's, but both have taken a turn for the worse.

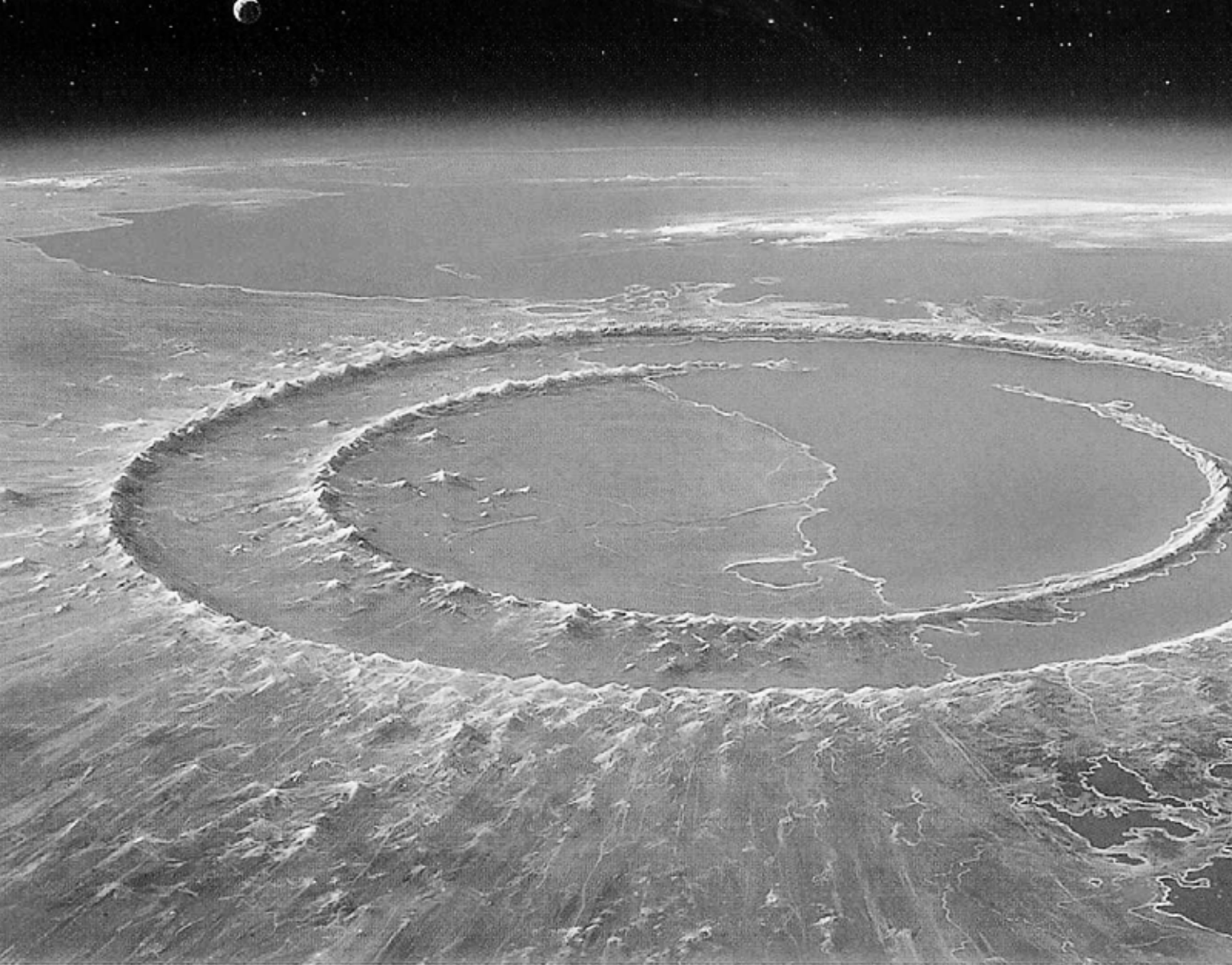
The term "runaway greenhouse effect" originally comes from the study of Venus. Despite the evidence that it once had oceans of water and many other Earth-like qualities, Venus today is often seen as being the closest approximation we have to hell. The surface is continually repaved with molten rock, the clouds and rains are made of sulfuric acid, the temperature is over 800 degrees Fahrenheit, and the pressure is a crushing ninety times that of Earth's. A runaway greenhouse effect started the current condition of this world. The ancient oceans Venus is thought to have had became hot enough to boil, forming a thicker atmosphere which would trap more heat and boil the oceans faster in a repeated feedback loop. Ultraviolet light from the Sun in the upper atmosphere split the hydrogen and oxygen in the water vapor, and the lighter hydrogen escaped into space. This left the oxygen with no way to form water again. Today, there is almost no water vapor left on Venus, and the greenhouse effect from the carbon dioxide remaining in the atmosphere holds the planet in its terrible state. It's important to note here that Earth would not become hot enough to have a boiling ocean runaway effect even if we burned all

the carbon dioxide trapped in the oil, coal, and natural gas in the Earth's crust—though that's not to say this wouldn't have other consequences. On the other hand, the Earth will eventually undergo this runaway effect in a few billion years as the Sun continues to become brighter.

On the other side of Earth is the red planet. Unlike Venus, it's certain that Mars used to have water on its surface—dried river deltas and lake beds are scattered across it. Today, ice uncovered by the Mars rovers simply sublimates (converts directly from a solid to gas) and the entire surface is bone dry. The atmosphere isn't suitable for liquid water, even though it surely once was. What exactly happened to Mars' atmosphere isn't known, but it assuredly is worthwhile to find out even if for no other reason than to be prevent such a fate on Earth.

Returning to Earth, we find that it has had a far from stable climate over its lifetime and even previous inhabitants which have fiddled with the atmospheric dials. As humans we, think of "air" as almost synonymous with "oxygen," yet the early atmosphere of Earth included almost no free oxygen. Oxygen simply isn't chemically stable by itself and quickly bonds with other things to form molecules such as carbon dioxide. Without something churning out a constant supply, oxygen won't stick around for long, and at the time nothing was providing this supply. The bacterial life that existed at the time had to rely on other chemical sources to grow and flourish. Then, around 2.4 billion years ago, along came the "cyanobacteria" with their newly developed ability of photosynthesis and the by-product of oxygen that comes with it. To us, oxygen sounds like a good thing—we all need it to live. However, life at the time had never dealt with oxygen before, and, for much of it, it was a deadly poison. At first, the new molecule didn't cause a problem as the newly produced oxygen would just quickly bond with the iron in the water. But photosynthesis is a powerful process which allowed the cyanobacteria to grow and spread rapidly. When the unbonded iron in the water ran out, the atmosphere was quickly (in geological terms) pumped full of oxygen. This was known as the Oxygen Catastrophe. This poison flooded the planet and drove vast swaths of the bacterial species to





extinction. Yet this extinction was only a minor part of the catastrophe. The oxygen reacted with the methane in the atmosphere producing carbon dioxide. Though carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, methane is a much stronger one. Without the methane and due to the Sun being less bright than it is today, the global temperatures plummeted and the Earth began to freeze. As more ice formed, it reflected even more of the Sun's rays and it became colder still. If not all, nearly the entire surface of the planet froze creating what is known as Snowball Earth. The Earth remained a frozen world for 300 million years.

Sometimes, the changes in climate happen in a much shorter timeframe. Unquestionably, the most famous extinction event is that which brought an end to the dinosaurs. On the Yucatán Peninsula in México, there is a crater 110 miles in diameter—the Chicxulub Crater. This is the site of the explosion of the astronomic bomb that exterminated not only the dinosaurs, but 70 percent of all species alive 65 million years ago. Upon impact, the asteroid exploded with more

energy than ten-thousand times the power of every nuclear weapon on Earth if they were to all go off at once. The explosion was certainly devastating, but it was really the climate conditions that the asteroid's impact started that rendered these creatures extinct. As the asteroid plunged through the Earth's atmosphere, it blasted aside air leaving a temporary vacuum behind. The explosion vaporized an enormous area of land and, helped by the pull of the previously mentioned vacuum, sent the particles flying back into space to encompass the globe. All this matter came plummeting back into the atmosphere across the planet. When you see a shooting star, it's typically caused by something not much larger than a grain of sand coming into the atmosphere more than fifty miles away from you. In this case, those little streaks of light completely covered the sky to a point that the entire sky would have seemed on fire. The heat from this caused a global conflagration that likely burned down the majority of the land plants on the planet—and perhaps all plants and animals that weren't physically wet or underground.





Immediately after the rain of fire, the dust and ash in the air would have mostly blotted out the sun for more than a year. For most of this time, there would be too little light for photosynthesis and to keep most creatures warm. After this dust settled, there were still problems for those creatures that had survived so far. The forest fires had released large amounts of carbon dioxide leading to a temporary greenhouse effect which caused another shift in temperature for the battered populations. On top of this, the vaporization of the sulfuric bed of material that the asteroid had impacted led to large amounts of acidic matter in the air. This resulted in acid rains for a decade after the impact.

While the Oxygen Catastrophe and the Chicxulub Impact were both major upheavals in Earth's history, they pale in comparison to the climate event that

happened 250 million years ago. This was the time of the Permian-Triassic extinction, also known as the Great Dying. To understand everything that happened here, we first need to go back about another 50 million years to the Carboniferous period. This is when plants first developed Lignin and with it the ability to grow into tall trees. With the advantage of new found height, trees spread to cover the globe. Unfortunately, other creatures had not yet developed the ability to digest the Lignin. When a tree fell, its corpse remained with no way to be eaten or decay. Over the years, the wood piled up and was buried by dirt and mud. It's from the buried trees of this period that many of the coal deposits around the world are formed. Jumping forward 50 million years, we come to the cataclysm. In what is now Siberia, volcanic eruptions began and continued for hundreds of thousands of years. More than a million square miles were buried by lava gushing from fissures in the Earth's crust. This endless series of eruptions spewed ash and carbon dioxide perpetually into the air. The ash covered the land in a freezing darkness,

all the while the carbon dioxide built up in the atmosphere. The lava flows ignited the enormous coal beds that were laid down by the uneaten Carboniferous forests. These smoldering coal fields streamed their own supplies of sulfuric haze, methane, and carbon dioxide into the sky, multiplying the effects of the volcanoes. When the ash and haze settled, the greenhouse gases remained. The Earth shifted from a frigid cold to a brutal heat, and from here things only got worse.

The waters began to warm, and methane rich ices in the ocean floor sediments began to melt. As these gases surfaced, they contributed to the greenhouse effect, which caused more methane rich ices to melt in a runaway fashion. Ocean currents were completely disrupted by the changing temperatures, and oxygen circulation all but stopped. The oxygen starved water choked and killed the vast majority of the fish in the sea. While life was perishing left and right, one type of being thrived: anaerobic sulfate-reducing bacteria. The bacteria, spreading like wildfire, pumped out huge quantities of hydrogen sulfide. This poisonous gas stifled the remaining land creatures. Further still, the hydrogen sulfide and methane both deteriorated the ozone layer and expose animals and plants to deadly levels of ultraviolet radiation.

It's hard to tell which parts of this disaster caused the greatest damage and if there were even more causes involved that we don't yet have evidence for. However, the evidence of the destruction is clearly written in the fossil record. Nine out of every ten species was eradicated from the face of the Earth. The Great Dying is by far the largest extinction event known. Another 30 million years had to pass before life had recovered from this devastating blow.

In the current day, humans have begun fiddling with the atmospheric knobs of the world, like the cyanobacteria before us. Cries to "Save the Earth" are really about saving the human race—and often the other life we share the planet with. The Earth itself would be fine no matter what we did to it. Humans have no conceivable way to destroy the enormous mass that is the Earth. It will continue to orbit the Sun happily despite any tiny things we do on the surface. The much smaller task of completely extinguishing life on this planet is also far beyond the reach of humans. Even if all humans deliberately tried to make Earth completely uninhabitable for life, there's really no chance we could accomplish this. However, we can certainly cause mass climatic changes, we can cause global extinctions, and we can topple the ecosystems that sustain many species on Earth, including our own. We're only here because the dinosaurs were wiped out by an asteroid impact. If we too are driven to extinction—by our own doing or not—another intelligent species of the future will surely be glad of that extinction which made room for them. Whatever we do, life on Earth will recover—it just might take a few million years and not include us. ☹

# The Terms of Unbelief

## An atheist by any other name

**nathan alexander**

IT IS PROBABLY EASIER to be an atheist today than at any other time in history. In most countries in the West, atheists face few or no legal barriers to their beliefs, although in some countries, particularly in the Islamic world, these barriers persist. Even in places where atheists are legally accepted, the term “atheist” itself can still send a chill down some people’s spines due to its association with immorality, lack of trustworthiness, and unsociability, among other things. In tracing the history of how the term acquired these connotations, we find that while some people have defended the term, others have tried to come up with new terms to describe their beliefs—although not always successfully.

Historically, “atheist” has been synonymous with the worst insult one could say about a person. The connotations around the word lack the power they used to, yet the term “atheist” remains such a highly-charged word in contemporary North America that in a study from 2011 participants reported distrusting atheists about on par with rapists. A 2012 Gallup poll, meanwhile, found that only 54 percent of United States citizens would vote for an atheist candidate for president, coming below a Muslim candidate (58 percent), or a gay or lesbian candidate (68 percent). Of course, in some ways, 54 percent seems much more encouraging if one takes into account that in 1958, the first time the question was asked, only 18 percent said they would vote for an atheist candidate. This trend toward increasing open-mindedness for political candidates holds true across the board for other groups, but it is clear that negative connotations around the term “atheist” linger.

The term “atheist” itself, like any other, is neutral on the face of it. The word comes from the Greek *atheós*: “a” meaning “without” and “*theós*,” meaning “god.” It entered the English language in the wake of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, but was used almost exclusively as a term of abuse rather than an accurate descriptor of one’s metaphysical views. In early modern Europe, one who did not believe in God was understood to be one who also did not believe in divine reward or punishment. This created a

dangerous situation for society since an atheist could make disingenuous promises or commit immoral actions without fear of consequence. In John Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), he refused to grant atheists tolerance precisely for this reason: “Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.” Atheists simply could not be trusted to act morally because they didn’t believe in divine punishment. As a character in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* remarked, without God, “everything is permitted.”

This idea that atheists had no reason to be moral was challenged in the early eighteenth century when philosophers, most notably Pierre Bayle, argued that a moral community of atheists was possible. Bayle, although he never called himself an atheist, argued that there seemed to be no connection between belief in God and virtuousness. He pointed out examples of highly virtuous atheists, while similarly showing there were also believers in God who were profoundly immoral. As Bayle and others began to make the case that one could be simultaneously moral and an atheist, a handful of people in the late eighteenth century began to use the term to describe their own philosophical viewpoints. Still, into the nineteenth century, negative judgments about atheists, not to mention legal penalties, persisted, so a variety of new terms were introduced with varying success.

One such term was “agnostic” (also derived from the Greek, meaning, “without knowledge”), coined in the mid-nineteenth century by T.H. Huxley, the English scientist. The term meant that one simply could never gain the empirical evidence needed to make a determination one way or the other about the existence of God, so it was best to remain agnostic on the issue, since one was without knowledge. The term appealed to those like Huxley, and to his fellow evolutionist Charles Darwin, who were reared in the tradition of scientific skepticism in which a statement that “God does not exist” seemed over-confident and unwarranted. There was no evidence that God did not exist, so how could one make that statement? Yet not all nineteenth-century atheists happily adopted the term and some even found something insidious lurking in it. G.W. Foote, a leading nineteenth-

century atheist in Britain, made the case that agnosticism essentially meant the same as atheism, just dressed in a more respectable garb. Foote came from a tradition of working-class atheism, and this meant that he was suspicious of what he saw as Huxley's attempt to distance himself from the godless masses and remain respectably middle class. Foote contrasted the terms in this way: "An Agnostic may safely be invited to dinner, while an Atheist would pocket the spoons." For Foote, the real issue was not the finer distinction between the two terms, but their connotations. By using "agnostic," one was capitulating to religious prejudice against the perceived immorality and disrespectability of atheists.

Bertrand Russell, the early-twentieth century British philosopher, was ambivalent about the term on more practical grounds. When speaking to an audience of other philosophers, Russell admitted that yes, he would describe himself as an agnostic since it was impossible to ever prove there was no God. Yet when speaking to a general audience, he would use the term "atheist," since it conveyed a much clearer message about his overall beliefs and avoided any philosophical obfuscation. Confusion around the precise meaning of "agnostic" continues to this day, among both atheists and religious people, and the term is not free of its own connotations of indecisiveness or timidity.

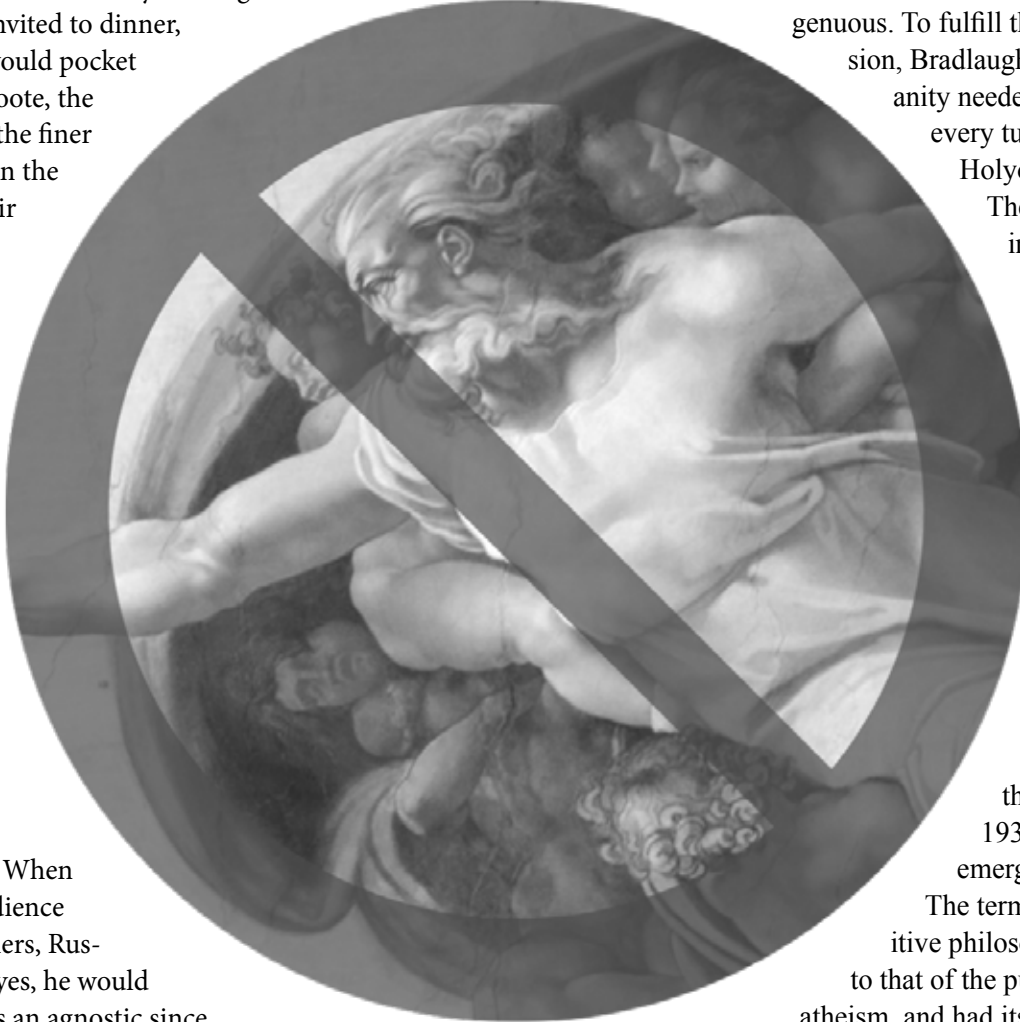
Another term invented in the nineteenth century ostensibly to avoid the taint of "atheism" was "secularism," coined in the 1850s by George Holyoake. According to him, "secularism is a form of opinion which concerns itself only with questions the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life." With this principle in mind, "the existence of deity and the actuality of another life, are questions excluded from Secularism." As with agnosticism, the

label was not without controversy. Charles Bradlaugh, one of the best-known atheists in nineteenth-century Britain and the leader of the National Secular Society, was himself a committed secularist, yet he disagreed with Holyoake about the implications of secularism. Bradlaugh believed that any honest secularists should ultimately become atheists in time and that to do otherwise was simply disingenuous. To fulfill the secularist mission, Bradlaugh believed Christianity needed to be fought at every turn—a position Holyoake rejected.

The two squared off in a public debate in 1870, during which they argued over the motion "The principles of Secularism do not include Atheism," but, as might be expected, the results were inconclusive.

During the 1920s and 1930s, another term emerged: "humanism."

The term described a positive philosophy, in contrast to that of the purely negative atheism, and had its roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attempts to retain some of the positive aspects of religion, like the community and ritual, without the dogma. In 1933, a group in the United States led by Unitarian minister Raymond Bragg released "A Humanist Manifesto," in which humanism was declared as a new religious movement, albeit one that proclaimed a naturalistic worldview which saw "the universe as self-existing and not created." The manifesto also discussed a positive view of life in which "joy" and "fulfillment" were given prominent positions. Subsequent manifestos, both in the United States and internationally, have scaled back the talk of religion from the original and have elaborated on humanist values, like human rights, democracy, and rationality. National and international humanist groups have continued to grow and often work hand-in-hand with atheist groups, yet there are lingering suspicions



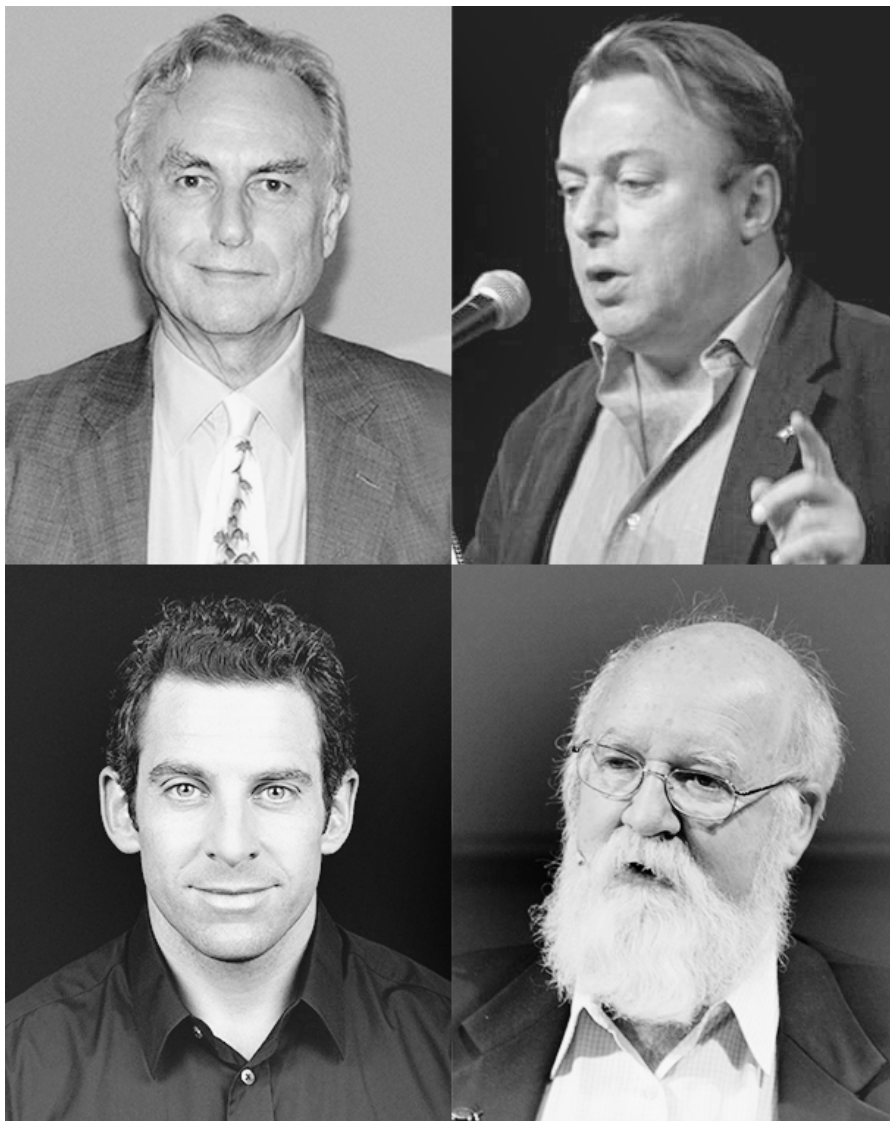


among some atheists that humanism is becoming too much like a religion, as in Scotland, where humanist weddings now make up ten percent of all marriage ceremonies.

A contemporary example of this kind of rebranding is the term “bright,” coined in 2002 by Paul Geisert, an educator in the United States. Leading atheists Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett quickly championed the term. Geisert, Dawkins, and Dennett have noted that they were consciously trying to mimic the twentieth-century success of the term “gay” in replacing “homosexual” or “queer,” terms hampered by


negative connotations. As Dawkins explained, a new word to describe atheists should “[l]ike gay,...be positive, warm, cheerful, bright.” (A similar appropriation of language from the LGBT movement is the idea that atheists should “come out of the closet” and declare their views publicly.) The Brights Network stated in 2010 that there were 50,000 Brights across the world, yet the term itself, like the many other attempts, faced a great deal of criticism from other atheists. Christopher Hitchens, the British journalist, denounced the idea as a “cringe-making proposal” that gave the impression of arrogance.

Despite all of the attempts at rebranding “atheism,” the term still remains the preferred label globally by a large margin. The Atheist Alliance International began a self-reporting global census of atheists and non-religious people in late 2012 and asked, among other things, for individuals’ preferred labels. Of over 250,000 respondents, 63.6 percent said they preferred the term atheist. “Non-religious,” “agnostic,” “freethinker,” and “humanist” received about 7 percent each, while “secularist” had less than 2 percent. “Bright” did



not even register in the poll. This data (and indeed the title of the organization which ran the poll) indicates that many continue to embrace the term.

All of this gets to a broader issue of strategy. Should atheists be struggling to rehabilitate their chosen label or should they be inventing new words, without the negative baggage of “atheist,” to describe their beliefs? Of course, in many cases the innovators of the new terms would hasten to point out that their terms were not just superficially different from atheism but actually had different meanings—though the inven-

tion of “bright” was an unapologetic attempt to paper over the negative connotations. As we’ve seen from the results of the “atheist census” and in examining the historical debates, efforts to create a more positive term to replace atheism have not been entirely embraced. One can only window-dress for so long before the substance of the beliefs need to be confronted. Whatever one thinks of the term, “atheist” as a label is probably not going to be replaced in the foreseeable future. For better or worse, we’re stuck with it, connotations and all. 

Nathan Alexander is a co-director of The International Society for Historians of Atheism, Secularism, and Humanism. ISHASH aims to provide a forum for academics working on any historical aspect of atheism, secularism, or humanism, broadly defined. The society provides the growing number of scholars in this area the means to communicate and collaborate with others who share their interests. Previously, only a handful of academics have dealt with the history of unbelief in any sustained way, though in recent years this has begun to change. The society encourages and facilitates the growth of this vibrant new field. To find out more see their website here: <https://atheismsecularismhumanism.wordpress.com/>



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## FILM REVIEW

# Moving Past Hagiography in Civil Rights Cinema

► *Selma* (2014). Director: Ava DuVernay. Writer: Paul Webb. Stars: David Oyelowo, Carmen Ejogo, Tim Roth

**michael stivers**

THREE YOUNG MEN ARE sprinting down a tree-lined block as the sun hits them in pulses through the leaves. The camera follows behind them swiftly as the music heightens and a white, brick church appears past the line of suburban houses. In the front lawn, black individuals lie bloodied and injured after being beaten, clubbed, and whipped by white

Alabama State Authorities for their attempted crossing of the Edmund Pettis Bridge between Selma and Montgomery. Many are in pain and anguish as they are cared for. The three men finish their sprint in the middle of the group and struggle to catch their breath before they can offer help.

The literal movement of the scene, as well as the urgency and terror that constitute it, parallel the larger social movement shown in *Selma*. These three boys, whom we do not see before or after this scene, and for all we know are average residents of Selma, are moved so urgently by a situation that

demands resolve. The viewers at once feel the violence of the oppressor and the necessity to respond to it, even if that may elicit more violence.

The film, directed by Ava DuVernay, tells the story of three marches organized in Alabama during the voting rights struggle of the mid 1960's led by Martin Luther King Jr. (played by David Oyelowo) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. DuVernay had originally imagined the film would help reignite debate in the context of recent attacks on voting rights legislation. It has been seen, though, more in light of the litany of racialized killings of black people by the police and the subsequent failure to indict the officers. It has served as a cinematic accompaniment to the recent protests affirming that despite the failure to bring murderers to justice in the courts, and the continued failure to ensure structural social and economic equality, black lives do matter.

Despite the innumerable references to King and his white-washed ethic of non-violence, astoundingly few films before *Selma* have been made about him or the history of grassroots struggle that made his reputation and legacy possible. Major motion picture companies, not coincidentally an industry dominated by white, upper class males, has largely remained silent on the topic. That a movie so well written, acted, and shot as *Selma* gets made at all represents a significant victory.

One would expect a film of its prestige to fall prey to the same revisionist, hagiographic tendencies present in the culture that produced it. Overwhelmingly, it does not. Despite an alarming absence of women's agency, a tokenized representation of Malcolm X, and an imprecise portrayal of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, *Selma* is a massive success.

The most alarming shortcoming of *Selma* is the distorted view it takes on the role of women in the movement. Of the organizers portrayed in the film, Diane Nash (played by Tessa Thompson) is the only woman. However, in spite of her presence in nearly all of the meetings and demonstrations throughout the film, she may have less than ten lines in all. Diane Nash was one of the founding members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, who cut her teeth integrating Nashville lunch counters and organizing freedom rides. Shortly after a church bombing in Birming-

ham, Alabama in September 1963, Nash, alongside fellow organizer and future husband James Bevel, made the initial pitch to the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) for a voting rights campaign in Alabama. Nash, who advised producer Oprah Winfrey on the film's script, had harsh words for the film's portrayal of the Selma campaign as an idea developed between President Lyndon Johnson and King. "Now this so-called controversy about Lyndon Johnson and Selma being his idea isn't really a controversy at all. Number one, it's a lie. Number two, it's a propaganda movement," Nash said at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Rev. Dr.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast earlier this year. "We can't have anything like that get an Academy Award, my goodness," Nash said. "It doesn't have a white savior. So we'll just say it was Lyndon Johnson and that he was a partner with Martin Luther King." The film's portrayal is surprising, given that DuVernay acknowledges, in an interview with Terri Gross on National Public Radio, that it was in fact Nash and Bevel's idea to go to Selma, and she laments the fact that Nash is not given a greater role in the film. Astonishingly, Nash was not in the film's original script, but was only inserted at the direction of DuVernay.

Corretta Scott King (played by Carmen Ejogo) also gets the short end of the cinematic stick as her real life fierceness and agency are wiped away and replaced with a domestic docility that serves more as a foil to Martin's resolve than as a historically accurate or even convincing characterization. Scott had been active in the NAACP chapter at Antioch College, where she was studying (and where her older sister had been the first black student to integrate). This was before she met Martin, though her involvement in the movement



certainly escalated after the two met and eventually wed.

Scott was integral in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and would with time come to craft fierce arguments connecting social and racial oppression. Emilye Crosby, in her book *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up*, quotes Scott as saying “Our policy at home is to try to solve social problems through military means, just as we have done abroad. The bombs we drop on the people of Vietnam continue to explode at home with all of their devastating potential. There is no reason why a nation as rich as ours should be blighted by poverty, disease and illiteracy. It is plain that we don’t care about poor people, except to exploit them as cheap labor and victimize them through excessive rents and consumer prices.” While it is commonly known that King’s politics became increasingly radical before his assassination, much less is commonly known about Scott’s, and the film unfortunately does not shed much needed light upon it.

Scott was also a harsh critic of women’s subdued role in the movement. In 1966 she remarked that “not enough attention has been focused on the roles played by women in the struggle. By and large, men have formed the leadership in the civil rights struggle but ...women have been the backbone of the whole civil rights movement.” Oprah Winfrey

(as Annie Lee Cooper) and Lorraine Toussaint (as Amelia Boynton) are also featured in the film, but minimally. In an early scene, Cooper has her voter registration attempt rejected by a corrupt county clerk, despite her obvious eligibility. It is a defeating exchange and though it is an important one, we never see the flip side of the coin, we never see her agency activated.

Despite the backlash the film weathered for its realist take on LBJ as a politician, and not the high minded, purist liberal he is publicly remembered as, the real historical blunder in *Selma* is the submissive role of women. DuVernay has been adamant that the film is not intended to track the historical facts to a tee, but rather to extrapolate a general truth. As a singular historical omission, it might not seem so important, but as a film that centrally engages the interpersonal, inter-organizational reality of grassroots organizing, the quieted, peripheral nature of women’s voices and presence is inauthentic.

*Selma* takes up difficult, nuanced questions of movement strategy and tactics in conversations between the media-focused, mass mobilization-minded SCLC led by King, and the militant, grassroots development approach favored by SNCC. One can only imagine how these otherwise master-





fully crafted scenes would have played out cinematically had voices like Nash and Scott's been as influential in the film as they were in real life.

Malcolm X (played by Nigel Thatch) also has a stunted role in the film. Present for all of five minutes, Malcolm appears in *Selma* just as the campaign gets underway. He is clearly resented by the SCLC, though still appears eager to make some sort of contribution to the campaign. Corretta relays the news to Martin through the iron bars of the jail cell, and in perhaps her only show of agency in the film, convinces Martin she should meet with him. A tense and curt scene follows in which Malcolm, months before his assassination in New York City, attempts to position himself as the radical against Martin the moderate, thus forcing President Johnson to choose the lesser of two evils and ultimately acquiesce to the demands of Martin, the SCLC, and SNCC. This exchange may be regarded as an important event in the *Selma* campaign, but it is unclear how it figures into the arc of the film, as Malcolm X is never made reference to either before or after.

The script adeptly addresses the intricate relationships within the SCLC amongst King and fellow organizers Andrew Young, James Orange, Bayard Rustin, James Bevel, Ralph Abernathy, and at times Diane Nash. The film also shows insightful exchanges between the leadership of SCLC and leadership of SNCC, as well as the leadership of SCLC to the masses in *Selma* (though this last aspect is not given as much attention as the others). However, the film never shows the relationship between the leaders of SNCC and the residents of *Selma*, which leaves the viewer wanting, because the film is explicit in noting that SNCC had been organizing in *Selma* long before the arrival of SCLC. We are lead to believe those relationships exist, but they are never shown.

In *Selma*, SNCC is embodied entirely by John Lewis and Jim Foreman and aside from a few off hand remarks about its organizational difficulties, little credence is lent to the highly developed and militant organization that it was. In one of the film's most moving moments, SNCC leaders Jim Foreman and John Lewis argue in an empty hallway, long out of earshot of the other organizers. They go back and forth over the recent organizing takeover by SCLC. Foreman, strong-willed but sometimes inflexible and doctrinaire, is deeply angered by what feels like a raid on their territory and argues that SNCC should take back the reins of the campaign. Lewis, who was eventually elected to Congress in 1987 and is still serving, is a more balanced character who pushes back against Foreman and forces him to recognize that people in *Selma* are tired of the repeated defeats of previous voter registration drives. The people want King, Lewis says. While Foreman (played by Trai Byers) and Lewis (portrayed by Stephan James) are very convincing in the

scene, the audience is forced to hear the will of the people—that they want King—through the mouthpiece of organizers. We can only imagine what a character like Cager Lee, still unable to vote at eighty years old, might think or feel in this instance.

These shortcomings aside, it won't be long before *Selma* is regarded as one of the best movement films in years or even decades. Any viewer privy to the internal intricacies of social movements can appreciate the honest take on conflict, strategy, and commitment. Yet those who are not as steeped in movement politics can still feel the urgent reaction that white supremacy and racism merit today. In the present context of an enduring white supremacy, a black citizen is killed by the police every 28 hours. Combine that with microaggressions, mass incarceration, and inadequate social services and economic security, it should be difficult for any viewer to deny that radical, systemic change is needed today just as it was in the 1960's. *Selma* forces both blacks and whites today to ask themselves the same question residents of *Selma* were forced to answer by the movement then: which side are you on? Clearly DuVernay is pushing the viewer to line up across the aisle from the oppressor and on the side of justice, and she pulls no punches and crafts no illusions as to the brutal and sometimes fatal consequences of this course of action, this way of life.

DuVernay and her incredible cast give us an encompassing picture of what it feels like to be part of something greater than oneself and the numerous risks and joys that it entails. We feel the intellectual stimulation of late night living room debates on strategy, the bonds built and friendships cultivated in the course of the movement, and the power of collective action as Martin and *Selma* residents call and respond from the church's regal pulpit to its wooden benches. Yet we are also shown the brutal violence awaiting those who challenge ossified power structures and the resolve required to proceed when progress appears elusive. At least for the men in the film, she assigns not halo-adorned portraits, but whole personalities that include Martin's marital infidelity, John Lewis's fear, and Cager Lee's sorrow at his son's murder by the police.

Despite major snubs for DuVernay as Best Director and David Oyelowo as best Actor, *Selma* has been nominated for two Oscars, Best Song ("Glory" by John Legend and Common) and Best Picture. The success of *Selma* is to be found not just in its craft, which is phenomenal, but in its raw content. For its willingness to address the racism of the past in the context of the racism of the present, the film is a desperately needed addition to Hollywood repertoire. For its relevance to the lives of viewers, particularly its black viewers, and its probing of complex yet accessible moral and political matters, *Selma* has already scored a major victory. 🏆

# JACOBIN

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# The Thin Cloak and Iron Cage:

## Al Taylor and the Gallery Industrial Complex

► *Al Taylor: Pet Stains, Puddles, and Full Gospel Neckless.*  
David Zwirner Gallery, 585 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street

### clay matlin

*PET STAINS, PUDDLES, AND Full Gospel Neckless* is, without question, a beautiful, even moving, show. The David Zwirner Gallery should be commended both for putting it together and for not allowing Al Taylor to drift into that netherworld of old catalogs and fading remembrances. Taylor's work, however, seems spectacularly out of place in Zwirner's 30,000 square-foot art-house cathedral. There is something both mysterious and comforting about Taylor's art, it radiates with a vibrant connection to being alive in and curious about the world. The simplest gesture brings with it a sense of the action's rigor and of its completion. These qualities, though, are stifled, trapped even, by a glistening fortress.

The first two parts, *Pet Stains* and *Puddles* (1989-1992), deal with dog urine and the puddles and stains they leave behind. Inspired by his experience of looking out of his apartment in Montmartre in Paris and seeing the stains of dog urine that ran down the sidewalk, *Pet Stains* is exactly what it sounds like, drawings of piss. They are beautiful and very funny, at once abstracted from their reality and turned into art objects, yet at the same time given a firm grounding by the fake pet names that Taylor assigns to his imagined perpetrators. *Puddles* is comprised of sculptures made out of Plexiglas, wood, and enamel paint. The paint takes the place of urine, trapped for eternity between sheets of Plexiglas. "I want them [the viewers] to see... levitation," Taylor said. "I am trying to find a state of suspended belief with this work." The artist, he declared, "should allow the art to make all the choices." It was not reality that worried him, but "space(s)" that concerned him. The urine/paint is observed in space, both vertically and horizontally. It is an exercise in the power and beauty of gravity, of the little things, the puddles and stains that we walk by, what the artist Sarah McDougald Kohn calls "accidental drawings," but are in their own way a vehicle for contemplation and engagement with life. "If a viewer realizes that they are looking at drawings of levitated urine stains they might laugh," Taylor said, "but when they leave the exhibition and they come across a dog piss stain on the street, they might approach it differently."

*Full Gospel Neckless* has nothing to do with urine. There are six sculptural works and sixteen drawings. The sculp-

tures, made of cut up industrial plastic pipes, tubes, and colored plastic-coated telephone wire, sit on the floor or hang from the wall. Some are quite large (27.5" x 206" x 64") and some are small (42" x 12¾" x 4¼"). It is a reproduction of Taylor's 1997 solo show at Galleri Tommy Lund in Odense, Denmark (this is the first time all six have been together since then). Like all of Taylor's three-dimensional work, they read less like sculptures and more like drawings, sketches even. They have a rough, unfinished quality to them. It appears effortless, almost slap-dash. Yet it is never sloppy, there are no false moves or happy accidents. There is always, with Taylor, a tension and control that undergirds his brightness and levity.

And yet...and yet...and yet, for all of the power to do good, to fill out the art historical record, I was left with the unshakable feeling that Zwirner (and Gagosian, and Hauser & Wirth, and Pace, and Matthew Marks) also serves as a tomb where art goes to become something else—not dead, but not quite alive. Robert Smithson wrote in 1967 that museums house things that were once "called 'pictures' and 'statues.' Anachronisms hang and protrude from every angle....Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum." Smithson indicted what he saw as the museum's ability to render exhausted our capacity to experience art. He imagined a museum as a series of voids that suck out the meaning and life of an artwork and instead leave behind a stale object. Homes for empty things, for objects that previously pulsed with life. Though Smithson's fears may have been a bit overstated and we have not stumbled upon Faulkner's "mausoleum of all hope and desire," Smithson's disquiet was well founded and speaks to us now in the age of the mega-gallery. Places like Zwirner and Gagosian are beginning to function as museums. The art shown in these blue-chip spaces is transformed. It is removed from life and it is made more fully a commodity.

Now, I realize that art is a commodity and that commodities are to be bought and sold, perhaps even put on a pedestal or wall. I am neither so naïve, nor so falsely idealistic as to imagine that success in the art market is really possible without some sort of representation. Artists need patrons and art has been an object of desire for centuries now. Also, bear in mind that I am not advocating some sort of vulgar-Marxist critique of commodity fetishism. I do not see the mega-gallery as a pernicious evil that needs to be



stopped, nor am I writing an indictment of art galleries, museums, or auction houses in general. My unease is with what appears to be a process of turning art works into objects that are commodities first, and links to life a distant second or even third. I am reminded of John Dewey's observation that the forces that led to the glorification of "fine art by setting it upon a far-off pedestal" did not arise from the realm of art-making. Rather, Dewey claimed, it is the same forces that removed not only art but religion as well from the "scope of common or community life." For Dewey it was the growth of capitalism and imperialism that led to art being "stored" in museums and galleries where it is kept until the wealthy can assert their status by picking out the best work that assures them of the most cultural cachet: "Generally speaking, the typical collector is the typical capitalist. For evidence of good standing in the realm of higher culture, he amasses paintings, statuary, and artistic *bijoux*, as his stocks and bonds certify to his standing in the economic realm."

And here is the very problem with the current blue-chip gallery world: it serves to further push, if not capitalism's "disenchantment of the world"—to borrow from Max Weber

who borrowed from Friedrich Schiller—then art's disenchantment *from* the world. It may seem a stretch, but this is what Weber worried about when he referred, at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, to a world of "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart." The thin cloak of concern for our "outward possessions," for the objects that define us as successful, as Weber understood it, has become a "shell as hard as steel." The objects that sit in the cavernous galleries are no different than the objects sold at luxury car dealerships. The art object is to be chased down and either displayed as some sort of pre-modern fetish or stored away in a warehouse divorced from its connection to life. They are things to accumulate and define ourselves by, not things of metaphysical significance or those things that we can discard because they are, in the end, just things. Instead, they have become the vehicle by which we define selfhood. So apparently devoted to keeping that shell hard as steel is a space like Zwirner's, that the very enchantment, for lack of a more precise formulation that runs through Taylor's work, is bottled up and frustrated. It shudders and crackles a bit, but the full force of it is stringently contained.



Of course, disenchantment is no new thing, it has been an ongoing process of rationalization and intellectualization through thousands of years of Western culture. Yet, it is a dilemma of real and vital importance when we consider it in terms of the current art market. It was Weber who wrote in *Science as Vocation* that as a result of the disenchantment of the world “the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life...It is no accident that our greatest art is intimate rather than monumental.” As such, the trouble with *Pet Stains, Puddles, and Full Gospel Neckless* resides not in the artwork, but in the place in which it is displayed. The blue-chip gallery space has become the impediment to experience. Instead, it is a place where the art object is merely one more part of the “sporting contest” of accumulation. Ernst Fischer, the Austrian Marxist who is now, sadly, slipping into obscurity, knew that art’s role was both to link us to others and prompt us to be more fully in the world: “But whether art soothes or awakens, casts shadows or brings light, it is never merely a clinical description of reality. Its function is always to move the whole person, to enable the ‘I’ to identify itself with another’s life. Art is necessary in order that man be able to recognize and change the world. But art is also necessary by virtue of the magic inherent in it.”

Is Al Taylor’s art going to change the world? Probably not. Though it also depends on what we understand “change the world” to mean. Fischer was not claiming that the work of art will make the world a tangibly better place, but that it might be able to bring us more fully into connection with others, to see in our life the reality of another’s. Al Taylor thought that art should give you “a new way of seeing life.” He shared this conviction with men who had lived through the craven violence of the First World War, had seen the rise of modern global capitalism (Dewey, Fischer, and Weber), its collapse, the horrors of the Second World War and capitalisms hearty return (Dewey and Fischer). These men were



neither mystics nor fools, but in their own way they believed in magic, the magic and enchantment that comes from making the world into a more humane place. Art, Dewey observed, should be alive and celebrate “with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is the quickening of what is now.” Al Taylor was a humane artist, one whose simple sketches and haphazard sculptures make the viewer think differently about objects and think differently about dog piss. This may seem trivial but it is not. However, it is made more trivial by, if not the oppression, then the suppression that his art is subject to, to which perhaps all great and subtle art is now subjected in the gallery industrial complex. We may never be able to re-enchant the world, but we can try to resist complete disenchantment just a little while longer. The thin cloak might still be “thrown off at any time.” ☹

# February Report from the DSC

## Join the DSC!

NOMINATIONS TO SERVE ON the DSC for 2015-2016 are now being accepted until 13 March. Visit our website for information about the positions, and make nominations at [eballot4.votenet.com/dsc](http://eballot4.votenet.com/dsc). Elections will follow later in the semester.

## Student Organizations

THE DSC STEERING COMMITTEE has voted to being the de-chartering process of the Eastern European Studies Group. After more than three semesters of inactivity, this group will be de-chartered if new leadership cannot be found by March 20.

Please contact [ccsa@cunydisc.org](mailto:ccsa@cunydisc.org) if you are interested in leading this group. If you're interested in creating a Chartered Organization, petitions should be submitted to [ccsa@cunydisc.org](mailto:ccsa@cunydisc.org) by March 10 for presentation at the March Plenary and a vote at the April Plenary.

## Fighting for Students' Rights to Serve on Program Committees

SOME PROGRAMS AT THE Graduate Center have attempted to remove student members of departmental committees based on the argument that they cannot be trusted to keep sensitive information confidential.

The Structure Committee of the GC's Graduate Council met on 20 February to address this issue. Legal counsel was invited by the Chair, Barbara Weinstein, to discuss how The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) applies to GC governance, specifically student participation on program admissions committees and on executive commit-

tees during student academic appeals. Legal counsel stated that prospective students' confidentiality is not protected under FERPA, so there is no legal conflict when students view applicants' documents while serving on this committee—as students have been arguing in the Structure committee and within programs.

In addition, although FERPA clearly states that “disclosure [of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records] without consent” should be available to “a student serving on an official committee,” the lawyer claimed that it appears students do not have the right to participate in the academic appeals meetings within program executive committees, because this responsibility is not specifically listed in the GC's Governance.

Student members present, Jennifer Tang and Amy Martin, argued that the Governance document doesn't grant this responsibility to anyone on the Executive Committees, including faculty members. Legal counsel will follow up with the Structure Committee in the coming weeks.

## Health Insurance Hack and Identity Monitoring

ANTHEM, INC. THE PARENT company of the Empire Plan, the student health care provider, was recently hacked and sensitive user data was compromised. If you have been a victim of identity theft as a result please contact the company directly at [Anthemfacts.com](http://Anthemfacts.com) or 1-877-263-7795.

## Computer Love


THE DSC HAS JOINED forces with the Library Staff to increase availability

of technology on loan. Equipment on loan through the library Help Desk will be coming soon to a circulation desk near you. In addition to more hours of access, the library will offer other helpful devices. Wrist pads and laptop chargers will be available for check out as reserve items.

## Lest we forget, EMAIL TRANSITIONS

YOUR NEW [@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:@gradcenter.cuny.edu) EMAIL address is now available. Students have until 1 June 2015 to transfer contacts, email messages, and other data from their old to new accounts. The DSC remains committed to relayed student concerns and issues with the new email set up and is working with IT to improve service and solve problems that have arisen. Stay up to date with information on the transition via the GC IT homepage (and FAQs), or the DSC Student Tech & Library Services blog: <http://opencuny.org/gctech/>.

Students who purchased business cards through the GC in 2014 with their “[@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:@gc.cuny.edu)” address are eligible for free replacements. Please contact Elisabeth Fraser in the Office of Communications and Marketing for details.

If you have an issue resetting the password on your new account please contact the Help Desk directly instead of using the link for password reset in Office 365. Be sure to include an alternate email address for the password to be sent. This will insure that your login issues are addressed in a timely manner. The Help Desk can be reached at 212-817-7300 or by email at [helpdesk@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:helpdesk@gc.cuny.edu). 





# WARSCAPES

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## MIND GAMES BY MARYAM GHAFARI SAADAT

### Puzzle #1: Age Estimation

Katherine is under 100 years old and the age of her grandson is the reverse of her age. If their age difference is divisible by 7, then how old can Katherine be?

Hint: there are three different possibilities, in all of which Katherine and her grandson have the same age difference. Try finding the possibility in which the grandson's age is a one digit number. Find the other two possibilities based on the age difference. The solution is the maximum number for Katherine's age in these possibilities.

### Puzzle #2: Insert Operations

Insert mathematic operations, addition (+) and multiplication ( $\times$ ), between the numbers below to obtain a result of 666. The order of the numbers should remain the same.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Hint: there are a total of 5 solutions for this puzzle, two of which only involve addition (i.e. no multiplication) and thus are easier to find.

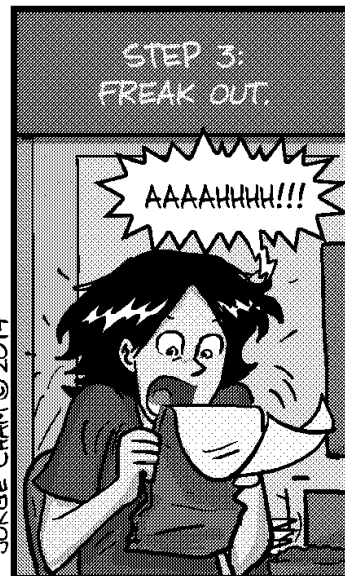
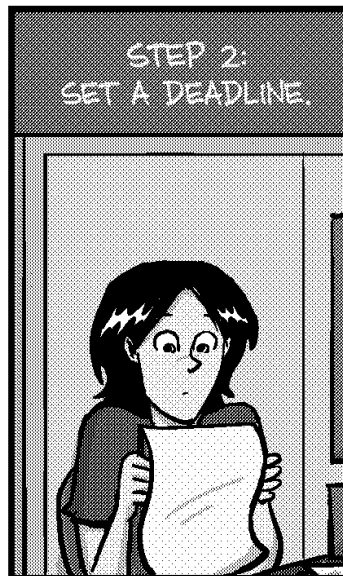
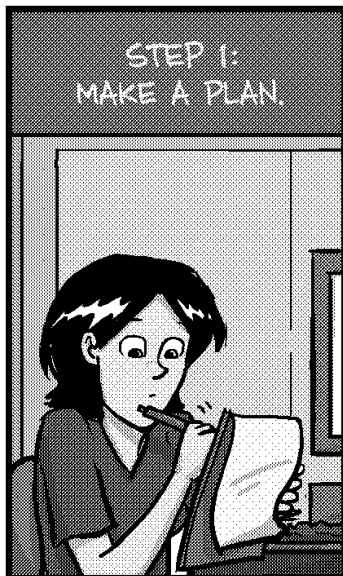
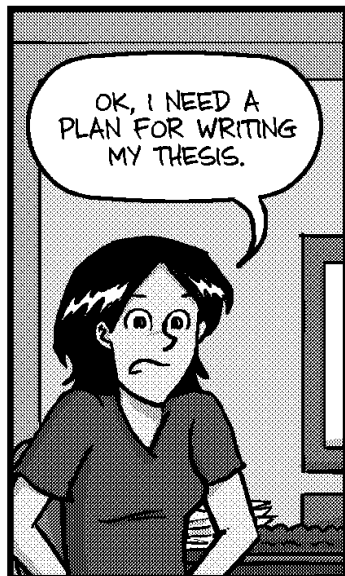
### Puzzle #3: Numbers

Consider the numbers between 200 and 300 inclusive. How many numbers in this range contain at least two occurrences of the number 2?

Hint: what positions can the two occurrences of 2 take in these numbers? What other digits can fill the remaining positions? Ⓐ

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