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"Violence Against Our Intellect"

Why the 2007 Hunger Strike Still Matters

By Catherine Chong

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Strategic Alliances

Rwanda's President and his Western dream team

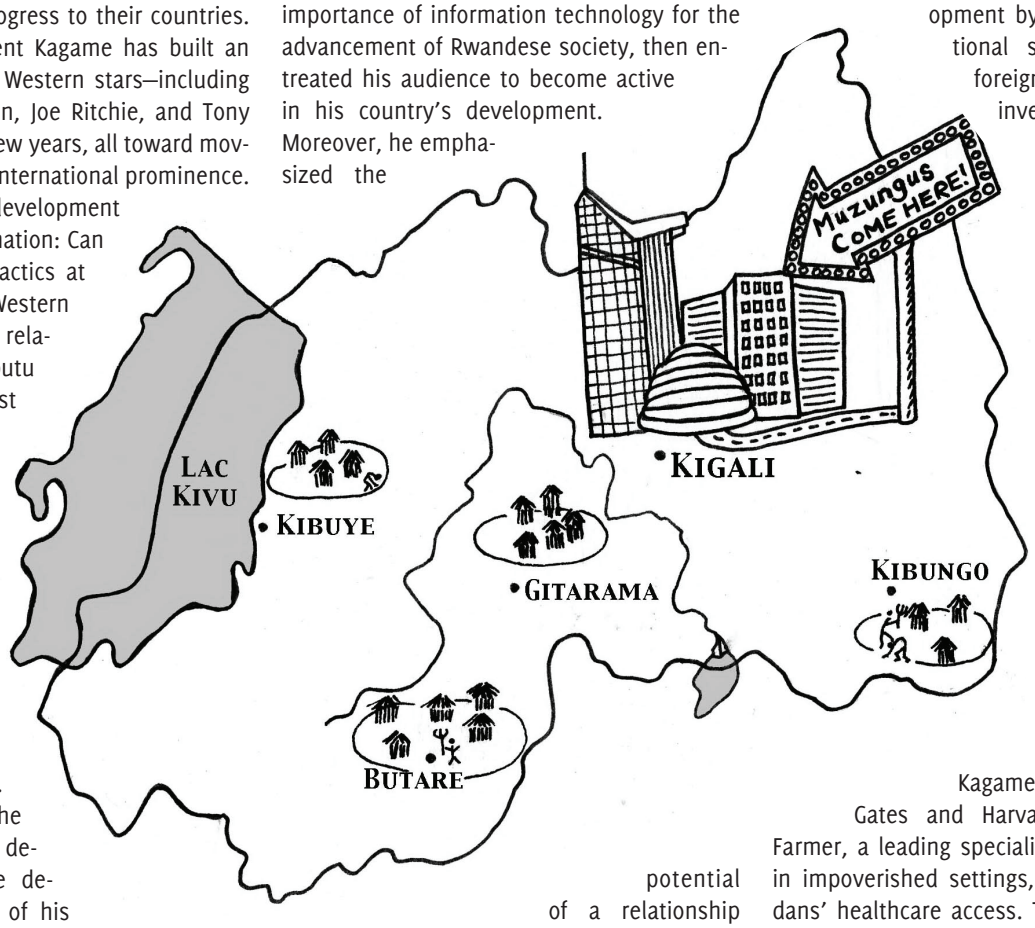
Ayla Bonfiglio

The roads in Kigali are perfectly paved. The car rides are conspicuously smooth, and the taxi-motorcyclists wear green helmets and carry extras for passengers. In East Africa, this is not the norm. During my conversations with university students in Rwanda's capital city, one explanation emerged for these superficial signs of development: President Paul Kagame.

Western notables consider Kagame, appointed temporarily in 2000 and then elected in 2003 as the first Tutsi to hold the post, part of a new wave of African politicians bringing Western ideals of progress to their countries. For his part, President Kagame has built an advisory network of Western stars—including Bill Gates, Bill Clinton, Joe Ritchie, and Tony Blair—over the past few years, all toward moving the country into international prominence. This high-profile development strategy begs examination: Can we take Kagame's tactics at face value? Did not Western leaders have similar relationships with Mobutu of Zaire when he first assumed power?

Based on my observations in Kigali and throughout neighboring Uganda, there appear to be two distinct perspectives that one could take on Kagame's policies. The first is that the president, genuinely devoted to a massive development overhaul of his country, is exploiting the international resources ripened by the post-genocide environment. Or, Kagame's extensive network of influential Western leaders is meant to divert attention from demands that he stand trial for genocide crimes he may have committed as leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Looking at these two stances with a critical eye, one needs to consider Kagame as an engineer of strategic events. The most recent was the president's participation in the Compton Lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in September 2007.

Dr. Susan Hockfield, MIT President, introduced him graciously as a man "working to transform Rwanda from a poor country trapped in subsistence farming to a thriving, modern, knowledge-based economy with trading partners around the world." President Kagame spoke to a packed auditorium on the importance of information technology for the advancement of Rwandese society, then entreated his audience to become active in his country's development. Moreover, he emphasized the potential of a relationship between his country and the university. In this way, he not only reached out to leaders in the science and technology community—as he has done with Google's Larry Page, who provided the country with free web-based software—but also to individuals with the potential to become the next generation of leaders.



HY Kim

Stepping back to the February headline-maker that first drew my attention to Kagame's strategic networking: former British Prime Minister Tony Blair voluntarily became advisor to the East African leader. At a press conference in Kigali, Mr. Blair explained that his involvement with Rwanda is a result of the strides the country has made in "overcoming trauma" since the genocide, a statement that reveals his investment in Kagame's narrative of progress. Mr. Blair has said that he intends to foster Rwandan development by using his international status to facilitate foreign aid and private investment.

To sustain the country's economic advancement after gaining admittance to the East African Development Bank and launching a stock exchange last January, Kagame also receives counsel from acclaimed commodities and options trader Joe Ritchie and former president Bill Clinton. In the public health sector, President Kagame partners with Bill Gates and Harvard professor Paul Farmer, a leading specialist on public health in impoverished settings, to improve Rwandans' healthcare access. The addition of Mr. Blair to the advising team is not extraordinary, but one action taken among many to engage Western leaders in strategic development. Thus it was no surprise when, during my visit to Kigali, President Bush told reporters that

he considered President Kagame part of the "new generation of progressive African leaders," and later called him "a man of action" who can "get things done."

One should consider Blair's advisory role in light of Rwanda's post-genocide development schemes and Kagame's efforts to put Rwanda on the map with the Western world. Ugandan political writer Andrew Mwenda poses a particularly poignant question when he asks, "How can a small, poverty-stricken country somewhere in the middle of Africa, having no rich minerals and almost of no strategic value in global politics, attract the attention of such an international statesman as Blair?" Glancing at the news Rwanda made in the month of March, the answer seems clear: the president's political and economic strategic positioning.

The question now becomes: How is President Kagame's dense network of alliances improving the country? As Tony Blair observed about Rwanda's development, "The vision is one thing and to make it happen is another." The president receives advice and assistance in a variety of sectors, but are the Rwandese people benefiting? It is still too early to tell whether he is "walking the walk," but I did encounter aspects of Rwandan "development" that throw doubt on the authenticity of his initiatives. For instance, though Kigali appears highly developed—more so than the neighboring capital, Kampala—the rest of Rwanda lags far behind the conditions of rural Uganda. The beautiful roads, fountains, green spaces, high prices, and flocks of *muzungus*—well-off white people—in the city may just be features of a highly localized development showpiece, while the rest of the state remains in need of assistance.

How does the disparity in developmental support between the capital city and almost everywhere else reflect on President Kagame's true motivations? Aside from a genuine desire to develop Rwanda, should we seek alternative political explanations? From Rwandese university students and Ugandan businessmen in Rwanda, I heard much skepticism of his highly publicized attempts to put the country on the "developed map." To this end, some hold that the president's actions are attempts to focus Western attention away from his controversial tenure in the RPF.

A Rwandese friend explained to me that former General Kagame may well be guilty of "revenge killings" (or simply, "mass killings"). Moreover, there is controversy over whether he should be tried in court over claims that he ordered the assassination of former President Habyarimana in 1994. Kagame said in a 2004 BBC interview that he was willing to stand trial for this second accusation, but in 2007, he opposed the idea on the BBC program HARDtalk. For over a year, French judge Jean-Louis Bruguière has been compiling a 70-page dossier on Kagame to implicate him in the murder that is said to have triggered the genocide. When the file was mentioned in an interview, the president answered, "It is 70 pages of trash, of nothing, and I assure you that." He has vehemently criticized the merits of the case and its sources because of France's alleged involvement in the genocide. The date Bruguière's allegations were first made public, the president cut diplomatic ties with France.

Lastly, the Rwandese president has been under fire for sending troops back to the Democratic Republic of Congo, after officially withdrawing them in 2002, to engage Rwandese Hutu militias. Kagame has not openly acknowledged his continued involvement in the Congo, but he has threatened to intervene before. When a 2002 interviewer asked how newly deployed troops might operate, he answered, "Maybe in a different way from what we did last time. We'll be more specific, we'll target certain areas and certain positions…and just get out." In public comments, Kagame has described the militias as a danger to Rwanda. In the course of her field research, Barnard political science professor Severine Autesserre found that numerous UN officials, soldiers, and other individuals living and working in Rwanda do not see the Rwandese Hutu militias as a threat. She explains that the rumor of danger could be "a pretext for [various elements of the Rwandese elite] to remain in Congo," to extract mineral resources and protect the Congolese of Rwandese descent.

"It is still too early to tell whether he is 'walking the walk,' but I did encounter aspects of Rwandan 'development' that throw doubt on the authenticity of his initiatives."

The two perspectives on Rwanda's strategic development contrast starkly. Leaders in the West either hail Kagame as an innovative force or as another dictator attempting to evade accountability. While the unbalanced development of Rwanda may suggest that President Kagame seeks to deceive, the evidence is far from concrete. Moreover, while his selection of famous Westerners as informal advisors do focus international attention on his development schemes, this is in no way conclusive about the president's underlying motivations.

What is clear is that President Kagame's development of Kigali is simply not enough. To prove the sincerity of his expressed intentions to the world and to his citizens, Kagame will have to craft a more balanced development scheme. He must convince the Rwandese people that the progress transforming the capital city will reach them in other parts of the country. Looking toward Rwanda's future, author Stephen Kinzer says it best: "The course [Kagame and his supporters] have chosen is at least as full of risk as it is full of promise. Over the next few years, it will be one of the most closely watched experiments in Africa."

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Insuring the Dream

Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and a national ethos

Michael Tannenbaum

As the nation's housing crisis becomes increasingly politicized, Wall Street—a phrase which today seems to fasten to any industry or person remotely associated with the real estate, financial services, or insurance industries—becomes further demonized. Politicians and businesses alike indict the greed of "Wall Street," and they see such corruption as an injury to its opposite glittering generality, "Main Street."

But the world of finance, derivatives, and mortgage-backed securities, and the world of traditional industry, mom-and-pop stores, and first-time home buyers, are not so binary.

The recent nationalization of mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac illuminates a more complex relationship at the confluence of Main Street and Wall Street. The bailout of these agencies is different in principle from those of Bear Stearns, AIG, and Washington Mutual. The government did not just insure the assets of Fannie and Freddie; it nationalized the companies. It did so for two reasons: as part of a much larger history of government involvement in housing, and because *housing is special*. There is something unique about homeownership in this country and in our culture.

By examining the intersection of housing and government, we can begin to understand the importance Americans place on homeownership. After all, the government's support for the housing market during this crisis is only the latest in a succession of policies that have privileged this sector over most others. The history of this special relationship spans the Homestead Act of 1862 to Federal Housing Administration loans after World War II, public housing, and Section Eight funding for low-income families. Taken together, these policies mark housing as exceptional.

In 1938, Congress created the Federal National Mortgage Association, later dubbed "Fannie Mae," to purchase loans from home lenders. The homeownership rate was then the lowest of the twentieth century—the despond that preceded the post-World War II housing boom. Fannie Mae allowed traditional lenders, such as small savings and loan enterprises, to sell loans and get repaid early, increasing liquidity in the housing market. Fannie Mae was chartered as a shareholder-owned company in 1968. The Federal Home Loan Company, commonly known as Freddie Mac, was originally created in 1970 to purchase loans made by institutions that were part of the Federal Home Loan Bank System. In 1989, Freddie Mac went the way of its counterpart and became publicly traded.

As they transitioned from federal to private agencies, Fannie and Freddie maintained an ambiguous relationship with the government. Company stock could be traded on the New York Stock Exchange; company executives received compensation commensurate with those of other enormous financial institutions; and their balance sheets remained as risky as those of investment banks. But in chartering these companies and remaining involved with their corporate governance and operations, the federal government implicitly backed Fannie and Freddie paper. Such support is marked in the very term used to characterize Fannie and Freddie: Government-Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs).

Nomenclature aside, these companies became part and parcel of the government when the US Treasury explicitly acknowledged its responsibility for the agencies in its September 2008 Senior Preferred Stock Purchase Agreement: "Because the US government created these ambiguities [in the charters of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac], we have a responsibility to both avert and ultimately address the systemic risk now posed by the scale and breadth of the holdings of GSE debt and mortgage-backed securities."

In reference to the recent bailout, NYU Stern School of Business Professor Lawrence J. White said, "The current situation is not a story about Fannie and Freddie stoking the flame of the real estate bubble." To White, bailing out Fanny and Freddy is not complicit with Wall Street corruption. Instead, the government's effort stabilizes the housing market and consummates its long-standing relation-

"Homeownership is more than just a symbol of the American Dream; it is an important part of our way of life. Core American values of individuality, thrift, responsibility, and self-reliance are embodied in homeownership. I am committed to helping more families know the security and sense of pride that comes with owning a home."

President George W. Bush, National Homeownership Month Speech, 2003

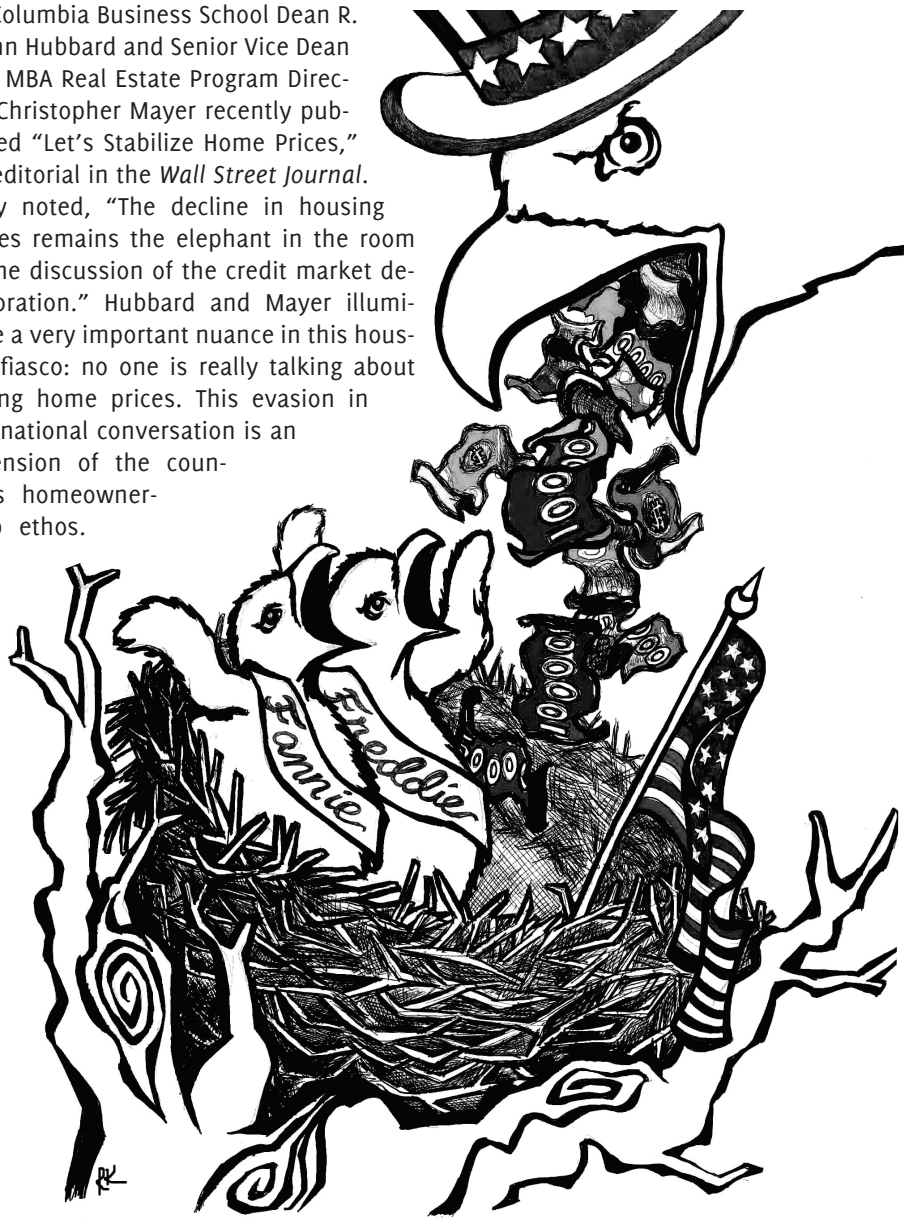
ship with homeownership.

The scale and breadth of Fannie and Freddie's holdings are truly remarkable, and both demonstrate how important housing is to the economy and the American psyche. The initially innocuous ambiguities surrounding the GSEs became grave uncertainties as the nation's mortgage markets expanded exponentially alongside an ever-rising homeownership rate, which stood at 68.1 percent in the second quarter of 2008—higher than in most other industrialized nations. Mortgages of all varieties—from zero-down payment to those containing low "teaser rates" followed by much higher ones—teleologically led to more, and increasingly fragile, homeownership.

What allowed this lending was the practice of securitizing loans, which packages individual mortgage obligations and sells them off in slices to reduce risk. The idea is that underwriting one person's mortgage is very risky, but underwriting one one-hundredth of 100 mortgages is much less so. Through securitization, smaller mortgage-lenders could sell mortgages for packaging, leaving the same lenders free to give credit to even more borrowers. Securitization of mortgages and other forms of debt was crucial to the growth and recent collapse of America's banking industry. As long as housing prices continued to rise, and the American Dream of homeownership continued to be a reality for more and more Americans, Wall Street and Main Street continued to play nice.

As securitization emerged as integral to the prospect of homeownership in America, the quasi-public GSEs became the natural place to store such a cultural burden. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac came to own an incredibly large amount of the American Dream in the truest sense of the term. This Dream was extended to almost anyone who sought it out in the form of now-controversial subprime loans and loans to those with impaired credit. When home values started falling, homeowners began defaulting on their obligations and, as securities unraveled, the government naturally stepped in to protect the very ideal that it had done so much to propagate.

Columbia Business School Dean R. Glenn Hubbard and Senior Vice Dean and MBA Real Estate Program Director Christopher Mayer recently published "Let's Stabilize Home Prices," an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*. They noted, "The decline in housing prices remains the elephant in the room in the discussion of the credit market deterioration." Hubbard and Mayer illuminate a very important nuance in this housing fiasco: no one is really talking about falling home prices. This evasion in the national conversation is an extension of the country's homeownership ethos.



Rebekah Kim

Homes are meant to be wealth builders and stockpiles of value, not speculative investments that ultimately foreclose. Homebuyers are builders and dreamers, and it runs counter to our culture of homeownership to call anyone subprime, let alone unfit to own a home.

The truth about Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac is the truth of American housing itself. Housing is special, and the government treats Fannie and Freddie as such, both in their former lifetimes and in the recent bailout. This extraordinary treatment is a function of homeownership as the American ethos invented it.

America and its politicians must come to terms with, if not embrace, the link between Wall Street and Main Street—an intimacy manifest in the very existence and bailout of the GSEs. We may realize that not everyone is meant for homeownership—that it is not an unconditional good for all citizens. Those who find owning a home unsuitable must amend their American Dreams.

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More Edouard Manet than Grandmaster Flash

Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now *at the Bronx Museum of Art*

Richard Prins

Glancing at the press release for *Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now,* the newest exhibition at the Bronx Museum of Art, I was surprised to learn that the museum was founded in 1971. In that decade, buildings in the museum's neighborhood on the Grand Concourse were generally more flammable than they were habitable, and the nation watched them burn in the background while the Yankees won the World Series.

It was the decade that the city requested a federal bailout for its budget woes and did not receive a $700 billion handout, but was instead told by President Ford, via the *Daily News*, to "Drop Dead."

Out of this pit of privation and blight, the forms of street art we most closely identify with the Bronx began to spontaneously generate, much like weeds do from cracks in the sidewalk. Without a budget for interactive spaces, community centers, or even art classes in public schools, an embryo of hip hop culture was conceived at block parties all over the South Bronx. Street art was in vogue—scratched records, graffiti and battling emcees—because the streets were all people had.

So, I thought I knew what to expect from the exhibit when I read the statement from the museum's director, Holly Block, who explains, "The vitality of the Bronx flows from its street culture, the connections people make on the corner, front stoop, or public park. During the period of this exhibition, the museum will draw both from these roots and the global conversation." If anything, I was worried that the exhibit might, in its zeal to put its host borough on the map, prove nothing more than a predictable retread of proto-hip hop history—maybe an exhaustive archive of paint-sprayed subways from an unrecognizable New York of the 1980s, or just the latest canonizing of edgy urban art's usual subjects (like Jean Michel Basquiat, for example, who has posthumously received a cult following, biopics, and an entire exhibition of his work at the more established and better-endowed Brooklyn Museum of Art).

But I was wrong: as it turned out, not a single artist from the Bronx was actually represented. The irony of my trip to the Bronx Museum of Art is that I came fearing an overdose of graffiti-chic, and left nearly jonesing for it.

Basquiat is there, though his name was conspicuously absent from the exhibit poster. That's because, instead of including one of his paintings, the exhibit instead presents a series of photographs by Peter Moore of Basquiat's graffiti tag "SAMO©" (ubiquitous in the Lower East Side long before the neo-surrealist wunderkind blossomed into the art world's response to the trope of the tragic rock star). I found this to be an especially galling way for the museum to cover its bases: graffiti and Basquiat, why not kill two queer birds with one showcase?

Such a cursory treatment of an iconic black figure reeks of tokenism, but, what's worse, Basquiat doesn't even get his token: the credit for the work goes to Moore, the photographer, who is quoted as saying, "If I don't record these, they'll be lost." At best, this statement is disingenuous in the context of Basquiat, whose origins as a cryptic graffiti artist would be well-known with or without Moore waving from the bandwagon.

But, more to the point, it's simply bizarre for an exhibit about street art to privilege the archivist over the artist, valuing the second-hand source of the snapshot instead of the original form of the graffiti. Essentially, the move rubberstamps the appropriation of a spontaneous art form by the art world at large, implying that Basquiat's vandalism wouldn't have mattered had it not met the approbation of the artistic powers that be. Bearing us back to that age-old philosophical question: if a street urchin tags a brick wall and Andy Warhol doesn't see it, did he ever really tag it at all?

It was at this moment that I felt the exhibit encouraging me to look at the street through the imperial lens of the dominant art world. In truth, I should have realized this bias as soon as I walked into the museum and was greeted by an introductory paragraph alluding to Charles Baudelaire's 1863 essay, "The Painter of Modern Life:"

> Poet and critic Charles Baudelaire exhorted the impression-

George Maciunas

> ists to paint modern subjects, such as Parisian boulevards, bridges and sidewalk cafes. He celebrated "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" qualities found in the street and described the figure of the *flâneur* as a "gentleman stroller of city streets,' a detached man of leisure observing his own urban milieu.

Expecting Grandmaster Flash, I wound up with Edouard Manet. The museum is divided into three rooms, arranged in a chronological manner. The first room, featuring some of the most famous American photojournalists of the 1950s and 60s, dovetails with this neo-Baudelairian conception of street art as a sort of passive and peripatetic voyeurism. A freewheeling urban grit pervades in these photos. A few portraits of Lower East Side drag queens are included from Robert Frank's seminal 1958 book, *The Americans*. Some prolific snaps by Garry Winogrand follow, one capturing a priceless moment when a swift-stepping pedestrian, anonymously blurred, lifts his hand in slick protest against the camera. I couldn't help but wonder if the 1950s version of the *flâneur* was much more than a paparazzi of the common man.

Increasingly, the observation becomes obsessive. These artists may be "men of leisure," but they are far from "detached." Take Lee Friedlander's eerie photo "New York City 1966," where the shadow of the photographer's face lands ominously on the back of a blonde lady's fashionable coat, blurring the artist's world with the fetishistic world of the stalker. Photographer William Klein doffs his voyeur shades, undertaking a strategy of provocation. His tactic was not to watch pedestrians, but rather to accost them, aggressively shoving his camera in their faces. This resulted in the particularly brilliant "Gun 1, New York City," in which a wizened, bullish lady reacted by sticking an out-of-focus gun directly at the camera's lens. Klein is applauded for so doggedly pursuing and inciting social fringes.

By portraying street life as resistant to artistic incursion, the exhibit envisions these artists as intrepid equals of the lowlifes and outcasts at which they flash. And this is when the true desire behind the lens of the artist is betrayed: what artist does not harbor the vague wish that by observing and stirring these hedonistic and craven segments of society, he might gain the power to transform himself, if only for a day, into one of these creatures?

Jamel Shabazz

Something about the selections struck me as inorganic, given that they were largely the work of people who were ostensible outsiders to the haunts they represented. What about the autonomous rumblings of a local populace that isn't held hostage by incorrigible creative types? I'd like to believe my concerns here went a little deeper than *where's the graffiti at? Street Art, Street Life* is curated by the Bronx Museum of Art, in a borough with one of the world's richest histories in both street life and street art, and yet not a single installation in the exhibit actually comes from the Bronx.

There is one row of undeniably vibrant photographs in the second room that at least resembles the Bronx in landscape, shot in locales like Brooklyn's East Flatbush. These are the photographs of Jamel Shabazz, who essentially serves as the token insider of the second room. I assign him insider status not because his last name is Shabazz, but because he happens to have been born in Brooklyn. His photographs include a picture of four black kids wearing red and white, striking playful, masculine and conveniently geometric poses, as well as a picture of five girls riding down a block in a shopping cart. The curator's explanation cites these pictures as "evidence of the reality of drugs, crime and poverty that pervaded these streets throughout the decade."

Okay, hold up. Let's pause for a second. What if we'd been presented with a photograph of five *white* girls riding a shopping cart down a block of brownstones? Most likely, the shot wouldn't be entered into a court of real estate law as evidence of a blighted, drug-addled neighborhood. Shabazz's attempt to portray a folksy, joyful scene is apparently belied by the pri-

"I'd like to believe my concerns here went a little deeper than *where's the graffiti at?*"

vation that the curator knows must exist there. Projecting a politics of consternation is a somewhat exasperating stretch, particularly because it negates the aesthetic and human richness of Shabazz's photos.

Shabazz is joined in the second room by the motley bohemians who rounded out New York's art scene in the 1970s and 80s. The first installation is a project undertaken by photographer Vito Acconci: every day, for a month, he chose a new downtown denizen to follow. Sometimes the stalking would last mere minutes until the subject hailed a taxi; other times, he waited for hours outside his or her job. He duly recorded every move of the subject in a log, which is represented in full alongside two grainy snapshots of a hirsute Acconci photographing a subject unawares.

> "Basquiat doesn't even get his token."

Compare this piece to Friedlander's menacing "New York City 1966," which merely implied through clever use of shadow that the photographer might be stalking the posh female subject. Acconci ups the stakes, making it his explicit mission to stalk, and instead of furnishing us with a polished and aesthetically masterful print, he provides meticulous written evidence and two hasty snapshots taken by an associate.

Tehching Hsieh, perhaps the most monastic performance artist I've ever encountered, outdoes Acconci's month-long project with a far more grueling year-long performance, during which he vowed not to enter any indoor location. For a year, a sleeping bag and city streets were his only home. Like Acconci, he systematically recorded his experience. We're presented with filmed excerpts of Hsieh lapping water from a leaky fire hydrant and relieving himself in a field overlooking an indeterminate river. One of his daily logs is also provided, a map of Lower Manhattan marked up with the time and place of various actions (*"7:10 AM, woke up; 10:15 AM, defecated"*). His outdoor odyssey was only interrupted once when he was forced to spend a night in jail, imaginably for vagrancy.

So you see that these post-modern *flâneurs* are far less anonymous, far more histrionic, than their predecessors. Instead of feeding just on ephemera and Kodak moments, they thrive on contrivance. And, for these artists, representing urban grit is no longer enough to suffice. Hsieh's night in jail, though technically a breach of his outdoors vow, highlights his transformation from artist into bum. This theme of metamorphosis is continued through in David Wojnarovicz's "Arthur Rimbaud in New York," where a person is photographed wearing a paper mask of the late French poet, whilst implicated in objectionable activities. One features the masked actor with a hypodermic needle jammed in his arm, another locates him in Times Square in the midst of its seedy heyday. Wojnarovicz exhibits his own affinity with outlaw poets of the past, his opinion of the role they might play in contemporary society, and, I would argue, his own desire to become Rimbaud.

A similar piece, "The Mythic Being Cruising White Women" by Adrian Piper, features photographs of an epicene, racially ambiguous figure, ornamented by a large afro and curly moustache, walking, sitting or smoking cigarettes in downtown streets. This "mythic being" is allegedly found intimidating despite its waifish frame, and supposedly ironic because the performer was actually a white, female NYU student, publicly navigating her identity. These works imbue us with the perspective of the artist-outsider, whose mission is to bring tension to his/her community (and, lest it go unstated, gentrification). This must be why Shabazz's attempt to record recreation—and a community's makeshift effort to relieve tension—is so thoroughly misrepresented by the curator, who frames it as a portrayal of the tension that history assures us must have lurked in the background.

The third and final room of the exhibit covers the late 1990s and 2000s, and blows open this discussion of the reigning art world's tendency to necessitate its own stamp of approval. You might have noticed by now that at least 90 percent of the work in the first two rooms took place in New York. Yet this third room hosts mostly foreign works, particularly from de-

Fatimah Tuggar

veloping nations. Are we to conclude that there was nothing which could be considered "street art" in the third world before globalization defined our world and made cosmopolitanism a chic buzzword? More likely, prior works simply hadn't pursued by art elites.

This stark, neo-Hegelian implication that the developing world has no history so far as street art is concerned is unfortunately highlighted by the chronological layout of the museum. After spending the first hour of his visit surrounded by edgy black and white photos from seminal New York City, the museumgoer enters into a room filled with colorful video installations from around the world. He is force-fed a teleological master-narrative which views New York as the vaunted delta that influenced all this uncanny global creative output.

Having exploited all of New York's grit as lavishly as a bunch of oil barons, the art world has no choice but to look to third-world artists for depictions of anything exotic or impoverished. This discrepancy, so prominent in the last room, was perhaps best encapsulated by Nigerian artist Fatimah Tuggar. Onto a photograph of a dusty and motorcycle-filled Nigerian road, she superimposes a familiar billboard advertisement from New York, in which Magic Johnson's face appears over a caption reading, "New York City has more AIDS than any other US city." The contrast between the two urban environs, as well as the inferred contrast between their rates of HIV infection, is quite haunting.

Another installation from an artist of the developing world is called Blank Noise Project. In the far corner of the third room, two televisions face each other, and the museumgoer may take a seat in between them. One television blares with women in Calcutta lamenting to the camera about how they are verbally harassed by men, and it alternates with the other television, where men are interviewed, arguing vehemently that if a woman is harassed in this manner, it must be her fault for dressing so scantily. In one case, an older woman chimes in on the men's side, decrying the nearly-naked women and arguing that they get the disapproval they deserve. She is cheered on licentiously by the surrounding crowd of men. While caught in this crossfire of confessions and epithets, the viewer may peruse a booklet titled *Not Glaring Suspiciously at Every Passerby Can Be Interpreted as an Invitation*.

Compare this to a video installation from the second room, which also portrays the street as a battleground for public discourse about gender. The artist VALIE EXPORT shows a 1969 photo of herself leading a man in a suit across the street by a dog leash, as well as a video of herself standing on a street corner with a box hung over her chest, encouraging men to reach inside and fondle her bare breasts.

In both of these works, there is a visceral cognitive dissonance between the insider and outsider artist. VALIE EXPORT uses the street as a public area to provoke tension and discourse; Blank Noise Project depicts women who are violently compromised by the street's capacity for tension and chauvinist discourse.

Surprisingly enough, it was in this globalized last room that I thought I glimpsed the Bronx, in Nikki Lee's "Hispanic Project." Lee is a young Korean woman whose "projects" involve transforming herself into her subjects, whether they are punks, yuppies or senior-citizens. "Hispanic Project" depicts her at the Puerto Rican Day Parade as well as standing in front of a stoop and wearing a bandana at a block party, hanging with ostensible homegirls, giving the camera a take-no-shit smirk. This metamorphosis reads like quite the crowning achievement in an exhibit so replete with artists' meditations on, and attempts to transcend, their outsider status.

Certain highly-represented places, like downtown New York, do indeed absorb creative migrants who wish to both authenticate themselves to neighborhood people and impress the artistic community. But, by and large, this has not been the case in the Bronx.

Representing a veritable historiography of the downtown art scene that privileges the view of the outsider—the *flâneur* who uses the street as his social experiment—the Bronx Museum of Art also neglects the particular forms of expression that have sprung up in its host borough, where locals have taken artistic innovation to the streets as a last resort, often because their own society has treated them like a social experiment.

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Creative Writing

Richard (CC '09), affectionately known as Platypus, is a former Bronx resident. He hopes to write the great un-American novel, and retire in Tanzania.

Photos by George Maciunas, Jamel Shabazz and Fatimah Tuggar are provided courtesy of the Bronx Museum of Art.

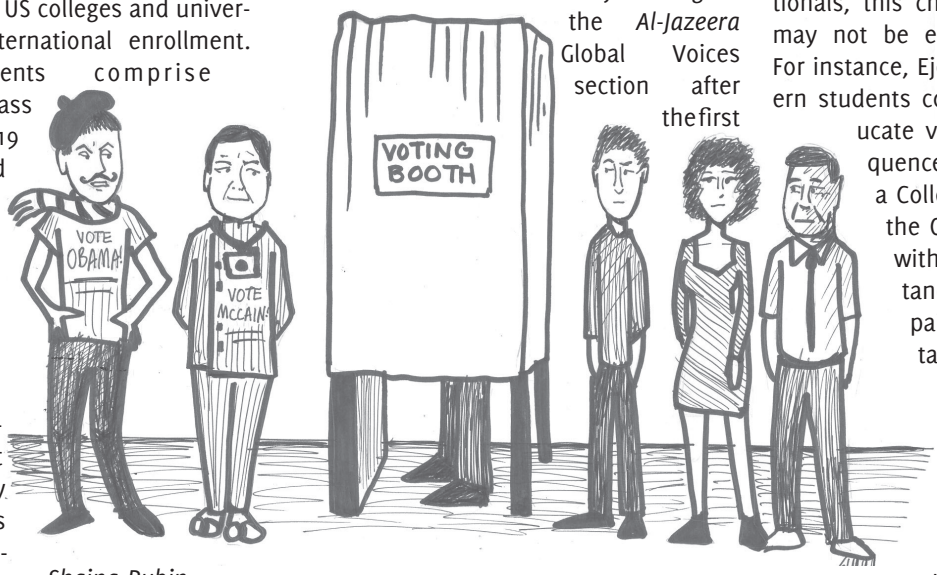
Without the Right

International students at the fringe of American politics

Sarah Khan

Walking past a Barack Obama campaign booth in Morningside Heights, I stop to ask the volunteers about how students respond to their work. After we speak for a few minutes, they ask the inevitable question: "Have you registered to vote?" When I answer that I am an international student, necessarily voteless, they lose interest.

Currently, Columbia ranks second among almost 2000 US colleges and universities reporting international enrollment. International students comprise 19 percent of the class of 2011—that's 19 percent guaranteed non-voters. If voting is at the forefront of political action, what is the role of international students in the upcoming election?



Shaina Rubin

Elections are political exercises that affirm—and newly invent—a country's nationalistic identity. In this particular presidential race, American exceptionalism has overshadowed a more global sensibility. Take, for instance, the ServiceNation Forum held on campus this past September 11th. John McCain called the United States "exceptional"; Barack Obama, surprisingly blatant, called this country the "greatest nation of the world."

Non-citizens are hardly the target audience, but it's worth asking whether such rhetoric estranges them from the political process. Mallika Narain (CC'11) is a non-resident Indian and a Singaporean national who has lived in the United States for the past five years, but is not a citizen. Narain understands why the candidates' language could seem off-putting, but does not feel offended: "Every country has to have this sort of patriotic rhetoric…[we have to] understand that these are just politically strategic moves." But Narain's generous comment conceals how American exceptionalism invokes a distinct *kind* of patriotism, one that can alienate internationals and immigrants from the US national project.

But it would be a mistake to think that international students *could* possibly remain untouched by this presidential race—a reality that generates intense debate within the international community. Writing for the *Al-Jazeera* Global Voices section after the first presidential debate, Lina Ejeilat, a Columbia Journalism student from Jordan, remarked, "I realized that whether we like it or not, everything the US does affects the rest of the world tremendously."

American policy's global consequences can complicate political involvement for international students and immigrant communities alike. Ali Najmi, a law student at CUNY, has worked to mobilize immigrants in all five New York City boroughs. In 2006, he co-founded Desis Vote, a campaign to promote a culture of civic participation within New York's South Asian community. Najmi describes the impact of US foreign policy as deeply complex for South Asian Americans—so much so that Desis Vote prefers to focus on local and state elections. It's obvious that a fixation on the act of voting presents a binary choice that doesn't begin to address the complex questions at issue.

But internationals are often committed to domestic issues as well—after all, many of these students are proto-citizens and proto-immigrants. For Taimur Malik (CC'11) of Pakistan, who is considering a career in the US, Obama's more favorable immigration stance is particularly important. For Narain, undeniably "American" social questions—for instance, *Roe v. Wade*—crucially shape her political commitments.

Despite all that is at stake for internationals, this chunk of Columbia students may not be especially politically active. For instance, Ejeilat feels that Middle Eastern students could do much more to educate voters on the global consequences of this election. Narain, a College Democrat and donor to the Obama campaign, disagrees with international students distancing themselves from campaigning. "It's a huge mistake," she says.

And voteless participation is easy. Students can connect with the franchised immigrant communities of their home countries. Campaigns like Desis Vote provide ideal opportunities for this sort of mobilization work. "We essentially need bodies," Najmi stresses. "You don't need to be a citizen to make phone calls." Desis Vote is just one of many ways for internationals to join a political exercise that doesn't require citizenship.

Though it may surprise that international students could fall short of political action now, it may be the very nature of American politics that alienates them. As far as the campus conversation is concerned, a discourse more inclusive of the 4,970-strong international community could remind non-voters that they do have a part to play. But it might also make Americans remember that their vote is a worldly one.

Sarah Khan
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Economics-Political Science, Sustainable Development

Sarah (CC'11) is an international student from Islamabad, Pakistan. She was intrigued by vice presidential candidate Palin's exchange with Pakistani president Zardari at the UN.

"A More Interesting Question"

New Common Core at CSER

Columbia's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER) launches its Common Core for majors and concentrators in Comparative Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies and Latino Studies this semester. The Center delivers two new Core classes: Colonization/Decolonization, a fall seminar with Mae Ngai and Claudio Lomnitz, and Race and Scientific Social Practice, to be taught by Nadia Abu El-Haj in the spring. Karen Leung talks to Professors Lomnitz and Ngai about their class and the new curriculum.

On what it could mean to teach an alternative to the Core Curriculum:

MN: [Columbia's] Core is set up as "the West and the rest," if we can use that shorthand. That's the product of an attempt to improve and reform a Core that traditionally had been "the West." To the credit of those who wanted to improve the Core, there was a recognition that a common liberal arts core should have a global understanding to it.

But adding something called Major Cultures to Lit Hum and CC didn't really affect the basic Eurocentric nature of the core. And that's not to say that there weren't changes within CC… but on the whole we still have an overall system that's based on a western-centered view of contemporary civilization. This became more striking to us when we had the opportunity to put [Colonization/Decolonization] in Major Cultures…it doesn't really fit there. Our focus is really on the rise of European hegemony and the making of the modern world. It's an integrated concept that what made the modern world is the interaction between Europe and the rest of the world.

CL: The interest the university has in deepening students' comparative understanding—between the West and the rest, between Europe and the US and other places—that interest is an important one, and one that we support. But it can really miss out on helping students understand the way in which worlds are interconnected…And it can mean that [students] have no language for talking about minorities, racialized or ethnicized minorities in the West or outside, because they can be kind of othered no matter which way you slice it.

So it turns out that if you're interested in migrant groups within Germany or Canada, those might be excluded in a traditional discussion of the West…their histories, their processes of identification, are harder to focus on exactly because they are existing as minorities. So the integrated approach this class takes allows you to move across the global space from a particular kind of analytic lens.

On the trickiness of educational "foundations":

CL: I have a [high] opinion of the Core. My impression, having taught here at Columbia for two years, is that it really creates an undergraduate body that is intellectually quite rigorous…I certainly don't regard it as simply a point of distinction at cocktail parties. But the process of criticizing and working with the Core is a dialogue with certain foundational issues that have developed over the years, and it would probably be an abandonment of our duties as professors not to be thinking through them critically.

MN: I think there's a place for studying western tradition and western political philosophy. But to call a class Contemporary Civilization is to suggest something that potentially could be much broader and more integrative, using a far richer kind of vocabulary.

CL: And the West is always a constructed category. If you look at what the West is, it's something that lots of people, places, groups, have wanted to claim for themselves, and doesn't always describe an actual specific culture or civilization. To give an example, there was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a whole discussion in Latin America about whether it wasn't truer to the Hellenic tradition than the United States, which might have turned its back on that tradition. Well, here in the US, you don't get [that history]. If you go to college and study Latin America, that's considered non-Western culture…So "the West" is very much a shifty category, just as much a shifty category as "the rest."

MN: This array of texts allows us to see how complicated [questions raised by colonization] were. It's so easy for us today to say, colonization was brutal, or enslavement was horrible and immoral…But what can we gain from asking more questions about their motives, if we understand that these were people who believed themselves to be good Christians, doing something positive?…This is the big question we should all be asking ourselves in understanding the world: not, why do bad things get done, but why is it that good people can do such bad things? I think that's a more interesting question.

On Colonization/Decolonization's approach:

CL: We thought we would need one course that introduces students to the whole historical sweep of the rise of race, racial thinking, racial relations, ethnicity, ethnification, class… Our majors and concentrators need to have a sense of the fact that none of these things were invented exclusively in the last 150 years when the minorities we're studying emerged as such. We did and do feel that the historical scope defined in this course needs to reach back to the whole of the modern period.

MN: And you're working with primary texts. In the secondary literature, somebody has already digested it and come up with an analysis. I won't say that we have no analysis, because we do, obviously. We're not teaching from the perspective of a blank slate, nor do we think you have no perspective on it. But we're trying to get closer to [the historical experience] by eliminating at least one level of mediation, which is a scholar's interpretation.

CL: We were also a bit concerned that majors and concentrators were very oriented around the contemporary, and very dominated by the contemporary discourse on colonialism, colonization, decolonization, slavery, race—

MN: Identity—

CL: —identity, etc., and we wanted to offer, in a basic course, the challenge of reading the primary documentation…There is too much received wisdom that maybe any college student, certainly CC and Barnard and GS students, come in with… Any primary text is a fragment, it's one voice from one person at one time, written for a particular audience, and that audience is not a college student reading it two or three hundred years later. So it is challenging. But I really think students are up for the challenge.

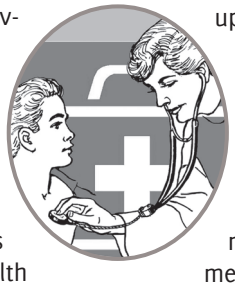
MN: Another thing we're responding to is the ubiquity of the term "globalization" in contemporary discourse, which now means almost anything one wants it to mean. An aspect of our goal with the class is to subject that idea to historical investigation.

Claudio Lomnitz is Director of CSER and Professor of Anthropology.

Mae Ngai is Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies and Professor of History.

On Health Care

Students about to enter the job market will find sharp contrasts between Barack Obama and John McCain's health care proposals, both in goals and means.



McCain's plan depends heavily on individual responsibility and the free market, while Obama's plan calls for universal coverage through expanded public insurance.

Obama's plan requires that all children have health insurance up to age 25, and makes it mandatory for employers to offer employee health benefits or contribute to public program costs. His new public plan features comprehensive coverage and makes federal income-related subsidies available to help individuals buy it. To finance his scheme, estimated to cost $50 to $65 billion per year, Obama proposes to draw from savings within the health care system and discontinue tax cuts for those with incomes over $250,000.

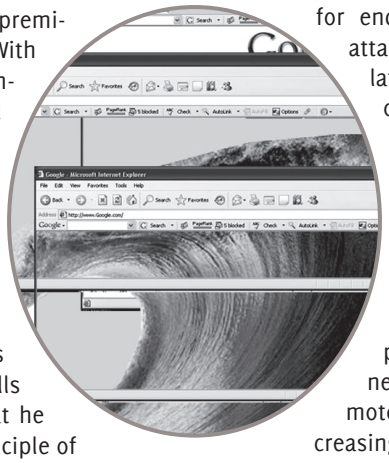
McCain plans to provide refundable tax credits of up to $2,500 to individuals and up to $5,000 to families for insurance purchases. Individuals who find innovative, multi-year plans that cost less than the allotted amount can save the excess refund money in Health Savings Accounts. McCain's tactic doesn't require as much financing; he holds that cost containment measures would make insurance more affordable to Americans.

The candidates' proposals propagate two different theories of government and two distinctly different goals for healthcare.

On Technology

Adam Aisen

The two candidates clash on the question of net neutrality: whether internet service providers (ISPs) such as Comcast and Road Runner should be allowed to charge websites for "premium" connection speeds. With these fees in place, non-paying websites could load more slowly, or be entirely inaccessible.



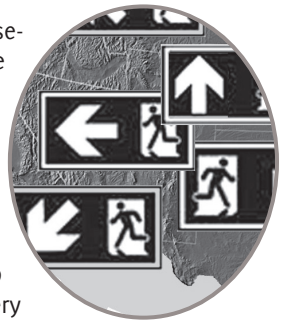
Net neutrality advocates favor an internet where all ISPs would be required to grant the same connection speeds to all websites, regardless of size. Barack Obama falls into this camp, saying that he "strongly supports the principle of network neutrality to preserve the benefits of open competition on the Internet."

But opponents of net neutrality, like McCain, call this model extreme and unrealistic. They argue that letting ISPs charge websites and users for their connections would offset the rising costs of broadband Internet for end users. McCain has even attacked net neutrality legislation as "prescriptive" and overly burdensome, declaring, "an open marketplace with a variety of consumer choices is the best deterrent against unfair practices."

As students, issues of intellectual property rights and net neutrality may seem remote. But in an age of increasing connectivity, we are all becoming increasing reliant on the internet for our work, our studies, and our everyday lives.

On Outsourcing

Nina Pedrad



Graduating seniors will face the highest unemployment rate of the past five years. The Economic Research Institute estimates 2.6 job seekers for every job, up from 1.6 the previous year. By 2015, up to 3.3 million US jobs and $136 billion in job earnings could be lost to outsourcing. It should be no surprise that job creation has catapulted to a bread-and-butter campaign issue.

John McCain plans to appeal to the corporations that do the hiring. A free trade advocate, he suggests lowering the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 25 percent. What's more, McCain would cut individual tax rates for small business owners and eliminate "costly requirements" for employers to provide health insurance or support pro-union initiatives. He would also build 45 new nuclear power plants by 2030, which he says will create 700,000 jobs.

Yet McCain's published stance is challenged by his selection of former Hewlett-Packard Chairperson and outspoken outsourcing advocate Carly Fiorina, and outsourcing broker Randy Altschuler, as senior economic advisors.

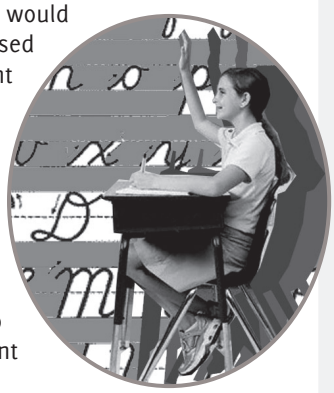
Barack Obama's economic plan is harsher on businesses but promises more jobs. Unlike McCain, Obama would end tax breaks for companies that send jobs overseas and award government contracts to companies that employ American workers. Obama also plans to double funding for the expansion of manufacturing, and allocate $150 billion over 10 years to create five million new green jobs.

Obama's plan, too, has come under attack. Critics charge that his proposal neglects small businesses. They also accuse him of hypocrisy in renting campaign headquarters from Accenture, a Bermuda-based company notorious for helping companies outsource.

On Service

Miguel Lavalle

As the global economy teeters and opportunities dry up, Columbians have found it easier to discover their inner do-gooders. Both candidates would promote increased civic involvement from young people—by expanding Americorps and Teach for America, for instance—but they diverge on the degree to which government gets involved.



Discussing the role of the individual in the state, Barack Obama minces no words: "I will ask for your service and your active citizenship when I am president of the United States." To execute his vision, he proposes offering college students $4,000 in exchange for 100 community service hours per semester. The Obama policy would also mandate that 25 percent of all work-study positions serve some public service capacity.

As far back as October 2001, John McCain said, "There should be more focus on meeting national goals and on making short-term service, both civilian and military, a rite of passage for young Americans." McCain's platform centers on acknowledging the successes of organizations like Americorps and the Peace Corps while avoiding the "crowding out" of already established private initiatives. He promises to protect the ability of faith-based charities to freely select personnel without risk to their federal funding. In the past, McCain has increased incentives for military service—for instance, an $18,000 tuition reimbursement.

One thing to keep in mind is the possible effect of the fiscal crisis caused by this year's economic troubles. Both candidates' plans would be threatened by a lack of funds, but McCain's less costly proposal might remain relatively unscathed.

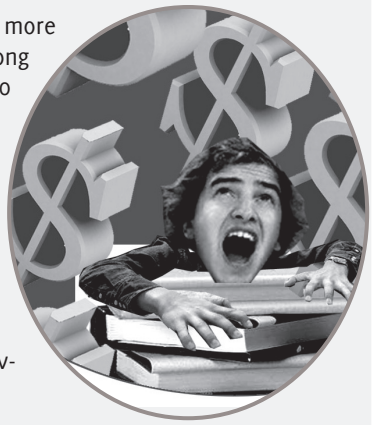
On Student Loans

Nina Pedrad

If the student loan industry continues down its current path, students may have to ask for a government bailout come graduation. Interest rates on student loans have hit 23 percent. Last year, the cost to attend college rose six percent. Both candidates have addressed the broken state of higher education funding and both propose to simplify financial aid, but the similarities end there.

John McCain's scheme aims to streamline financial aid, but does not ultimately include any new programming to help with college costs. Essentially, his policy would explain and clarify current policy on tax benefits for families with children in college. However, McCain evades any specific commitment to increase funding for government Pell Grants. He does back an expansion of the program giving the government the capacity to act as a students' final alternative lender. He also proposes improving information and transparency in educational institutions.

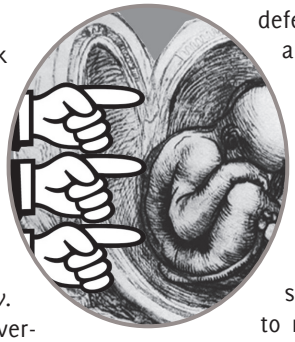
Barack Obama offers a more extensive, and far more expensive, approach to student loans. Chief among his plans is a refundable tax credit of up to $4,000 to help with tuition costs for students who complete 100 hours of community service. Obama also promises to "keep pace" with Pell Grants, though he too does not commit to a numerical increase in funding. To simplify the financial aid application process, he proposes allowing families to apply by checking a box on their tax form. Lastly, Obama does not favor the current system of student loans and would instead eliminate bank subsidies and shift to direct government loans.



On Contraception

Erin Conway

John McCain and Barack Obama's positions on contraception could not be more opposed.



McCain is strongly against abortion except in cases of rape, incest and threat to the mother's life. He believes that the *Roe v. Wade* decision should be overturned, and would give individual states the power to make abortion laws instead. He promotes strengthening faith-based, community and neighborhood organizations to provide services to pregnant mothers in need, hoping to "build the consensus necessary to end abortion at the state level." McCain backs abstinence-only education and opposes public spending for birth control. His approach was summed up in a declaration from the man himself: "I will be a pro-life president, and my presidency will have pro-life policies."

On the other hand, Barack Obama defends keeping abortion legal and supports the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Obama favors making emergency contraception available, and he has supported public funding for contraception, health information and preventative services. He believes that states should hold the power to make abortion laws, but has voted in favor of federal funding for both birth control and abortion. Obama also endorses comprehensive sex education, rather than abstinence-only education.

The polarity of the candidates' stances presents voters with two distinct approaches to contraception.

Art by Phyllis Ma

"Violence Against Our Intellect"

Why the 2007 hunger strike still matters

Catherine Chong

For those of us not involved in multicultural affairs, Ethnic Studies or Manhattanville activism, the fading memory of last year's hunger strike is one of a fringe group seizing center stage and polarizing the campus. The promise to transform Major Cultures into seminar format will affect some of us soon, but the other concessions seem remote. On expansion, the university remains unassailable; Nick Sprayregen and the Singh family notwithstanding, all that stands between the school and 17 more acres of campus is the ground-breaking. So why return to the hunger strike?

Since the tents have folded up, I've realized that there was a lot I didn't understand from my outsider's perspective. Mostly, I remembered the histrionics: the cardboard octopus, the barbeque. Protest, anti-protest, anti-anti-protest. And I wasn't alone: after all, a full retrospective analysis of the hunger strike—never mind reflection—never surfaced in campus news coverage. By the end of the strike, publications moved on, probably convinced that students were sick of hearing about it. And many were, I think, tired of it.

But the strike deserves a closer look in the aftermath. The hunger strikers did not, as many thought, fast for ten days—inflict suffering on themselves—out of the blue, but decided to act drastically after self-critical discussions. And as hunger striker Bryan Mercer (CC '07) said, "We organized the hunger strike out of a sense of fatigue around traditional channels of communication with the administration, which we had been utilizing since 2004." For those involved, November 2007 was the ripest time to act—not the only time.

PROTEST AGAINST PROTEST

Many of us remember the spate of hate crimes that shook the school at the start of last fall semester. The Jena 6 protests, the Islamophobic and racist graffiti in SIPA, the anti-Semitic graffiti in Lewisohn and the Teacher's College, and most notoriously, the noose hung on the door of now-suspended TC professor Madonna Constantine all contributed to a tense, defensive, and angry student body.

To reply to these events, some students organized a series of "townhalls" to discuss related questions and tactics of response. These townhalls drew a mixed crowd: "People wanted to get involved because they had done stuff at school, they had been leaders on campus, and some wanted to help just out of personal interest," said Mercer.

The proposal to hunger strike first emerged in these discussions. "The idea of the hunger strike was brought up by a few students, and there was a long debate about whether we should go this route," said strike organizer Ryan Fukumori

Stacy Chu

(CC '09). "Some people were willing to put their bodies on the line." After some three weeks of discussion—which did not dispel all of their reservations—a handful of students decided to risk their health.

In an official statement on their blog (cu-strike.blogspot.com), they declared, "We strike because the university does not recognize that the lack of space for the critical study of race through Ethnic Studies, the lack of administrative support for minority students and their concerns, the lack of engagement with the community in West Harlem, and the lack of true reform of the Core Curriculum are harmful to the intellectual life of its students." At a systemic level, the strikers aspired to challenge how "racist, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies dominate the way power flows." They called these inadequacies "violence against our intellect."

A list that clumps many concerns together, but the official statements and off-the-record complaints pointed to one underlying concern: the apparent monolith of Columbia University was not responding to the students it was supposed to serve. So in a highly visible protest, the hunger strikers decided to enact the self-criticism that the university wasn't doing. "The idea of the hunger strike was appealing because it was an internal act. It was reflective," said Mercer. "Fasting wasn't meant as an attack but as a symbol of meditation."

But many students *did* see the hunger strike as an attack, a radical attack that undemocratically pressured administrators and practiced a politics of victimhood to stifle debate. Opposing voices sometimes contested the demands themselves, sometimes the tactics. These anti-strikers expressed themselves in three main places: the "We Do NOT Support the Hunger Strikers" Facebook group, comments on the *Columbia Spectator* website, and postings on *Bwog*, the blog of *The Blue & White*.

Protesting against a protest, unity of argument didn't always characterize the opposition. But themes appeared, most clearly on the Facebook group wall. Vitriolic, asinine comments dominated the discussion, but others tried to object seriously.

Contesting the demands, some students questioned the strikers' assertions. Liz Berger (CC '09) wrote, "I…object to the implication that hate crime on campus is somehow the fault of the administration, and is linked to the lack of non-Western perspectives in the Core." And some questioned the philosophical basis of the strike. Brendan Price (CC '09) put it this way: "The American civil rights movement of the 1960s made a powerful case for the use of this and similar tactics. The Columbia strikers' demands, however, do not rise to the same level. The issues at stake are not matters of moral certainty and thus are amenable to political contestation." Historical allusions grew even more loaded, maybe, after Dennis Dalton, a political science professor at Barnard, decided to fast with the strikers. Dalton, a scholar of nonviolence, drew connections between the strikers' protest strategies and the ones he studies and teaches.

On Manhattanville, some students argued that it was useless to quarrel with an inevitable expansion and that Columbia's plan would revitalize an underdeveloped area in the most equitable way. The university was the most benign possible evil—better us than corporate America. Max Talbot-Minkin (CC '07) wrote, "The campus expansion is endorsed by nearly every city agency and Columbia's transparency and openness in the process has been second to none. Ratner's Brooklyn developments, for example, have had not [sic] nearly the same kind of public input opportunities."

Still others condemned the strike as too extreme, an injury to discourse on the issues they engaged. For Courtney Ervin (CC '09), the strikers' rhetoric "fostered an image of sides that seem racist/anti-racist, with Columbia and those against this protest apparently on the racist side of things." Many students, she thought, muted their criticism rather than face accusations of "racism." Timothy de Swardt (CC '08) went even further, claiming that the strikers were "polarizing Columbia and obstructing rational debate on real issues."

> "But mostly, my friends and I were onlookers of the spectacle the protest had become."

THE SO-CALLED "SILENT MAJORITY"

As students who did not support the hunger strike grew more vocal and organized, many identified themselves as the "silent majority." This term demands our analysis. It first entered the American consciousness in 1969, when President Richard Nixon popularized it in a speech meant to rally citizens who felt their voices had been lost in the 1960s: during that decade's radical protests, long-haired drug culture, and, it must not be forgotten, the ascent of minority groups in the wake of the civil rights movement. While this context was rarely, if ever discussed—probably not even consciously invoked—the historical resonance was at the very least suggestive.

But were the anti-hunger strikers really a majority? Most of the student body did not do what the hunger strikers or anti-hunger strik-

An Outsider's Primer to the Hunger Strike

AMERICA: THE BOOK OR, THE CORE CURRICULUM

As many students know, the Core is a recent invention. The Core Curriculum was inaugurated in 1919 with the creation of Contemporary Civilization. The University of Chicago followed suit, creating its Core during the tenure of school president Robert Maynard Hutchins. The university's website states that their Common Core was created in response to "the rapidly shrinking, changing, and threatening world"—an assertion of tradition to counter threats to "the American."

And why not? The 1920s saw an increase in Southern and Eastern European immigrants and a drop the number of Western European immigrants. Nativist backlash culminated in the National Origins Act of 1924, which attempted to maintain the ethnic distribution of the country. By this time, Asian and Latino immigration had already been restricted by law, most notoriously in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This background partly constitutes the Core's complicated—and undeniably political—history.

When I spoke to Gary Okihiro, Ethnic Studies professor at Columbia and former Director of CSER, he encouraged me to continue thinking of the Core as political. "The curriculum as it is presented to students is…not divorced from history, not divorced from society. It's not an abstraction," he said. "What people choose to include and exclude is a political exercise. The centrality of the core curriculum is what the faculty believes to be the basis of American civilization and society." Okihiro's comments challenged me to rethink the education that I had taken as given—as just natural.

I wouldn't want to reduce the field to these questions, but I've learned that some Ethnic Studies scholars attempt to address these kinds of assumptions, analyzing power relations in an effort to create a more equitable society. This area of inquiry stresses how inadequately "multiculturalism," as it's popularly conceived by liberals and taught in American schools, treats the issue of power.

Multiculturalism might seem to level power relations by celebrating diversity and according each culture its due respect, but an approach that says, "Let's eat Chinese food, or let's wear our Mexican costume today," as Okihiro put it, doesn't really get at the crux of the issue. Instead, he holds up the theory of social formations, which accounts for class, gender, sexuality, and race in the social construction of identities within the hierarchical American cultural fabric.

For Professor Okihiro, critiques of power should be enacted in classroom pedagogy, too. He says that in his generation, Ethnic Studies educators prescribed to the teaching approach of Pablo Freire, "who said students are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by professors…[students need to] gain a critical sensibility so that they can participate equally in their education process."

Okihiro emphasized, "Professors and students should be learning from one another. That's the ideal." While he says that this philosophy is not one necessarily shared by his colleagues, his approach is one way in which Ethnic Studies pedagogy can dovetail with critiques of power in Ethnic Studies theory.

Students-as-teachers appear again in his statement of solidarity with the hunger strikers: "It is unfortunate when students, who are at Columbia and Barnard for an education, must themselves educate their professors, Columbia's/Barnard's administrators, and their fellow students about the importance, nay necessity of a more democratic, responsible, and inclusive university, college, curriculum, and climate."

The approach of Okihiro and others convinced me that the university demanded to be analyzed as a supremely political institution, not removed from the world outside. We had to ask whether it had created structures of oppression that paralleled those suffusing American society.

THE CITY AND THE STUDENTS

It was to address this relationship that the hunger strikers took action on another front: Manhattanville. Yet negotiations between Columbia and the Lower Development Corporation (LDC), created to represent the West Harlem community, only complicated this link.

A statement from the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification (SCEG) asserts that the group's stance has never been "no expansion," but "expansion within the context of the 197-a plan," a 247-page plan created by Community Board 9 (CB9) to guide future development in the area. As opposed to Columbia's 197-c plan, CB9's would have forced the university to enter into a "community benefits agreement." The agreement would have promised "that the environment is protected, that housing opportunities for low-, moderate-, and middle-income residents are protected and expanded, and that high-road jobs and locally-owned businesses will be created and existing businesses preserved." But this proposal was roundly rejected by Columbia and the city.

During the hunger strike, the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), required for all rezoning in New York City, entered the final approval stage for the City Council's plan. Despite Community Board 9's overwhelming objection to Columbia's 197-c plan, there was no communication between the school and community leaders until after the plan's approval. But according to the university, administrators had negotiated with community actors in a democratic process.

Campus expansion activists call this claim patently false. Days before the hunger strike, a broad student coalition met with Maxine Griffith, the lead administrator responsible for handling Columbia's expansion. Accordingly to Andrew Lyubarsky, "There was a lot of refusal to deal substantively with the concerns of the community." An especially striking example of this behavior happened during the strike, in a meeting supposedly open to the public. When CB9 member Vicky Gholson attempted to sit in as a silent observer, Griffith refused to negotiate with students until Gholson left the room.

In subsequent meetings with administrators, students could not convince Griffith to consider their recommendations. As Lyubarsky said in an interview with *Bwog*, the hunger strike negotiations underscored "how recalcitrant the university is on this issue, despite the fact that the university was in a situation of heightened tension, they were still unwilling to negotiate with students. They treated it like an information session."

Just one month after the hunger strike, the efforts of students and West Harlem organizers took a final blow. In an unexpected move on December 19th, the City Council overwhelmingly voted in favor of Columbia's Manhattanville plan, with 35 in favor, five against, and six abstaining.

Even with only construction left, SCEG refuses to give up. Lyubarsky says that the group plans to "build education, to build a cohesive movement, and to understand contextually what is going on, so if anything happens in Manhattanville, we're quick to respond." Against highly improbable odds, SCEG continues its work, hoping that it can force administrators to consider its recommendations.

ers did. That is, take an active role and a hard stance. For most of the strike, I rushed madly to finish my Lit Hum reading, highlighting the pages yellow and taking notes. When I wasn't doing that, I procrastinated between Facebook and *Bwog*, where I skimmed over the strike coverage. I knew some of the students posting on the anti-hunger strike discussion board, and I knew of the people risking their health. But mostly, my friends and I were onlookers of the spectacle the protest had become. From this perspective, we were convinced that both sides had their flaws and merits.

The hunger strikers' concerns were valid, we thought. The Core's scope was too Western, as our Lit Hum and CC professors lamented on the first day. The College Republicans were cruel to throw a barbeque next to the tents. And for reasons we intuited but frankly couldn't articulate in detail, Manhattanville was unjust. But we didn't want any more Core requirements—we felt constrained as it was. And when we wondered how else the Core might be taught, we experienced a failure of imagination. So we returned to Butler, to our books, to Facebook.

I don't speak for all of my classmates, but I suspect that many shared our reactions. We joked and snickered. We shook our heads. We believed that we understood both sides and neither one was right. So we kept up with the news, or we didn't; maybe joined a Facebook group or two. But it didn't really matter—whatever our stances, the positions we took weren't life-changing or urgent. But for the strikers agitating for curricular reform and administrative support, our way of thinking mirrored deep-seated problems.

Anti-strikers were often just as misguided. Even their thoughtful statements betrayed a deep misunderstanding of Ethnic Studies as a field of study, and a misperception of the university's actual conduct with students and Manhattanville residents. Particularly on the issue of Ethnic Studies, many mistook the strikers' perspective for something it wasn't; anti-strikers formed judgments based on sudden exposure to an effort that had been underway for years.

At Columbia, the institutionalization of Ethnic Studies had begun over a decade earlier. In 1996, the school established the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER) after protests that included a student hunger strike. But this founding had a genealogy. Even during the 1968 protest, the Student Afro-American Society (SAS) had demanded Black Studies, which was inaugurated as the Institute for Research in African-American Studies (IRAAS) in 1993. "An academic presence has existed for a pretty long time [in the US]," stressed Mercer. Ethnic Studies emerged as a field in the 1960s.

And an organized student response to Manhattanville began in October 2003, a year after the school unveiled its plans for the new campus. A coalition of student groups organized a panel called "The Ethics of Expansion" to discuss how the expansion would affect community members. The coalition sprouted the group Students Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification (SCEG), active to this day. SCEG has arranged teach-ins to educate students on expansion, held press conferences, written *Spectator* editorials, and sponsored Community-Student dinner discussions.

Suffice it to say that student activists kept busy up to the 2007 hunger strike.

A QUESTION OF EXPERTISE

Many hunger strikers and strike organizers began advocating for their causes long before setting foot on campus. Fukumori is one example. He grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area where he witnessed anti-war and anti-racism protests, learning about both activist practice and theory. In high school, Fukumori started a club to discuss these issues. "Looking back on it now, I think I said some pretty dumb, self-righteous things," laughed Fukumori. "But I think that my experiences made me begin to think critically about issues of power in our country." Now, he majors in Comparative Ethnic Studies and hopes to become a scholar on the subject. But outside of formal study, Fukumori

Cristina Politano

noted, "A lot of the activism happens in the day-to-day grind. We just don't hear about it."

For me, Fukumori's story highlights important facts that were overlooked by most students on the outside. The hunger strikers saw their strategies as linked to the activist impulse of a well-established area of study; most already practiced activism in one form or another, and these strategies grew out of complicated personal histories. And Fukumori's self-description is critical and reflexive. It accommodates self-doubt. In an important sense, the most interesting, nuanced criticism of the hunger strike was generated by the strikers and organizers themselves.

But these facts weren't so obvious. A pointed, effective communication of motivations and demands didn't always happen. Strike organizer Natalie DeNault (BC '10) called this problem one of the biggest setbacks for the hunger strike. "We definitely had trouble conveying the history of expansion, the facts and the figures," she said. "It created a cult of people who knew about it, and those who didn't were on the outside."

And so the quickly assembled protest provoked much confusion and criticism from students, some who thought of the strikers as a fringe group out to divide the campus. "I don't think any activist movement can claim to be majoritarian, but you try to cast a wide of a net as possible. It's very difficult to do, though, and there's no doubt that the hunger strike did polarize the campus," said strike negotiator Andrew Lyubarsky (CC '09). "But at some point, when you view a lot of things that are going on, you have to take a stand. And that's what happened." The goal of the hunger strike was not to divide, but to include as many students as possible in a larger struggle with issues of inclusion. But acting as they did, the strikers risked being misunderstood.

For most onlookers, there was little apparent connection between the curricular demands and the expansion ones, giving the demands only a tenuous unity. This made one student write on the Facebook group wall, "They have sure done an efficient job of bombarding us with their propaganda." Many strikers cited "oppression" as a common thread, but even I found this explanation unsatisfying. It lacked the specificity that would explain why these four demands were chosen, and not a host of others that could have been made on the basis of battling sexism, LGBTQ discrimination, and other systemic exclusion. Even now, I'm not sure that I understand; but I'm certain that "oppression" as it was deployed didn't have the explanatory and rhetorical power the strikers needed.

One strike organizer, asking to remain anonymous, suggested in an e-mail that there existed "a potential tactical conflict in which many people felt that the ethnic studies/OMA/curricular issues were the most appealing for cultural organizations on campus, as evidenced by their statements of support and the numbers they turned out to our rallies." Trying to garner widespread support and give each issue the attention it deserved wasn't easy. Perhaps it underscores the problems that all activism faces.

One last problem I noticed was the reluctance of hunger strikers and organizers to speak openly about their mistakes. Many mentioned inadequate communication, but when I asked for more details, they declined to point to specific tactical errors or particular regrets. Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the hunger strike had played out—but only off the record. To maintain a unified front, they kept these concerns from the wider public. Much of their astute self-criticism was left out of the campus conversation, and this gave detractors room to accuse them of naiveté and oversimplification. If the strikers had acknowledged their missteps, maybe the criticism would have ebbed. At the same time, the hysterical defensiveness of offended anti-strikers makes me think that these critics weren't exactly looking for argumentative nuance.

"'There's been a lot of revisionist history about the level of support for the hunger strike,' said Andrew Lyubarsky."

THE FUTURE AS HISTORY

References to the 1968 protests stalked the hunger strike, and for obvious reasons. The events of 1968 swelled into a national symbol of student protest and truly shook the administration for years to come. It elicited sympathy from Americans who opposed the war and disapproved of violent intervention by the NYPD. Blamed then for exerting unnecessary force, the administration strains, even now, to exorcise this image. When President Bollinger spoke to the *New York Observer* about the Manhattanville expansion in 2007, he explained, "Because of the crisis of the 1960s, part of which involved space, Columbia has struggled for several decades to address the issue."

But a triumphalist narrative of the 1968 protests can mask a large oppositional voice. A survey conducted by Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research in the autumn of 1968 found that 68 percent of students opposed the demonstration tactics while 26 percent were

for it. An opposition group—mainly athletes and fraternity members—also formed, calling themselves the "Majority Coalition." They created a human blockade around Low Library, where students were conducting sit-ins, and prevented supplies from getting inside.

Even Columbia's most famous, most successful student protest was plagued by majority opposition. But last fall, the critics exploited newer weapons: anonymous forms of communication like the Facebook group wall, *Bwog* postings, and online *Spectator* comments. Nameless over the internet, students wrote the most absurd, callous, hurtful comments without having to be accountable for them. "When people can express their opinions anonymously—however well-thought out, it changes the level of discourse," said Marcel Agüeros (CC '96), who participated in the 1996 hunger strike for Ethnic Studies. "When I was protesting, there was nothing equivalent to that. The kinds of reactions that I saw last year were very embarrassing. I don't mean that people had to agree, but they should be able to articulate their opinions and not hide."

Ramin Talaie / Bloomberg News

> "Some protests live on invisibly — and this is, in fact, a measure of their success."

Was there really as large an opposition as the Facebook, *Bwog*, and *Spectator* commenters claimed? "There's been a lot of revisionist history about the level of support for the hunger strike. It's being presented in the popular culture of Columbia as if it was a totally fringe movement," Lyubarsky said. "But almost every relevant group on campus issued a statement of support. That's been lost a lot in how it's being portrayed in the months afterwards." The College Democrats, Columbia College Student Council, Student Government Association, and many cultural groups released statements of solidarity, and many formally unaffiliated students showed their support. "On the night that the administrators finally capitulated and said that they would give us a lot of our demands, 300 to 400 students came out to the vigil to support us," DeNault pointed out.

We will never really know how many students actually supported the hunger strike; nothing more methodical than a poorly executed *Spectator* poll ever tried to capture the campus mood. We can only wonder what traces the protest will leave, or whether it will persist in the institutional memory at all. But interestingly, demands that students fought for a generation ago have become a given in ours. Some protests live on invisibly—and this is, in fact, a measure of their success.

One aspect of the 1968 strike that's often forgotten is the strong black-white schism between even white radicals and African American protestors who protested "Gym Crow," Columbia's plan to build a segregated gymnasium in Morningside Park. When students began occupying Hamilton, African American students active in the Black Power movement asked white Students for a Democratic Society members to leave. When last year's strike raised the expansion question again, we saw students of diverse ethnicities, genders, and sexualities physically suffering together under three tents. This historical turn provokes the question: what legacy of the 2007 hunger strike will haunt the campus, 40 years on? Will we even realize what we will have taken for granted?

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Nothing Super

Caped crusaders and American crypto-fascism in Alan Moore's Watchmen

Billy Goldstein

It's 1985. The Doomsday Clock stands at five to 12. Nixon, after winning Vietnam and amending the Constitution, is in his fifth term. God exists, and he's American—but the Cold War rages on.

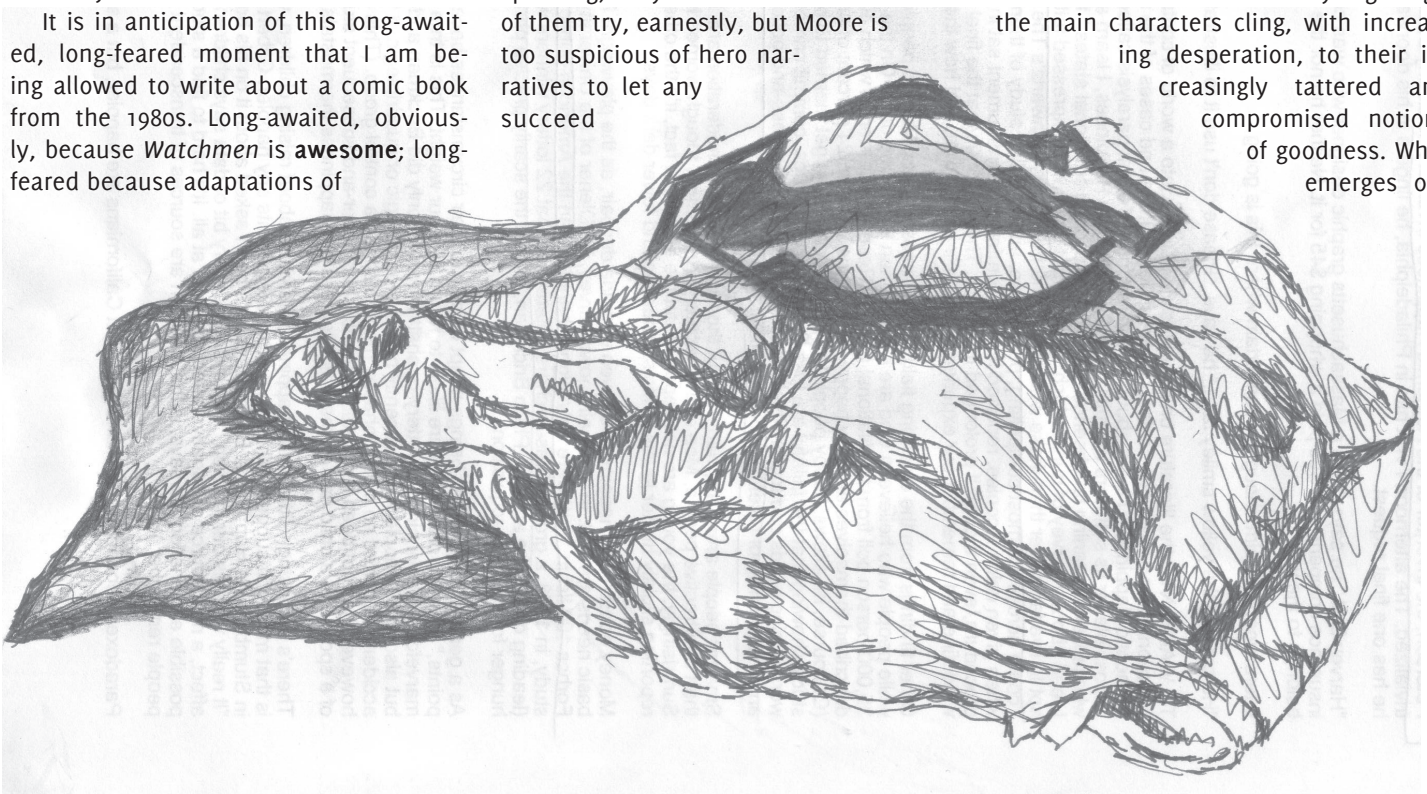
This is the world of *Watchmen*, Alan Moore's bestselling, trendsetting, groundbreaking, amazing, genius, superlative-magnet comic book masterpiece. *Watchmen* has won Kirby Awards and Eisner Awards, and it is the only comic book to win a Hugo Award (the Oscar of sci-fi and fantasy). It won for "Best Other Forms," a category invented just to award it once again, and it is the only comic to make *TIME Magazine*'s list of the "100 Greatest English Language Novels from 1923 to the Present." And on March 6th, 2009, after nearly 20 years of development limbo, Watchmen is coming to the silver screen, directed by *300* auteur (*coughcough*) Zack Snyder.

It is in anticipation of this long-awaited, long-feared moment that I am being allowed to write about a comic book from the 1980s. Long-awaited, obviously, because *Watchmen* is **awesome**; long-feared because adaptations of Alan Moore books don't exactly have the best track record.[1] *Watchmen* is uncompromisingly high-brow—rigorously ethical, it provides no one clear viewpoint, offers no facile answers—and there is some concern among fans that Snyder isn't up to the task of condensing the twelve-part epic into a reasonably faithful two-hour approximation.[2] So, before yet another Alan Moore masterwork is turned into a flaming pile of dumbed-down doggy poo (God forbid), let us take a moment to fawn lovingly over the best comic book of all time—that is, to appreciate it.

What the hell is *Watchmen* about, anyway? You know, the usual: free will, love, the meaning and future of human life on planet Earth…and Superheroes. Or rather, masked vigilantes, costumed crusaders, Nazi perverts in spandex, whatever you want to call them—as long as it isn't Super-, because (with one very important exception) there's nothing Super-powered about *Watchmen*'s heroes. Strictly speaking, they're not even *heroes*. Some of them try, earnestly, but Moore is too suspicious of hero narratives to let any succeed unequivocally. And that, on one level, is what *Watchmen* is all about: a hard look at the mythos of the Superhero as it relates to the very real possibility that the world will tear itself apart. With bombs.

Instead of saviors who must overcome adversity within a fairly well-defined moral order, as is the case with most Superheroes of the classical mold (Batman, Spider-Man, and their angst included), *Watchmen*'s protagonists all come with their own version of a moral order, which they try, and fail, to impose on an uncaring, or even hostile, world. The hostility they confront is somehow pre-moral, more primal and ambiguous than anything you'll find in a holy book, a punch in the gut to anyone who takes comfort in phrases like "the essential goodness of man." The book has a reputation for leaving readers with an alarming feeling of unease, an angsty cauldron of angst where the stomach used to be—an experience I can personally vouch for.

In the midst of all this abyss-gazing,[3] the main characters cling, with increasing desperation, to their increasingly tattered and compromised notions of goodness. What emerges out



Cassie Spodak

of all this hand-wringing is a fairly complex comparative discussion of ethics, with several discernible viewpoints in play. We get the nostalgic liberal technocrat, the right-wing Manichean absolutist, the cynical authoritarian would-be nihilist (also a right-winger, and a covert government agent to boot![4]), and the megalomaniacal, totalizing rationalist (among others). These viewpoints are not presented as naïve sets of assumptions. In fact, all are premised (to varying degrees and in varying ways) on what we might call the fact of the abyss—an unpalatable mixture consisting, in equal parts, of a creeping sense of the meaninglessness of human affairs (the modern condition) and the gut-knowledge of humanity's brutal, essentially amoral core (the human condition).

What this means is that the characters' positions (and hence their oppositions) are not schematic, but rather rooted in the experience and psychology of the characters who claim them. The operative word here is *realism*,[5] a principle which circumscribes (almost) the whole book. The characters have "staggeringly complex psychological profiles,"[6] and maybe one or two origin stories, but nothing corny—no radioactive spider-bites or dead Uncle Bens. In fact, the first generation of *Watchmen*'s costumed crimefighters (sketched out in flashbacks and the fictional documents at the end of every chapter) are inspired to don masks by *real honest-to-god comic books*,[7] and they are socially perceived much as they might be in our world.[8] Because of all of this, the motivations of the costumed heroes are questioned in a way that Superman's would never be. And rightly so—given the world they inhabit, it should be no surprise that their claim to being agents of the good is fundamentally compromised.

It is in this context that Moore thinks through how the presence of practicing, efficacious vigilantes might warp a society (think police strikes, rioting, and legislation, the last of which Marvel only recently ripped off in its *Civil War* story arcs, maybe hoping that after 20-plus years no would notice the theft). He does all this while simultaneously embedding arguments about accountability and entrenched authority in the "Superhero discourse" as it plays itself out in his fictional world.

Unraveling Moore's own positions gets tricky. The integrity of the story is such that one is led to feel that none of the characters can be "right" or "wrong"—much like real life, the experience of reading it opens up, ultimately, into ambiguity. Nevertheless, certain of Moore's ethical commitments shine through fairly clearly, and can be summed up by a recurring piece of graffiti: "Who watches the watchmen?"[9]

> "God exists, and he's American—but the Cold War rages on."

Moore has stated publicly that the political thrust of *Watchmen* is a kind of "anti-Reaganism," but what exactly this "anti-Reaganism" consists of is both obvious and unobvious. Certainly, there is an obvious frustration with the idea that MORE BOMBS will keep the peace, as well as a strong suspicion that America's military interferences in, say, Latin America, were not exactly conducted in the glorious name of Freedom. This authoritarian, anti-democratic streak in Reaganism is, for Moore, tied up with the vigilantism of *Watchmen*'s heroes. The moral viewpoints of the protagonists are all compromised, then, precisely because they are, or try to be, heroes—at bottom, all end up as anti-democratic, no matter how superficially liberal their character.

This proposal is complicated by two things. The first is the conspicuous absence of a truly democratic voice. There is a sort of Greek chorus, in the form of a newsstand vendor, but he's something of a buffoon. *Any* voice that might conceivably be "of the people" is deeply mediated by the political world around it. For all the force behind Moore's critique, it's not at all clear what he would substitute in place of Reaganism, or how being "anti-democratic" can effectively be a vice in the absence of even the *possibility* of truly democratic discourse.

The second complication is what, in addition to the book's formal properties,[10] kicks it up into a delicious realm of sweet sweet goodness, way better than anything anyone could have any right to expect. I am talking, sports fans, about Dr. Manhattan, the one exception to every rule the book sets for itself and the only character with bona fide superpowers.

In 1959, nuclear physicist Dr. John Osterman, son of a watchmaker, was trapped inside of a test chamber at the Gila Flats research base, stripped of his "intrinsic field," and thereby disintegrated. But, you know, not entirely. "An electromagnetic pattern resembling consciousness" persists, and he is eventually able to physically reconstitute himself. Only now he's big and blue and he glows. And he has godlike powers, an absolute control over matter, which he perceives and manipulates at the subatomic level. He is a walking H-bomb, the "linch-pin of America's strategic superiority," Reagan's SDI with a consciousness,[11] a being who singlehandedly shifts the balance of international power. And he works, for a time, for the US government.

Dr. Manhattan is the ultimate complication—he makes all other life on the planet effectively obsolete. He is all-powerful, and yet, in the context of Cold War Soviet psychology, he almost guarantees Mutually Assured Destruction. He can do anything, but because he experiences all time simultaneously, he is a determinist—unwilling or unable to alter the course of events as he perceives it. He is unwilling or unable, for instance, to prevent the assassination of JFK, despite knowing about it in advance. He implies the impotence—moral, political, and even sexual—of every conscious being (all species will eventually fail), and he is himself fatalistically incapable of making choices.

Most staggeringly, he is totally amoral, willing to be led along to "fight crime" on behalf of the US government without any sense of the humanity[12] of his actions—because, really, he isn't human. He is, truly, a God, and a God for our day and age. Reigning absolutely over matter and

its mechanics, he is the deification of Science—the God of the Deists—the Watchmaker, and ultimately just as detached and uninterested in human affairs as that god was imagined to be…except when it comes to sex. Dr. Manhattan is something of a serial monogamist, and yet he never conceives a child (immaculately or otherwise).

Most puzzlingly, for me—and this is something of a peripheral concern—is his complete lack of interest in the conditions of his own identity. He knows, firsthand, something that no one in our world will probably ever know: that identity, sentience, consciousness can *inhere in things other than normal animal bodies*. He is a God without any sense of the religious, until, perhaps, the end. But I wouldn't want to spoil anything.

All of this is, perhaps, part of Moore's point. Insofar as Dr. Manhattan embodies divinity as it exists for modernity, he also embodies the conceptual limits (or frontiers) of the universe Moore is writing about—a universe in which the meaning of "human being" has been torqued in a way no one understands quite yet. The fate of democracy can seem a paltry concern in the face of the physical and temporal scales of science.

And yet it cannot but concern us, it *must* concern us, because this is the world we live in. Moore insists upon this, and in so doing, insists upon the enduring relevance of his own work, able as it is to grasp—in one long glance—the incoherence of democracy and the dangers of the Age of Reagan,[13] as well as a sense of what lies below, behind, and beneath it: an impenetrable metaphysical puzzle not even our atomic-powered deities can get a handle on. "God help us all," as the Comedian says.

> The protagonists are all morally compromised…precisely because they are, or try to be, heroes — at bottom, all end up as anti-democratic.

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1. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*? VOMIT VOMIT VOMIT. *V for Vendetta* was better, but not better enough.

2. Terry Gilliam reportedly worked on a script for years before deciding *Watchmen* was unfilmable as a feature (which Moore has been saying all along), saying he could only do it as a five-hour (at least) miniseries. That, obviously, never happened (alas).

3. The title of every chapter is a fragment of a famous quote, which is then reproduced in full at the end of the chapter. The first one is Bob frickin' Dylan—"at midnight, all the agents and superhuman crew go out and round up everyone who knows more than they do"—from "Desolation Row." Another, as the phrase that directed you down here obviously suggests, belongs to Friedrich frickin' Nietzsche, referenced before it was even cool to do so again: "Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you." Heavy, man. Heavy.

4. That is, in Moore's world, an agent of US imperialism. The Comedian, as he's known, toppled his fair share of Marxist Republics in Latin America (the anti-Ché), and may or may not have assassinated JFK on Nixon's behalf.

5. You know, like in Flaubert and stuff. The world of *Watchmen* looks and feels like the world we live in, except when it doesn't. Moore and his illustrator, Dave Gibbons, pack incredible amounts of nuance onto every page. The details are all synchronized according to the demands of the work as a whole, so they don't exactly produce a "reality effect," but the plot is so free of holes that the overall mood is still one of realism.

6. Thanks, *New York Times Book Review*!

7. Specifically, the *Action Comics* of 1938, in which Superman made his first appearances. This is more than a clever plot point. Moore, who had a very high-profile run on *Superman*, is situating himself in a heritage, in effect saying that *Watchmen* could not exist without those first, schlock-filled comic books—like Picasso and cave paintings, only with capes.

8. With derision and scorn, most likely. Upon retiring, one of the first heroes writes a memoir (*Under the Hood*—he becomes a car mechanic), the first few chapters of which are "reproduced" in the comic. He writes that masked adventurers were "sometimes respected, sometimes analyzed, and most often laughed at."

9. Or *quis custodiet ipsos custodes*, as originally penned by the Roman satirist Juvenal.

10. These are dazzling and deserve an article all their own. Would that I had the space to address them substantively, but once you get going on how incredibly brilliant Moore is, it's hard (for me) to stop (as you may have noticed).

11. One of the fictional documents in the book quotes theoretical calculations which demonstrate that Dr. M could "deflect or disarm at least 60 percent" of a full-scale nuclear assault by the Soviets.

12. At one point, Dr. Manhattan says, "This world's smartest man means no more to me than does its smartest termite." He understands human emotions only abstractly, and is, Moore suggests, therefore incapable of genuine moral thinking or doing. Alan Moore, weighing in on Kant vs. Hume 200 years after the fact.

13. Which we are undoubtedly still living in, despite the temporary cessation of the Cold War.

Enough Is Enough

One boy's murder mobilizes Mexico

Karen Woodin

Kidnappings are close to common practice in Mexico and the majority go unreported. But when this fate befell Fernando Martí, the 14-year-old son of a wealthy businessman this summer, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans flooded the streets of 88 cities throughout the country in a series of candlelit marches called *Iluminemos México* ("Let's Illuminate Mexico"), crying "Enough is enough!" and "No more kidnappings!"

Two months later, the candles are extinguished, and protesters are back at home. As a Mexican citizen, I wonder: What was the significance of this massive public uprising?

> "In response to organized crime, what we have is a disorganized society."

Frequent kidnappings and insecurity are not new in Mexico. According to Pablo Picatto, Director of Columbia's Institute of Latin American Studies, the rate of violations and misdemeanors rose in the 1980s but has since remained constant. It might be the case, he says, that more crimes are reported now, masking a falling crime rate; but the statistics don't tell us the full story.

But it is clear that kidnappings and murders perpetrated by the country's crime rings have been happening for years. Why organize now?

One reason is the sensational and extensive media coverage of the Martí case. Elías Kuri, the main organizer of *Iluminemos México*, said that publicity gave people cause to think, "Since this happened to him, it could have happened to me. This can't be. We cannot just let this go." But weeks before, an entire family was killed; just days after, another boy was kidnapped and murdered. The media seized upon Fernando's case because his father had direct access to them at the boy's funeral mass, which was attended by President Felipé Calderón.

This much-publicized case was also a rare one—only one out of every eight abductions in Mexico targets the wealthy. The problem of insecurity in Mexico affects the masses more than those who can afford to hire private firms to keep their families safe. If Alejandro Martí couldn't save his son with all of his wealth, how could middle class and impoverished families save theirs? It took the kidnapping and murder of Martí to trigger the "collective conscience" of the society and start a social movement.

Mexicans responded to the high profile case by rallying in 88 cities across the country. In each city, wearing white and bearing candles, they marched against the inefficiency of the government, echoing Martí's words at the National Security Council: "If you can't [do your job], then quit."

Among my friends and family, and commentators in newspaper editorials and blogs, I have noticed general support for the marches coupled with disbelief in the movement's capacity to effect change. It was a good means of expression, everyone said, but the government will not take action.

Two reasons for this disillusionment are the sterility and corruption of the justice system and lack of trust in law enforcement. It should be noted that when Fernando was abducted, his father did not call the police.

But people also feel that Mexico systematically excludes citizens from policy decisions that could change these corrupt systems. "In response to organized crime, what we have is a disorganized society," Kuri said. Roberto Gallardo, the organizer of *Iluminemos Nuevo León*—the arm of the march in the state of Nuevo León—agreed. When politicians convene on issues that affect society, Gallardo says, "the citizen is uninvited." March organizers, without an opportunity to participate directly in government, took matters into their own hands by creating one.

People will remember the marches' unifying effects in the face of this fragmentation: "It was important that we came together as one people, without political or class distinctions," Gallardo noted.

Politicians recognize this unity as the movement's most potent asset, and at some levels of government, they are attempting to restore faith in the democratic process.

Kuri plans to create a program called "Commitment to Mexico" in Nuevo León which would call upon individuals to fight corruption where they live and work. Holding businesses, labor organizations, and other groups accountable for their pledges would channel the spirit of *Iluminemos México* into a long-term policy.

Meanwhile, *Iluminemos Nuevo León* addresses citizens' demands through *Semáforo Nuevo León* or "Nuevo León Streetlight," launched in August to lower crime rates in every city by 25 percent of the "historical mean rate" between 2004 and 2007. A city receives a green light if it meets the goal, a yellow light if it achieves between the mean and the goal, and a red light if the rate is higher than the mean. "We cannot control that which we cannot measure, and [Nuevo León Streetlight] allows us to evaluate results," Gallardo says.

These initiatives are still sprouting. But even if they don't lower crime rates, if done right, they establish spaces for citizen participation—something the people also craved when they flooded the streets this summer.

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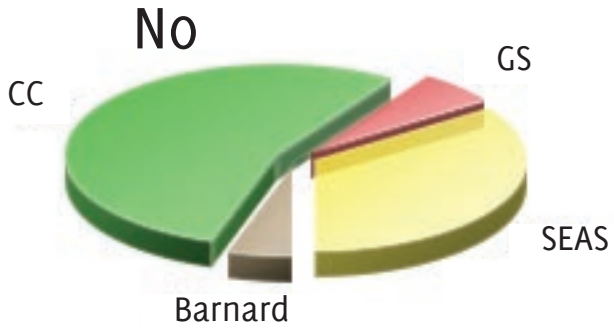
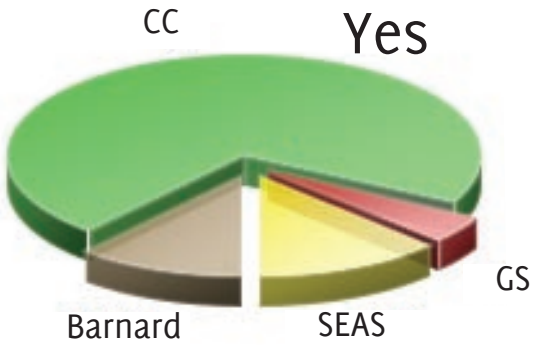
Karen (CC'11) is an international student from Mexico. Her research interests include government, public policy, and economic policy.

[student poll: politics of recruitment]

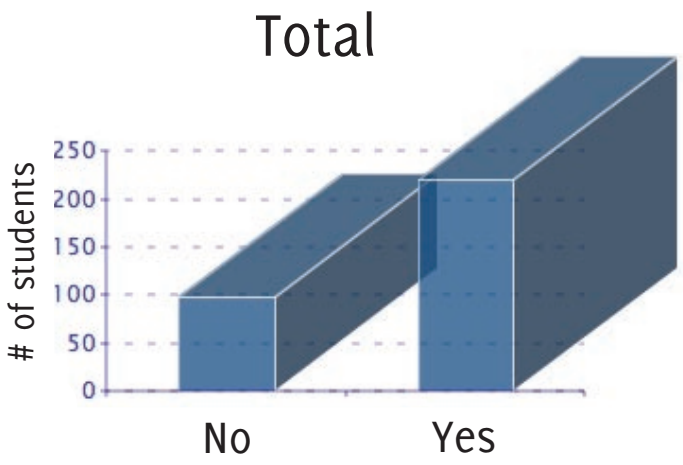
Are you aware of the reason that the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is not allowed to recruit on the Columbia campus?

margin of error: +/- 5.1
number of respondents: 319





83% of Barnard is aware; 45% of SEAS is aware.

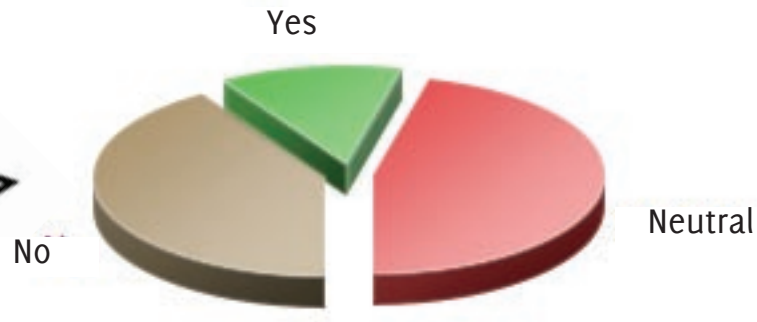


Women are more likely to be aware.

Does Columbia's ban on ROTC recruitment imply an anti-military stance?

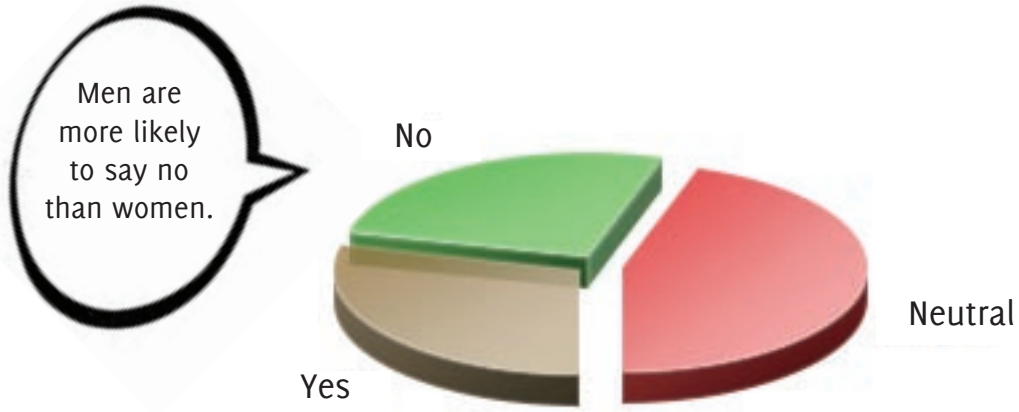
margin of error: +/- 0.66
number of respondents: 222

Women are more likely to say no than men.



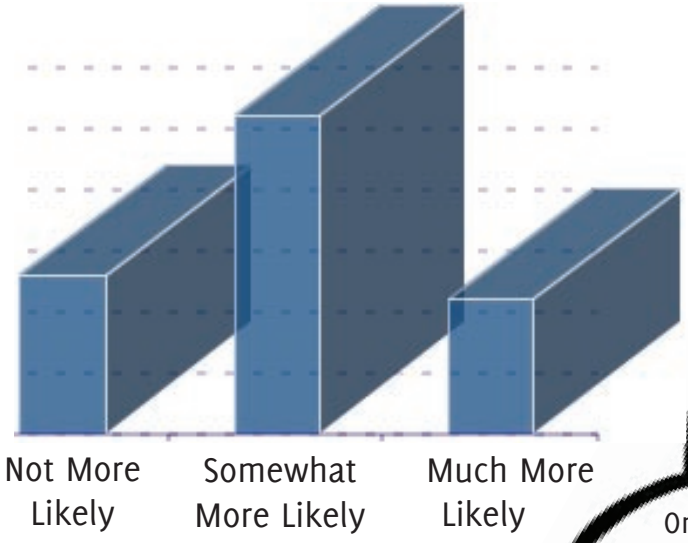
Would Columbia's acceptance of on-campus ROTC recruitment imply an endorsement of discriminatory hiring policies?

margin of error: +/- 0.84
number of respondents: 222



If an employer recruits on campus, how much more likely are you to take advantage of their services?

margin of error: +/- 0.67
number of respondents: 315



School Breakdown of Those Much More Likely

Only 13% of seniors said "much more likely," compared to 25% first years, 24% sophomores, 22% juniors.

For more detailed poll analysis, visit cpreview.org.

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